

Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	East Lothian
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	The Chesters Hill Fort
PROJECT CODE:	HSCO-90072-2017-01
PARISH:	Athelstaneford
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	David Murray
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Kirkdale Archaeology
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Archaeological evaluation
NMRS NO(S):	NT57NW 1
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Fort (Prehistoric)
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	
NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	Centred c. NT 5086 7830
START DATE (this season)	13 February 2017
END DATE (this season)	13 February 2017
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>Four small trenches were excavated to accommodate the strainer posts of a new rabbit-proof fence in the vicinity of Chesters Hill Fort. The proposed new works were components of a suite of pest-control measures at the site to address long-term infestation by rabbits.</p> <p>The four hand-dug trenches each measured 0.30m x 0.30m in plan and were excavated to a depth of 0.50m where possible.</p> <p>Trench 1 (NT 5091 7824) revealed only heavily-rooted topsoil.</p> <p>Trench 2 (NT 5091 7828) produced a surprising mass of stones within it; this might imply that the top of the ridge here has never been ploughed. The lowest deposit in this trench may be the only place where the natural subsoil was encountered.</p> <p>Trench 3 (NT 5090 7832) was at the base of the ridge, and produced a single homogenous deposit with far fewer stones than was found in Trench 2. This may well be a cultivated soil at the base of the slope.</p> <p>Trench 4 (NT 5084 7834) was in a seemingly disturbed area, and this impression was borne out by the amount of relatively recent finds recovered. The trench was not too far from the apparent building remnant in the north-east corner of the site. A probable track seems to utilise the outermost ditch on the north side of the fort. This runs from the present farm (Dalvreck) in an easterly direction towards the building, and passes close by Trench 4.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Historic Environment Scotland
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ARCHIVE LOCATION	Archive to be deposited with Historic Environment Scotland

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Updated on 15/06/2007

(intended/deposited)	
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**HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2016/2017**

Chesters Hillfort • Watching Brief • February 2017

HS PIC Index Number: 90072 (PIC132)

SITE: The Chesters Hillfort, East Lothian.

N.G.R.: Centred c. NT 5086 7830

DESCRIPTION: Watching brief during work associated with rabbit-proofing the hillfort.

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-90072-2017-01

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MAY 2017

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC call-off contract with Historic Environment Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake the excavation of four trenches to accommodate the strainer posts of a new rabbit-proof fence in the vicinity of Chesters Hillfort, East Lothian (Fig.1). The proposed new works were components of a suite of pest-control measures at the site to address long-term infestation by rabbits.

