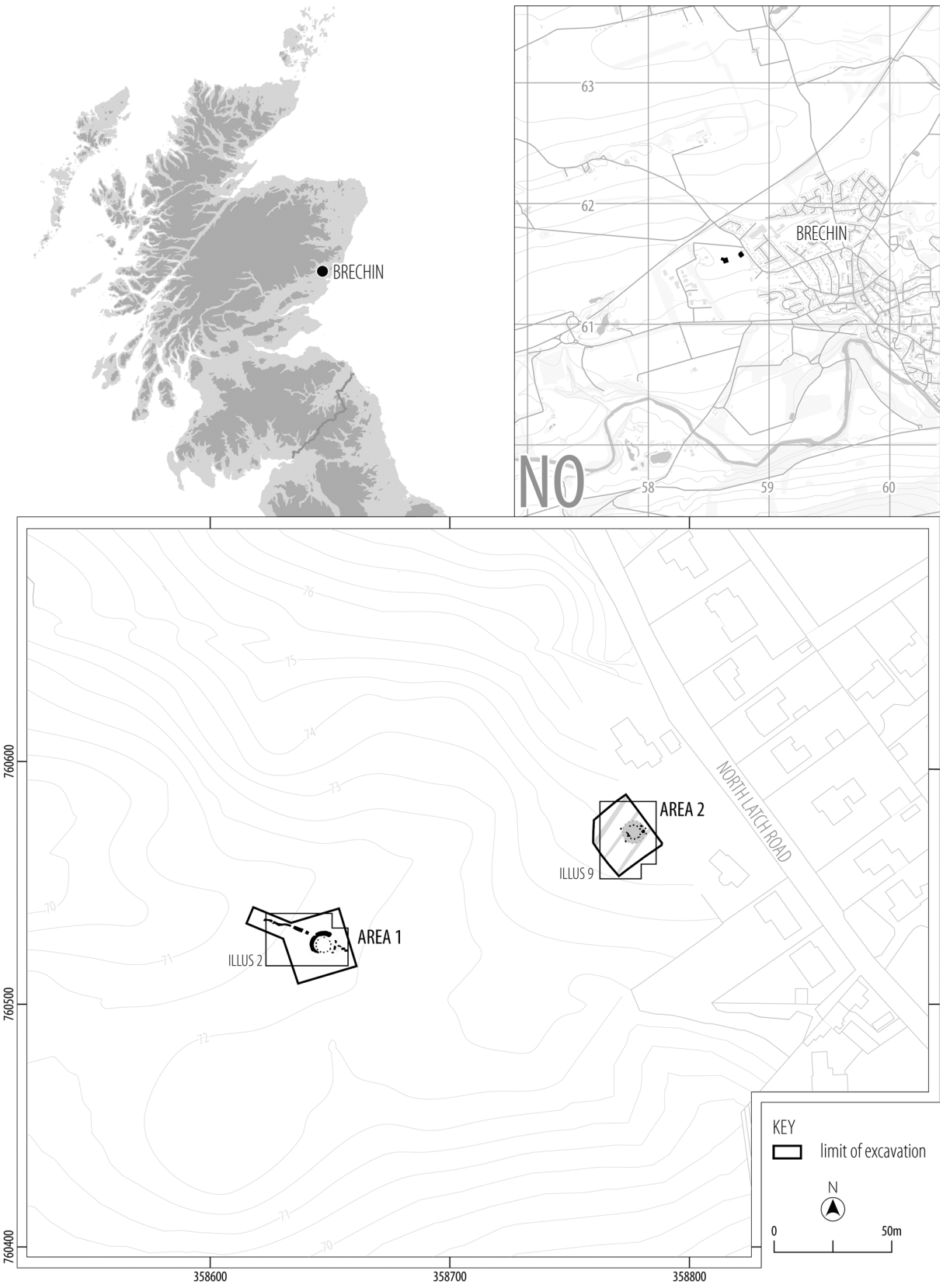


Illus 1 *Site location.*

An Iron Age settlement and souterrain at Dubton Farm East, Brechin, Angus

Matthew Ginnever

with contributions by Julie Franklin, Alex Croom, Julie Lochrie, Tim Holden and Laura Bailey

Background to the project

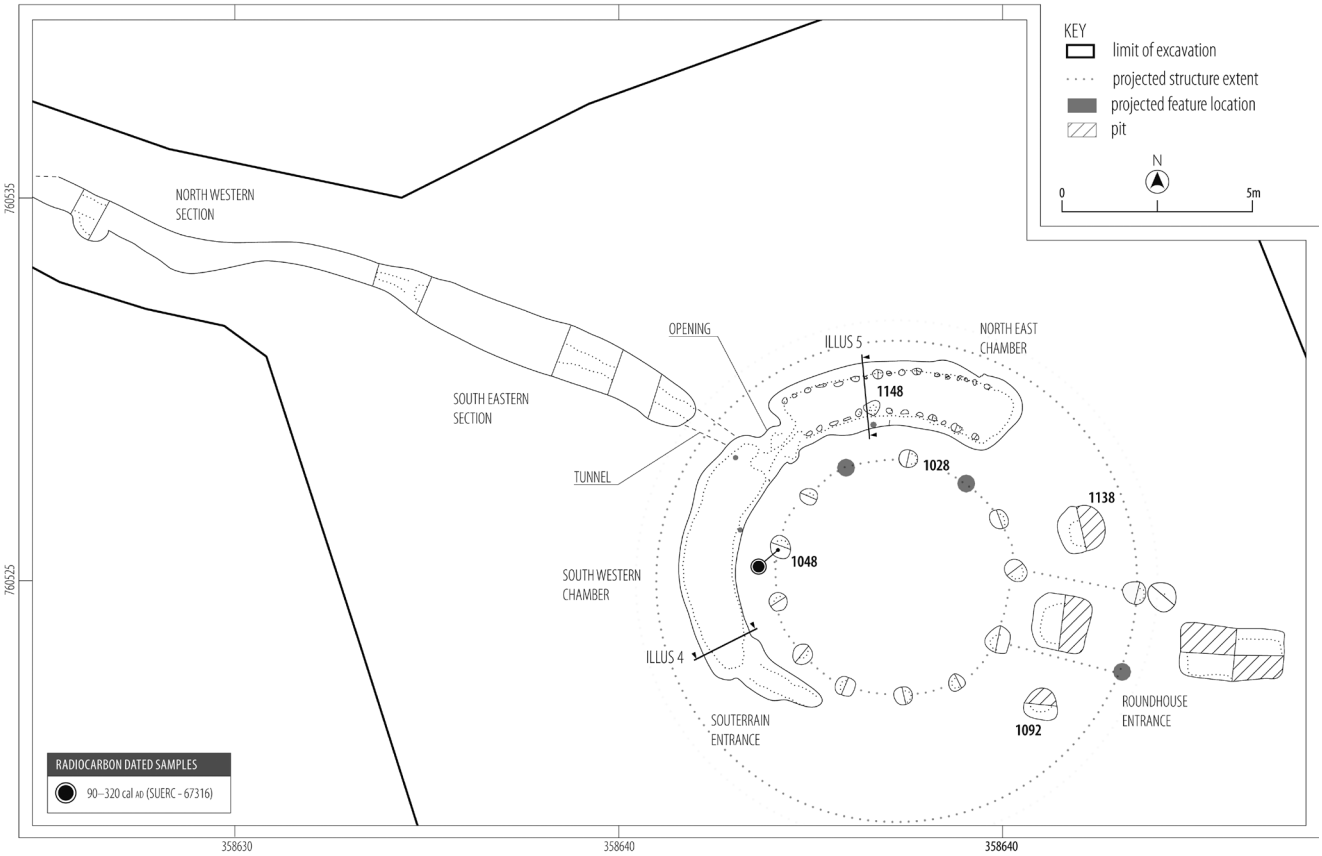
During February 2016 Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd conducted an excavation on land to the east of Dubton Farm, Brechin, Angus (Illus 1; NGR NO 5861 6062). The excavation of two open areas (Illus 1; Areas 1 and 2) was prompted by a planning condition placed upon the proposed development of the site and followed the identification of prehistoric settlement remains during evaluation (CFA Archaeology Ltd 2010). The site was located in an open arable field on the western periphery of Brechin, occupying a small plateau at approximately 71 m OD and overlooking the River South Esk. A previous excavation conducted in a neighbouring field to the west had uncovered Neolithic pits and Iron Age settlement (Cameron 2002).

A post-built roundhouse with a deeply cut internal C-shaped ditch interpreted as a souterrain was identified in Area 1, with a heavily truncated remains of a second post-built roundhouse identified in Area 2.

Area 1

The roundhouse

The roundhouse comprised a single inner post-ring, containing 11 post-holes, with an east-facing entrance (Illus 2). The post-ring was 6.2 m in internal diameter, with posts spaced between 1.4 m and 1.5 m apart, and with a wider gap of 1.95 m at the entrance. Truncation by field drains had removed a number of post-holes. Most were circular, averaging 0.5 m in diameter, with near vertical sides and rounded bases. Those along the southern and south-western arc were generally much shallower due to being cut into an outcrop of bedrock. Four post-pipes, about 0.25 m in diameter, were visible, one of which contained a sherd of pottery [1028]. A single AMS date from post-hole [1048] yielded a date of 90–320 cal AD (SUERC-67316).



Illus 2 *Plan of Area 1.*

Two post-holes were located some 3.2 m to the east of the inner post ring and appear to form corner posts for the roundhouse entrance and porch. A corresponding southern corner-post was noted during the evaluation (CFA Archaeology Ltd 2010) but was not rediscovered during the excavation.

Four pits were located within and around the entrance of the roundhouse (Illus 2). They contained charcoal rich rapid backfill events which included heat cracked pebbles, redeposited burnt soils, burnt bone and charcoal, suggesting that they were backfilled during the occupation of the house or immediately after its abandonment. As all four pits were similar in their shapes and deposits, and form a regular pattern, it is likely that they were set out either at the same time or with explicit reference to one another.

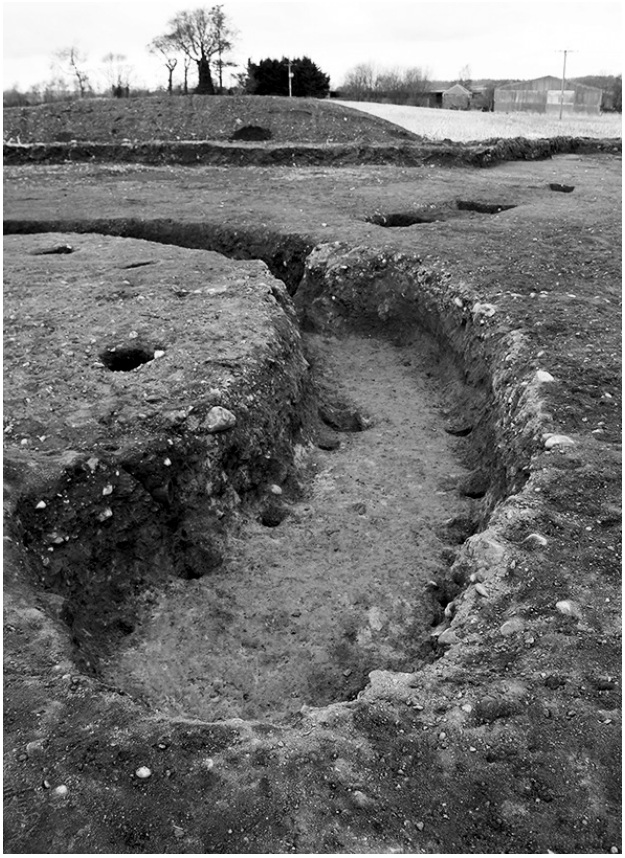
A fill of Pit [1092] (1094) contained sherds of pottery while Pit [1138] contained hammerscale, two sherds of wheel-thrown pottery, a fragment of burnt flint, a whet stone and a worked stone disc (possibly a pot lid).