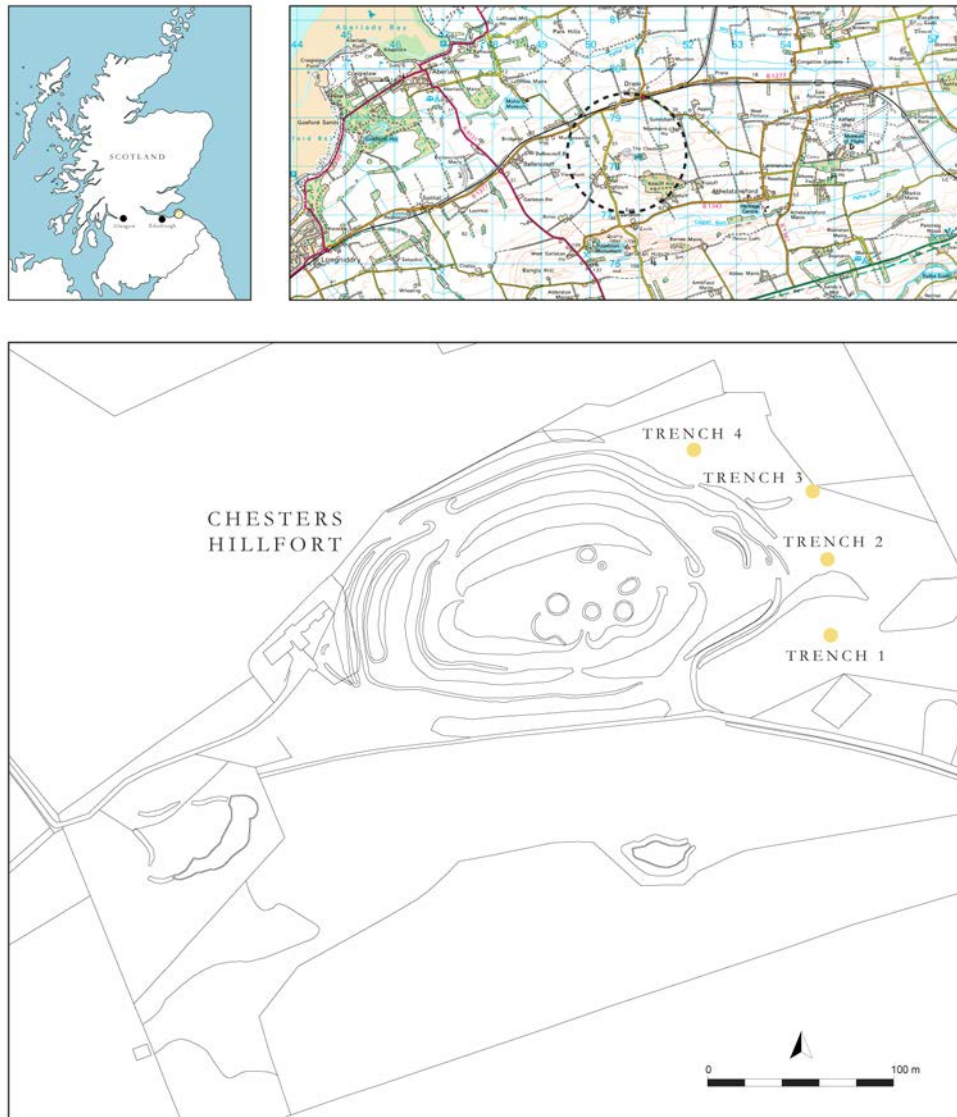


Figure 1: General locations of the four trenches.

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Chesters Hillfort is a remarkably well preserved example of a later prehistoric site enclosed by multiple banks and ditches. In respect of morphology it could be considered to be a fairly typical site for its time and place; however the preservation of the site causes it to stand out. Dozens of similar enclosures exist in East Lothian, but almost all are crop mark sites, ploughed intensively over centuries until there is little or no trace of any upstanding banks, ditches or interior features.

The site occupies the summit of a low but steep ridge running roughly E/W. It is presumably this steepness that has saved the site from agricultural depredations. Extant farm buildings are to be found today to the immediate west of the earthworks, and the wall of a post-medieval building can be seen built into the field boundary around the north-east side of the site.

The site has proved attractive to rabbits however, with the up cast bank material providing an ideal burrowing medium. Severe erosion is visible today in many parts of the site as a result of this. As a response Historic Environment Scotland decided to erect a new rabbit proof fence around the site. While much of this involved pile driving fence posts into the ground, four larger strainer posts needed to be emplaced on the eastern side of the site.

The work took place on 13th February, 2017.

DESCRIPTION

The four trenches that were hand dug each measured 0.30m x 0.30m in plan and were excavated to a depth of 0.50m where possible.

Trench 1 was located towards the south-east of the site, at the base of a mature scots pine, growing in the steep valley that passes to the south of the monument. Topsoil **100** proved to be a mid-brown fine silt, so rich in roots that it proved impossible to excavate more than 0.15m, and much of the trench only reached a depth of 0.10m. Due to these difficult conditions, the trench was abandoned.

Trench 2 was to the north of the first one, at the eastern end of the top of the ridge on which the site sits. It was approximately 8m east of the nearest visible hillfort earthworks, and just to the south of a concrete marker (stamped 'DOE A.M.'). The topsoil **200** consisted of 0.1m of mid-brown silt, followed by 0.28m of **201**, a mix of mid-brown silt and a mass of small stone fragments, all sub angular chunks of degraded seemingly igneous rock. At the base of the trench, **202** proved to be compact pale-brown-to-yellow fine silt, with a small component of the same stones as **201**. This was not bottomed.

Trench 3 lay to the north of Trench 2, at the base of the ridge, and near an extant dyke at the north-east corner of the monument. Here some 0.12m of topsoil **300** overlay (at least) 0.38m of **301**, a mid-brown fine silt rich in degraded stones.

The final trench lay at the base of the north side of the ridge, to the west of Trench 3. While this is in an area of relatively flat ground, there are numerous small undulations, suggestive of disturbance. Some 0.15m of topsoil **400** lay over 0.20m of **402**, a loose mid-brown fine silt, rich in stone that also produced

brick and ceramic field drain fragments (photographed, but not retained). The lowest 0.18m was filled by **403**, similar to **402**, but richer in stone. This deposit was not bottomed.