The souterrain

Located in an arc around the north-west exterior of the post-ring was a deeply-cut flat-bottomed C-shaped ditch. This has been interpreted as a souterrain-type feature likely contemporary with the house (Illus 2). It comprised two main chambers, herewith called the North-East and South-West chambers for ease of reference. These two chambers were separated by a narrow opening, located approximately in the middle of the ditch. The overall cut was C-shaped, 15.4 m long and enclosed a semi-circle measuring 11.5 m in overall diameter. Access into the feature was afforded from a gently sloping entrance located at the south-western terminus. This entrance appeared as a shallow groove up to 2 m long and 0.9 m wide. The entrance sloped gently down 0.4 m over its length before stepping down sharply into the South-West chamber. This step down was approximately 0.6 m high.

The South-West chamber of the souterrain was the smaller but deeper of the two, covering an area measuring approximately 9m^2 and being on average up to 1 m deep. The sides of the chamber were near vertical and the base flat. Rising ground water was a problem during the excavation of this chamber the bottom of which was up to 0.2 m below the current water table. As a result, low-lying subtle features could not be recorded due to the constant ingress of water. Stake-holes cut into the inner and outer edges of the base were observed in two places and it is assumed that more were present.

The North-East chamber (Illus 3) appears to have been accessed through a narrow opening that measured 1 m long and 1 m wide and incorporated a step up of approximately 0.2 m from the South-West chamber. The opening bulged out on both sides suggesting the original presence of door jambs that had been removed. A narrow gully ran through the centre of the opening, sloping down from the North-East chamber back into the South-West.



Illus 3 *The north-east chamber of the souterrain (looking west).*

The North-East chamber had an internal floor space of *c* 11m^2. The depth of the base was fairly consistently 0.8m, putting this chamber on average 0.2 m higher than the South-West chamber. The sides of this chamber were near vertical and the bottom flat. A series of 30 stake-holes was located running along both edges of the bottom. These can be subdivided into three groups based on the shapes of their cuts. The first and most numerous were sub-circular and they were typically placed tight to the edges of the cut, in some cases (*ie* [1148]) the edges were overcut to accommodate the stakes. The second grouping consisted of semi-circular (split) timbers. These were typically placed with the flat face along the edge of the cut. The third, and least numerous, group were rectangular in shape and must have held vertical
timber planks. These were found in a grouping of two pairs facing each other towards the western end of the chamber. The spacing of these stakes suggest that these were uprights supporting some form of lining, most likely timber planks, along the inner faces of the chamber. It is possible that the floor of the chamber was also of wood as little evidence of erosion along its bottom was noted. No evidence of *in situ* wood was seen in any of the stake-holes and the fills matched the basal deposit within the souterrain, suggesting that the timber frame of the souterrain was removed prior to its infilling.

The fills of both the chambers were post-abandonment deposits originating through alternating dumps of topsoil like material and sand and gravel from the erosion of the exposed sides (Illus 4 and 5).

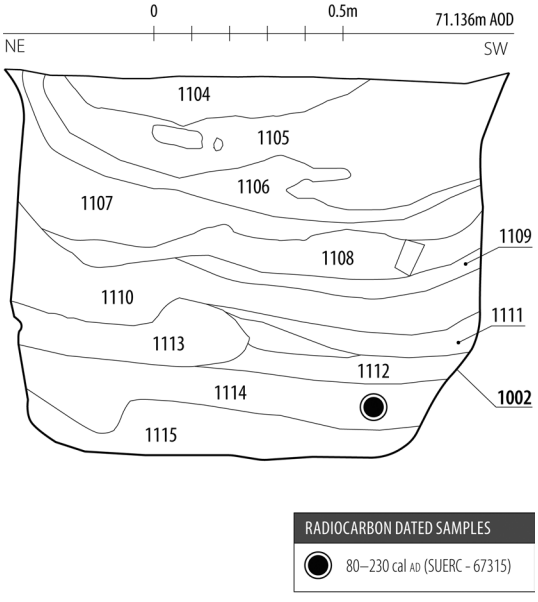
There were a number of significant fills. The basal fill in the North-East chamber was an organic rich dark brown sandy silt containing occasional charcoal. It is possible this layer represents the final occupation deposit or a deposit related to the removal of a roof or timber lining. A distinct charcoal rich deposit (1008) was located at the North-East chamber terminus contained burnt fragments of mammal bone and the fragments of an amber bead, suggesting that it was deliberately deposited at the terminus, perhaps as a closing deposit. Within the South-West chamber a layer of organic rich silty clay (1122) up to 0.2 m thick had formed across the base. Several fragments of waterlogged wood were recovered from this deposit but these do not appear to have originated from the surrounding structure. The formation of this organic rich deposit indicates that the water table must have been around this level immediately following the abandonment of the souterrain.

Three AMS dates were obtained from samples from the backfills of the souterrain. A sample from fill (1114) of the South-West chamber yielded a date of 80–230 cal ad (SUERC-67315). The deliberate deposit (1008) made towards the bottom of the North-East chamber yielded a date of 50–220 cal AD (SUERC-69150). A sample of one of the final infilling deposits (1006) in the North-East chamber yielded a date of 80–250 cal AD (SUERC-69146).

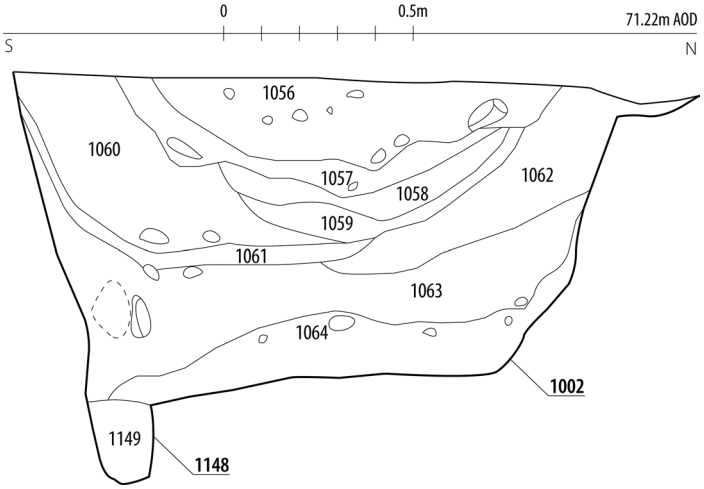
The sequence of deposits, coupled with the AMS dates, suggest that upon abandonment the wood lining of the souterrain was removed and the bottom of the souterrain rapidly covered by clean sandy gravels likely collapsed from the sides as a result of the removal of the lining. A deliberate deposit (1008) was then placed in the north-eastern terminal. The souterrain then appears to have been rapidly backfilled as is often seen at other souterrains (Armit 1999).

A linear ditch [1013] was located immediately adjacent the outer edge of the souterrain, running north-west to south-east for *c* 20 m beyond the feature. It was truncated at its north-west end by both a 2010 trial trench and a modern service trench. The ditch appeared to have been originally excavated in at least two distinct sections. The north-west section measured 12.5 m long and 0.6 m wide and was between 0.2 m and 0.4 m deep. The sides were steep and the base slightly rounded. The level of the base was highest at the north-west and lowest towards the south-east. The south-east section, measuring 8 m long and 1.4 m wide, was much deeper at 0.8m, with near vertical sides and a flat bottom gently sloping down towards the south-east.

The ditch fills were mostly uniform slumping due to erosion of the sides throughout the 20 m length. However, the deposits within the south-east terminus differed, being organic rich and deposited rapidly, possibly representing deliberate infilling at this end of the ditch. Due to its location these deposits could be the remains of decaying turf walls and thatch roof from the roundhouse.



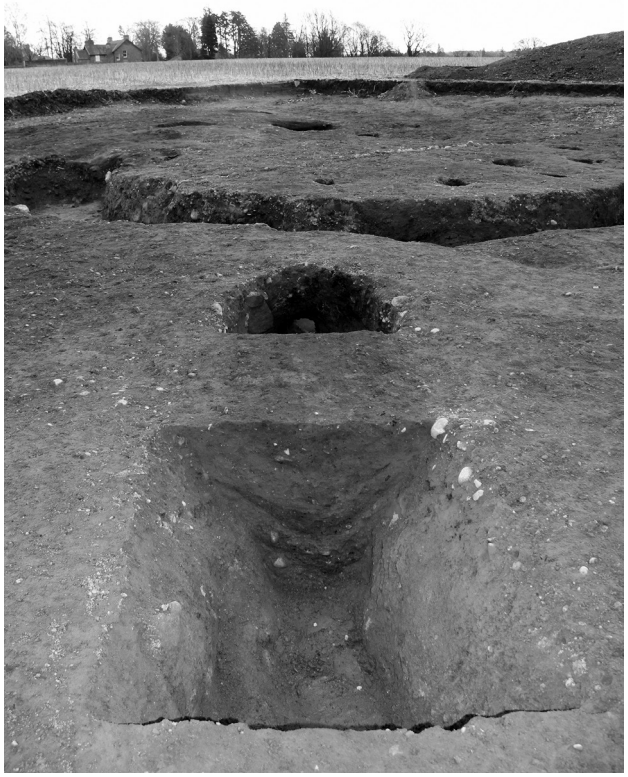
Illus 4 *Section across the South-West chamber of the souterrain.*



Illus 5 *Section across the North-East chamber of the souterrain.*

A tunnel (Illus 6 and 7) linked the south-east terminal of the ditch with the South-West chamber of the souterrain. The tunnel was roughly triangular in profile and measured 0.7 m high and 0.7 m wide with a total length of 1.3m. It sloped gently downwards from the end of the ditch into the chamber of the souterrain. The edges of the tunnel were iron-panned which indicated that water had run through the feature for a considerable period of time. A large stone was found within the south-west chamber of the souterrain, opposite the tunnel entrance and when placed within formed a tight fit. It is possible this stone was used as a plug for the tunnel.

Illus 6 *The tunnel running into souterrain (looking south-east).*



Illus 7 *Ditch and tunnel (looking south-east).*

The tunnel was filled with an organic rich grey-black silt (1142) up to 0.4 m thick containing occasional charcoal fragments, probably water-lain. This was overlain by a brownish grey sandy silt (1143) up to 0.3 m thick with no inclusions that was also possibly water-lain. The largest concentration of industrial waste from the site, consisting of 29g of vitrified fragments, most likely burnt soil and stone, was recovered from the lower deposit (1142).