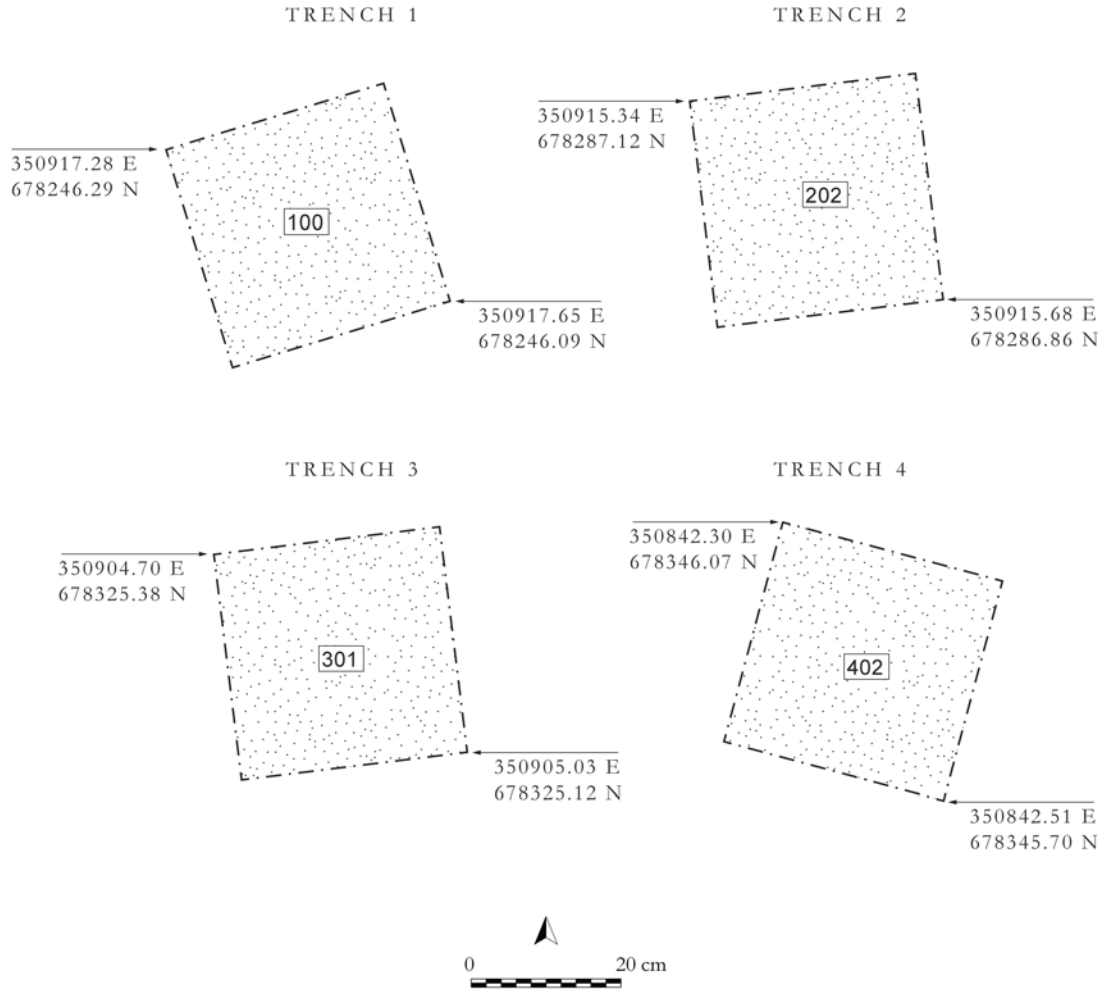


Figure 2: Trenches 1 – 4, post-excitation plans.

CONCLUSIONS

All four trenches produced different results. Trench 2 produced a surprising mass of stones within it; this might imply that the top of the ridge here has never been ploughed. The lowest deposit in this trench may be the only place where the natural subsoil was encountered.

Trench 3 was at the base of the ridge, and produced a single homogenous deposit with far fewer stones than was found in Trench 2. This may well be a cultivated soil at the base of the slope.

Trench 4 was in a seemingly disturbed area, and this impression was born out by the amount of relatively recent finds recovered. The trench was not too far from the apparent building remnant in the north-east corner of the site. A probable track seems to utilise the outermost ditch on the north side of the hillfort. This runs from the present farm (Dalvreck Farm) in an easterly direction towards the building, and passes close by Trench 4.



Plate 1: The finds from context 402.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

Trench 1

No.	Description
100	Topsoil, a mid-brown fine silt full of roots.

Trench 2

No.	Description
200	Topsoil, a mid-brown fine silt.
201	Stone rich deposit, mixed with mid-brown fine silt.
202	Compact pale-brown-to-yellow fine silt.

Trench 3

No.	Description
300	Topsoil, a mid-brown fine silt.
301	Mid-brown fine silt mixed with some stone.

Trench 4

No.	Description
400	Topsoil, a mid-brown fine silt.
401	A loose mid-brown fine silt mixed with some stone, brick and tile.
402	A loose mid-brown fine silt mixed with some stone, brick and tile.

LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Type	Description	Scale
1	Plan	General location of works.	1:100

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
1	Trench 1, as finished.	S	13/02/2017
2	Trench 1, as finished, location shot.	SE	13/02/2017
3	Trench 2, as finished.	S	13/02/2017
4	Trench 2, as finished, S-facing section.	S	13/02/2017
5	Trench 2, as finished.	E	13/02/2017
6	Trench 2, as finished, location shot.	E	13/02/2017
7	Trench 3, as finished.	E	13/02/2017
8	Trench 3, as finished, S-facing section.	S	13/02/2017
9	Trench 3, as finished, S-facing section.	S	13/02/2017
10	Trench 3, as finished, location shot.	NE	13/02/2017
11	Trench 4, as finished.	E	13/02/2017
12	Trench 4, as finished, S-facing section.	S	13/02/2017
13	Finds from 402.	N/A	13/02/2017