Area 2

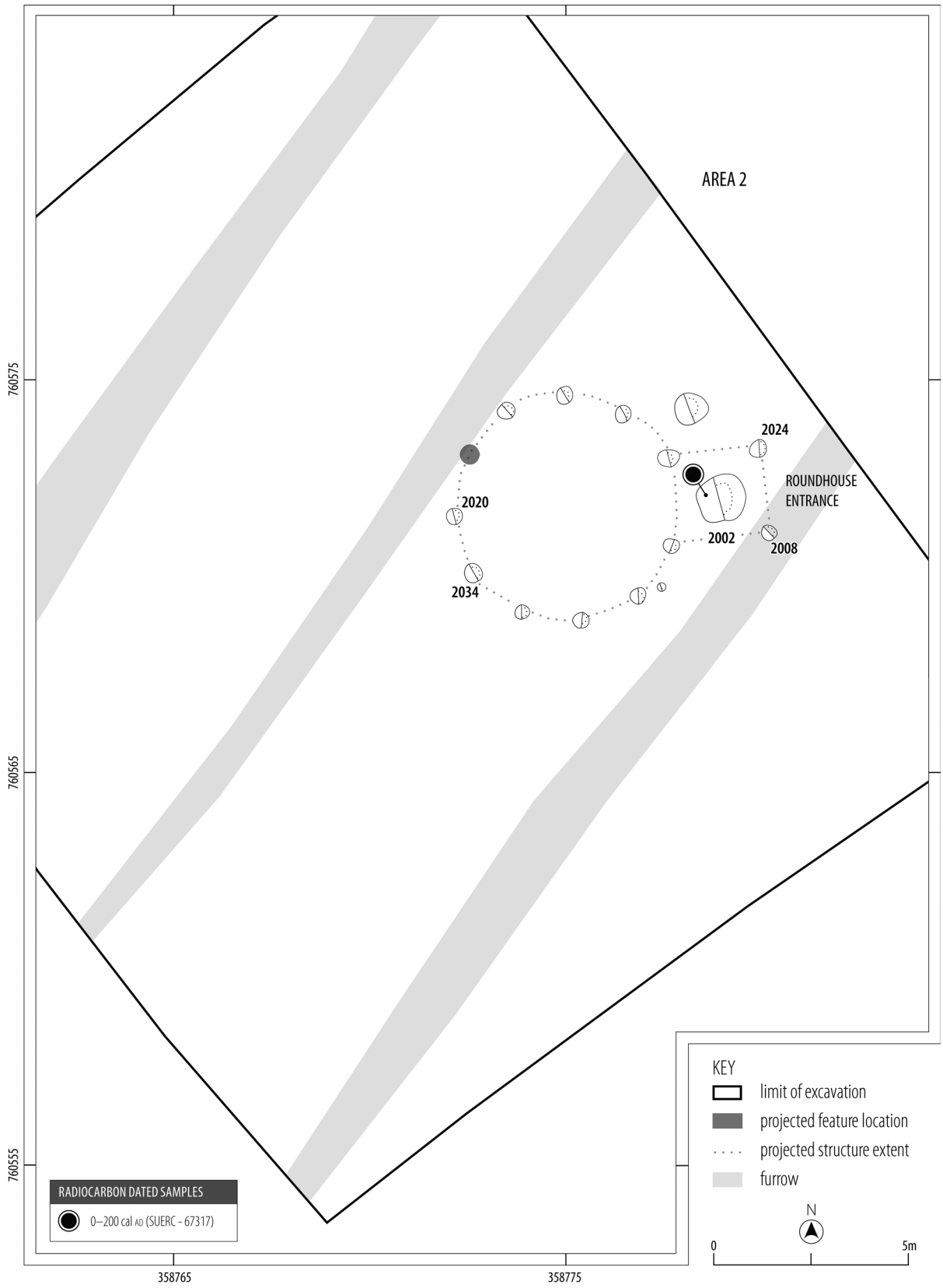
The second post-built roundhouse was located *c* 120 m to the north-east in Area 2 (Illus 9). This structure was very similar in size and design to the roundhouse in Area 1 and comprised an inner ring of 10 post-holes with an internal diameter of about 5.7m.

Posts were spaced between 1.5 m and 1.6 m apart with a wider gap of 2.2 m at the east-facing entrance. Most were circular, averaging 0.4 m in diameter, with near vertical sides and rounded bases. The post-holes were generally much shallower than those seen in Area 1 due to the greater level of truncation here. A single post-pipe (0.23 m in diameter) was visible in Post-hole [2020]. Undiagnostic lithics were recovered from a number of thje post-holes but no other finds were identified.

Post-holes [2008] and [2024] were located *c* 2.3 m to the east of the post ring and appear to form the corner posts of a *c* 2.2 m wide porch.

Two pits, very similar to those identified in Area 1, were located in the immediate vicinity of the entrance of the roundhouse. A single AMS date from fill (2003) of Pit [2002] yielded a date of 0–200 cal AD (SUERC-67317).

Illus 8 *Post-excavation shot of the roundhouse and souterrain (looking north-west).*



Illus 9 *Plan of Area 2.*

The finds

Julie Franklin, Alex Croom and Julie Lochrie

The finds assemblage from Dubton Farm East is small, amounting to six sherds (146g) of pottery, 10 lithics, two of coarse stone and one of amber, a small collection (29g) of industrial waste, a fragment of glass and a piece of possible ceramic building material. None can be independently closely dated but the pottery is potentially of early- to mid-first millennium AD date with clear Roman influences.

Pottery

The six sherds of pottery are all wheel thrown, in the same fabric a highly micaceous reduced ware that is likely to have been produced somewhere in the region – perhaps locally made or traded with the Romans. At least two vessels, cooking pots, are represented, including two base sherds and a rim. The rim (Illus 10) is a very simple form but would support a Flavian date (AD 69–96). Pottery has been recovered from the fort at Stracathro, but only the samian has been studied, and there is very little accessible information about the coarse wares in this area (Robertson 1969, 2; Hartley 1972, 4).

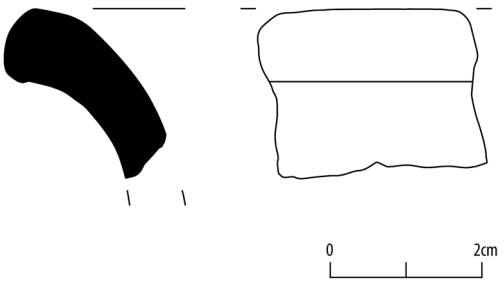
Stone

The most significant of the stone finds was the remains of an amber bead (Illus 11) found in a post-abandonment deposit within the souterrain (1008), a dump of possible hearth material dated to 50–220 cal AD (SUERC-69150). It was in two fragments, representing less than half the complete bead, with no complete dimensions surviving. However, the remains of the central perforation and some of the exterior surface indicate it was a rounded bead at least 12 mm long and approximately 10 mm in diameter.

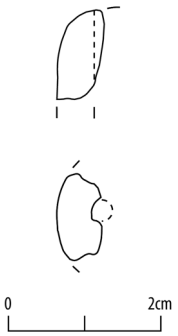
The other two stone finds were both found in pit [1138] in Area 1. The first was a large and well-used whetstone. The second was a small disc. The latter was made with some care, and forms a roughly circular disc about 60 mm in diameter. It may have formed a lid or surface, but has no obvious signs of use wear.

Lithics

The lithic assemblage was small, fragmentary and not particularly informative. It comprises two flakes, five fragments and three chips. All are flint and six are burnt. They are all most probably residual and this and the burning would account for their fragmentary state. They appear to be prehistoric but none are indicative of a more specific date range.



Illus 10 *Pot sherd.*



Illus 11 *Amber Bead.*

Glass

A single fragment of colourless glass was found in a post-abandonment fill of souterrain [1002] (1011). It is in very good condition and is most likely to be an intrusive modern find.

Ceramic building material

A single lump of possible ceramic was found. It is red, fine grained, and amorphous. It is soft but fired to a bright brick-red. It is possibly a sherd of much abraded soft brick or an accidentally fired piece of clay or even a fine grained soft stone. It was the only find from the last use or abandonment level of the souterrain (1122).

Industrial waste

A small assemblage of industrial waste comprises 29 g of vitrified fragments and <0.5 g of hammerscale. The vitrified fragments are undiagnostic of any particular industrial process but clearly indicate burning of some sort. Most were found in tunnel [1141] (1142) connecting the souterrain [1002] to the ditch [1013] and are likely to be residual. A very small quantity was also recovered from post-hole [2014] (2015).

Table 1 *Finds catalogue*

context	context notes	sample	quantity	weight (g)	material	object	description	spot date
1122	Souterrain 1002 last use/ abandonment		1	194	CBM	fired clay	large lump of amorphous red fired clay?, possibly very soft very braded brick or accidentally fired lump of clay, seem to light and soft for stone	?
1011	Souterrain 1002 post-abandonment	1005	1	0	glass	fragment	small sliver of colourless glass	?Modern
1140	Pit 1138	1021		0	industrial waste	mag res	small quantity of hammerscale	?
1142	Tunnel 1141			29	industrial waste	slag	Vitrified fragments, possibly burnt soil and stone	?
2015	PH 2014	2004		0	industrial	slag waste	small vitrified fragments	?
1008	Souterrain 1002 post-abandonment	1003	2	0	lithics	debitage	one burnt, one fresh flint chip	PH
1104	Souterrain 1002 infill	1010	2	0	lithics	debitage	two small burnt flint fragments	PH
1105	Souterrain 1002 post-abandonment	1011	1	0	lithics	debitage	burnt flint fragment	PH
1106	Souterrain 1002 post-abandonment	1001	1	0	lithics	debitage	secondary burnt flint flake fragment	PH
1139	Pit 1138		1	0	lithics	debitage	burnt flint fragment, probable flake	PH
2005	Pit 2004	2002	1	0	lithics	debitage	fresh flint fragment	PH
2009	PH 2008	2003	1	0	lithics	debitage	inner flint flake	PH
2015	PH 2014	2004	1	0	lithics	debitage	fresh flint chip	PH
1030	PH 1028		1	25	pottery (Roman)	Reduced Ware	cooking pot base sherd	?RB
1094	Pit 1092		3	105	pottery (Roman)	Reduced Ware	cooking pot base/body sherd, and two body sherds	?RB
1139	Pit 1138		2	16	pottery (Roman)	Reduced Ware	cooking pot everted rim and body sherd	?RB
1008	Souterrain 1002 post-abandonment	1003	1	0	stone	amber bead	two fragments from amber bead, central perforation and part of exterior remain; no complete dimensions, but at least length 12+ mm, diameter 10+ mm	?
1139	Pit 1138		1	713	stone	whetstone	long stone, of roughly triangular section with wear on three sides, particularly on the largest flat face, fine-grained metamorphic stone, length 187	Iron Age to medieval
1139	Pit 1138		1	41	stone	disc	small disc roughly chipped from piece of grey sandstone, diameter 60 mm, thickness 6 mm	?

The hammerscale was recovered from pit [1138]. It is related to either smelting or smithing but is in such small quantities it does not necessarily indicate this activity being carried out on site; it could easily have been transported by ploughing or be windblown.

Discussion

The earliest finds are the lithics which imply pre-Iron Age activity in the area, but all are residual and none can be tightly dated.

Finds associated with the roundhouse in Area 1 include all of the pottery, the whetstone and stone disc, and a small quantity of hammerscale. They suggest general domestic occupation and possible ironworking associated with the structure though cannot provide a tight date. The pottery may be Roman or influenced from Rome though little is known about local pottery during that period.

Finds from the souterrain include an amber bead, a fragment of possibly intrusive glass and an ambiguous lump of ceramic. The amber bead adds to the relatively small assemblage of well-dated amber from the Scottish Iron Age (see Hunter 1998), the distribution of which is scattered widely from East Lothian to the Northern Isles. A more local example, of an amber finger ring, was recovered from the souterrain at Shanzie Farm, Alyth (Coleman and Hunter 2002). Hunter (1998) argues that rather than indicating Roman contact, the presence of amber shows low-level, direct or indirect, contacts across the North Sea in decorative and exotic goods.

Environmental evidence

Laura Bailey and Tim Holden

Thirty samples were assessed for palaeoenvironmental remains, the majority from the souterrain, tunnel and associated ditch and the pits associated with the roundhouses.

The environmental assemblage offers limited insight into site economy. Hulled barley was identified in one sample from the post-abandonment phase of the souterrain fills. Hulled barley was the dominant cereal crop across Scotland during the Iron Age (ScARF 2012). Charred hazel nutshell fragments from one of the basal fill of the souterrain suggests that wild food may have been a resource. Charred hazel nutshells are typical of floor or hearth sweepings discarded onto fires, but it is also possible that they were incidentally collected with fuelwood. The presence of pig and cow teeth together with burnt and fragmented animal bone from the pits outside of the roundhouse in Area 1 and backfill of the souterrain suggests that the main domesticates were consumed on site. Certainly the presence of nutshell together with pottery, cereal grain and animal bone suggest that the souterrain contained debris from a domestic source.

A small amount of burnt peat was recovered from the fill of the souterrain and tunnel and may have been the remains of fuel, turf walls or perhaps roofing material. Similarly, the remains of large roundwood charcoal fragments and waterlogged wood from the souterrain may also have been the remains of fuel or structural material.

Radiocarbon dates

Material for AMS dating was selected giving priority in the first instance to short lived examples such as bone, fruits and nutshells. Where no other material was available charcoal from backfilling events was used. Charcoal deriving from Oak was avoided. All AMS dates are summarised in Table 2. The range of dates suggests a single phase of activity at the site between the first and third centuries AD. These dates appear to be roughly contemporary with those recovered from one of the souterrains (Souterrain A175) from the neighbouring site which yielded a date of 20–210 cal AD (AA-39950) (Cameron 2002).

Table 2 *AMS dates*

lab ID	feature	context	material	δ^{13C} (0/00)	radiocarbon age BP	calibrated age ranges **2σ** (95% confidence)
SUERC-67316	Roundhouse 1	(1050) fill	charcoal *Alnus*	-28.2	1822±29	90 – 320 cal AD
(GU40864)		of Post-hole [1048]	*glutinosa* (alder)			
SUERC-67315	Souterrain [1002]	(1114) basal fill	charcoal *Corylus*	-26.0	1863±29	80 – 230 cal AD
(GU40863)		of Souterrain [1002]	*avellana* (hazel)			
SUERC-69150	Souterrain [1002]	(1008) fill	nutshell *Corylus*	-23.1	1892±33	50 – 220 cal AD
(GU41788)		of Souterrain [1002]	*avellana* (hazel)			
SUERC-69146	Souterrain [1002]	(1006) fill	cremated bone	-27.2	1838±33	80 – 250 cal AD
(GU41787)		of Souterrain [1002]				
SUERC-67317	Roundhouse 2	(2003) fill	charcoal *Alnus*	-27.4	1920±30	0 – 200 cal AD
(GU40865)		of Pit [2002]	*glutinosa* (alder)			

Discussion

The roundhouses

The two roundhouses are consistent with other post-built Iron Age structures from the region such as those at Dalladies (Watkins 1980a) and Ironshill (Pollock 1997). They both survive as single inner post-rings with entrances orientated to the east, their similar sizes and design suggesting that they were contemporary or near contemporary builds. Both are likely to have had at least partially turf or soil outer walls and, according to the post-holes located on the outer edge of the entrance, may have been up to *c* 14 m in internal diameter.

In both cases the post-rings appear to have remained un-modified for the duration of the buildings' use with no obvious evidence for post replacement or insertion. Coupled with the AMS dates, this could suggest that both buildings were in use for a relatively short period of time, perhaps *c* 60 years or less (Pope 2003, 345).

The entrances into both roundhouses were orientated approximately east, with that in Area 1 orientated slightly further to the south. This choice of orientation can be seen as both a function of the roundhouse placement within the local topography and to maximise sunlight within the building. East and south-east facing orientations seem to favour the sunrise, especially during shorter winter days as the entrance way would be the principle source of light into the building. The entrances on both structures would presumably have helped to maximise the light entering the building by holding up the eaves of the roof. Eastern orientations for roundhouse entrances are favoured throughout the late Iron Age and Roman Iron Age periods (Pope 2003, 201).

The souterrain

The site at Dubton Farm East is situated in the heart of one of the densest concentrations of souterrains currently known in the archaeological record. These have been mainly located by aerial photography undertaken between the Tay and the Grampian hills (Dunwell and Ralston 2007, 113 and Illus 37). The known types within Angus are typically stone-lined subterranean chambers capped either with stone slabs or timber, such as those from Hurley Hawkin (Taylor 1983), Ardestie and Carnlugie (Wainwright 1963). More recent stone-lined examples were excavated at Shanzie (Coleman and Hunter 2002), Ardownie (Anderson and Rees 2006) and Hawkhill (Rees 2009). Their discovery on excavations has led to them being accepted as a common feature of Iron Age settlements in the region and their most common interpretation is as subterranean storage chambers (Dunwell and Ralston 2007, 116).

Wholly or partially wood-built souterrains are rarer in the archaeological record although their numbers are increasing as more are discovered through excavation. Examples have now been recorded in Angus at Redcastle (Alexander 2005), Dubton Farm (Cameron 2002), Hawkhill (Rees 2009), Dalladies (Watkins 1980a), Ironshill East (McGill 2003) and Auchlishie (Dick 1999).

The soft geological sands that the souterrain was excavated into would have both proved easy to dig and impossible to maintain without a lining. The stake-holes along either edge of the North-East (and most likely the South-West) chamber show that the walls were lined with wooden planks. None of the stake-holes were as substantial as those seen at Redcastle, which were interpreted as supporting a roof structure (Alexander 2005). The bottom of the souterrain was probably floored with wood as no erosion to the relatively soft base was seen. As the step down from the entrance into the South-West chamber is considerable, and given the likelihood that the bottom may have been waterlogged, it is not impossible to imagine a raised wooden floor being necessary to traverse the chamber without getting wet. It is likely that the souterrain would at least have been screened from the interior of the building to prevent falling in, whether with the use of a panel wall or by simply covering it over with planks, although no evidence for either of these contingencies was seen.

Most current theories see souterrains functionally as food stores, for grain and other agricultural produce, such as dairy, that would benefit from the cool, dark and (in many cases) dry conditions. The larger souterrains may have served as stores for a community or for the storage of surplus to be traded or gifted while smaller souterrains such as those at the neighbouring site at Dubton Farm may have served a single household. Since most souterrains were kept clean during their lifespan, and appear to be deliberately decommissioned, very little evidence for the goods stored with in them has survived. Even the souterrain at Shanzie Farm, Alyth in Perthshire, which appears not to have been backfilled upon abandonment, failed to produce an *in situ* deposit related to its use (Coleman and Hunter 2002).

A unique feature of the Dubton Farm East souterrain is that the ditch and tunnel running into the South-West chamber may have been associated with water collection. These features appear to have channelled water into the chamber which could have served as a water tank within the house. This is a very rare find with the nearest parallel, that of a drain-like feature in the base of the Ardestie souterrain, presumably built to keep the souterrain dry not wet (Wainwright 1963). If animals were being overwintered within the settlement, and potentially within the house, then a plentiful supply of water would be necessary. The ditch may have acted as a cistern to collect rain and ground water that was then fed into the souterrain through the tunnel. If a plug were used then the system would have performed much like a tap providing water as needed to the interior of the building. Other functions should also be considered, including the use of water in numerous household tasks from washing to food production.

The two chambers of the souterrain at Dubton Farm East, likely separated by a timber shutter or door, may therefore have served different purposes. The South-West chamber may have stored water for at least some of the time and its cold and damp conditions may also have been ideal for the storage of products such as dairy or meats. The higher chamber to the north-east would have remained dry however and useable for the storage of grain and other produce but would also have benefited from the 'refrigerating' effects of the cold water in the chamber next door. Given that this souterrain was located within a roundhouse, the tunnel may have served to allow cooler air into the chambers to prevent it from becoming too warm, especially if a hearth was lit elsewhere in the building.

In plan the souterrain at Dubton Farm East is very much reminiscent of a traditional ring-ditch. In form and substance, however, its depth, vertical sides, sloped entrance, partitioned chambers and structured lining place it closer to the category of souterrain. This is, to the authors knowledge, the first excavated example of a souterrain found entirely within a roundhouse although many 'ring-ditch' roundhouses identified within the aerial record could easily be similar structures. There is already a common association between souterrains and above ground buildings, especially in regard to Dalladies (Watkins 1980a) and Newmill (Watkins 1980b), where the entrances to souterrains are located within the interior of the house. Above ground structures, represented by posthole clusters and an area of isolated paving, also appear to have been related to the 'micro souterrains' in the neighbouring field (Cameron 2002). Certainly Souterrain A175 from these excavations could have been partially or fully enclosed by a structure given its proximity to the paved surface. The closest parallel in terms of cut ring-ditches would be from House 6 at Douglasmuir (Kendrick 1995), the ring-ditch of which reached up to 1.80 m in depth. Here the internal edge was sloped and no evidence of a lining was seen. Kendrick argued that the depth of the ditch could have allowed it to be covered over and used as a cellar type store and includes a wooden lining to the external edge in the reconstruction of that building. The 'proto-souterrains' from Dalladies (Watkins 1980a) are also seen as possible ring-ditch souterrain hybrids, some of which showed evidence for wood and stone linings. Conversely ring-ditches are also seen to provide more useable space beneath the eaves of a pitched roof for the carrying out of activities. It is therefore possible that the souterrain provided functional space as well as storage space beneath the steeply sloping roof.

Regardless of terminology all of these features discussed above appear to have been serving similar purposes, as either below ground storage or additional space for either an individual household or a wider settlement. It is probably unhelpful to suggest that one developed from or was superior to another as most were almost certainly constructed to suit the individual requirements of the household.

Abandonment

The settlement at Dubton Farm East was abandoned between the 1st and early 4th century AD. Two main events can be identified with this activity – the digging of pits across the entrances of the roundhouses and the removal of wood from the timber lining of the souterrain. The pits positioned at the entrances to both houses perhaps indicate similar, if not contemporary, abandonment practices with the buildings. After the timber lining was removed a deposit (1008) was placed into the north-eastern terminus of the souterrain. Whilst it is possible this deposit originated from a purely domestic context it is also possible that the burnt bone and the amber bead represent the poorly preserved remains of a cremation. The fragments of bone were too small to determine if they were human in origin. The AMS dates returned from the souterrain fills conform roughly to the abandonment horizon identified by Ian Armit (1999), between the first and second centuries AD.

Conclusions

The excavation at Dubton Farm East adds significant further evidence for settlement in the Brechin and Angus area in the early part of the first millennium AD. The site revealed a settlement of two roundhouses, built, occupied and abandoned in the first few centuries AD. Whilst the roundhouses themselves are fairly typical of post-built structures found on Iron Age settlements in the region the souterrain is a unique structure.

This souterrain adds to the known wood-lined souterrains excavated in recent years in central Scotland. Indeed it is now apparent that wood lining is a fairly common variation on the tradition; whether as an easier or cheaper material or a preferred local fashion. Stone-lined examples were far more likely to be discovered by accident during ploughing in the 19th and 20th century and it is likely that modern excavation will continue to rebalance the record between the two construction techniques.

Perhaps more unusual is the positioning of the souterrain entirely within a building in an area traditionally occupied by a ring-ditch. This raises interesting parallels between the functions suggested for large and deep ring-ditches such as those found at Douglasmuir (Kendrick 1995) and other souterrains. The ditch and tunnel water management system also appears to be unique in the record at this time and relatively difficult to explain functionally; although as ever with prehistoric archaeology this is more likely due to the limited record we possess than actual peculiarity.

Despite a general paucity of artefacts, the few sherds of pottery contribute towards the corpus of known local types from this period. The possible Roman influence on the fabric and the presence of the amber bead suggest possible links to Rome and the Baltic. The nearby fort and marching camp at Stracathro,

approximately 6k m to the north-east, occupied during the first century AD perhaps indicate direct contact, influence and trade between the Roman world and
the native Iron Age peoples of Brechin.

Acknowledgements

Matthew Ginnever would like to thank Carmen Dahlke, Stephen Digney, Josh Gaunt and Aristotelis Palyvos for their hard work during the excavation and Dr Candy Hatherley for advice during fieldwork and writing up of the results. The Illustrations are by Rafael Maya-Torcelly. The project was managed by Dr Candy Hatherley for Headland Archaeology and wholly funded by Scotia Homes (North) Ltd.

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Abstract

Archaeological excavation undertaken in 2016 at Dubton Farm East, Brechin, uncovered the remains of two post-built roundhouses, one of which contained a deeply cut pennaular ditch interpreted as a souterrain. Radiocarbon dates indicated that the houses and souterrain were likely built and occupied sometime between the first and early fourth centuries AD. *Pottery recovered from pits located within the entrance way of one of the structures appears to show evidence of Roman influence or contact. The partial remains of an amber bead may indicate further trade links with the Baltic where the amber was most likely sourced, again possibly brought in through Roman contact. The wood-lined souterrain found within one of the roundhouses and linked to an external ditch via a tunnel is currently a unique feature in the archaeological record and further highlights Brechin as an important area for souterrain studies.*

Keywords
amber
Iron Age
pits
pottery
settlement
souterrain

This project was wholly funded and published by Scotia Homes (North) Ltd.