

## **Excavations of Iron Age and Roman Iron Age levels at a settlement in Glencoyne Park, Ullswater, Cumbria**

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This paper outlines preliminary results of four seasons of excavation at a curvilinear enclosed settlement in Glencoyne Park. The excavation formed part of a project to investigate later prehistoric settlement in Cumbria. Much information for the Neolithic and Bronze Ages derives from funerary and ritual monuments such as stone circles and burial cairns. Further, there is a lack of settlement evidence for much of prehistory, a problem that is compounded for the Iron Age by the absence or unrecognisable reuse of earlier funerary and ritual monuments. Consequently, the Iron Age is very poorly understood in Cumbria. It was a priority for the project to identify, excavate and date sites that, based on regional comparators, were likely to date to the Iron Age.

**T**HE Glencoyne Park site, NY 387 199 (Figure 1), is located towards the end of a broad terrace at about 220m. This terrace marks the upper limit of a large number of features associated with past human activity including field boundaries, cairns and other enclosures at this location (Loney and Hoan, 2006; Hoan and Loney, 2003). There is no physical connection between the adjacent field boundaries, lynchets and the site under investigation. Curvilinear enclosed settlements are a common form in Cumbria for which little recent excavated evidence is available. The site had previously been mapped by the Ordnance Survey, and recorded by Hay in 1936. The settlement consists of a roughly oval drystone enclosure wall, approximately 60m in diameter, covering 0.2ha, and contains the remains of three possibly four hut circles, a possible cairn and other internal features (Fig. 2). Prior to excavation we conducted a topographical survey of the site and subsequently a magnetometry survey of the settlement.

This site was chosen for excavation as it met a number of criteria that satisfied the overall research aims of the project. It was located on better soils within the valley and would provide a contrast with our earlier excavation at Baldhowend (Loney and Hoan, 2000, 2006). The available evidence suggested that this type of site at Glencoyne Park might have existed prior to the Roman period. The surrounding landscape is archaeologically rich and contains a suite of features known from elsewhere in central Britain. The site is located near to several mires and the results of excavation, survey and vegetation history would provide a good context for the interpretation of landscape history.

Four seasons of excavation were conducted at the site in 2002-2003 and 2005-2006. In 2002 the excavation took the form of an open area excavation in and around the south-eastern-most hut circle, near a later drain. Our main trench was 10 x 10m, adequate to investigate the interior and portions of the exterior of the hut circle, which had an internal diameter of approximately 5m. A condition of our licence to excavate from the National Trust was that we could not alter or remove the upstanding stone wall of the hut circle, thus limiting our excavations to the interior of the house.

Excavation on the interior of the house ceased at the end of 2003 and the analysis of the excavations will be presented separately. In 2003 and again 2005-6 we focused on understanding the archaeological deposits preserved between and under the enclosure wall and the house that appeared to be of pre-Roman date (Fig. 3).

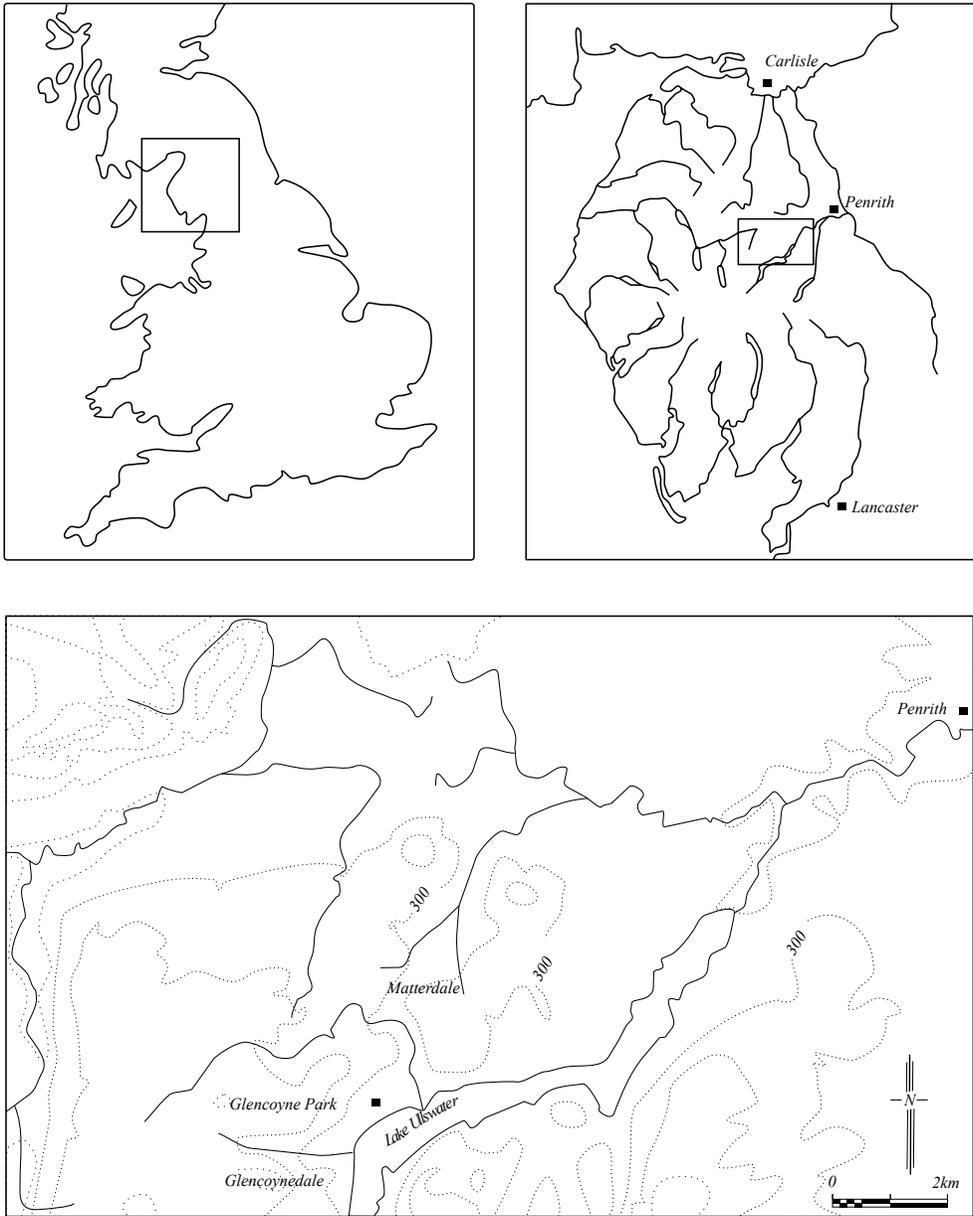


FIG. 1. Location of the excavations at Glencoyne Park, Ullswater.

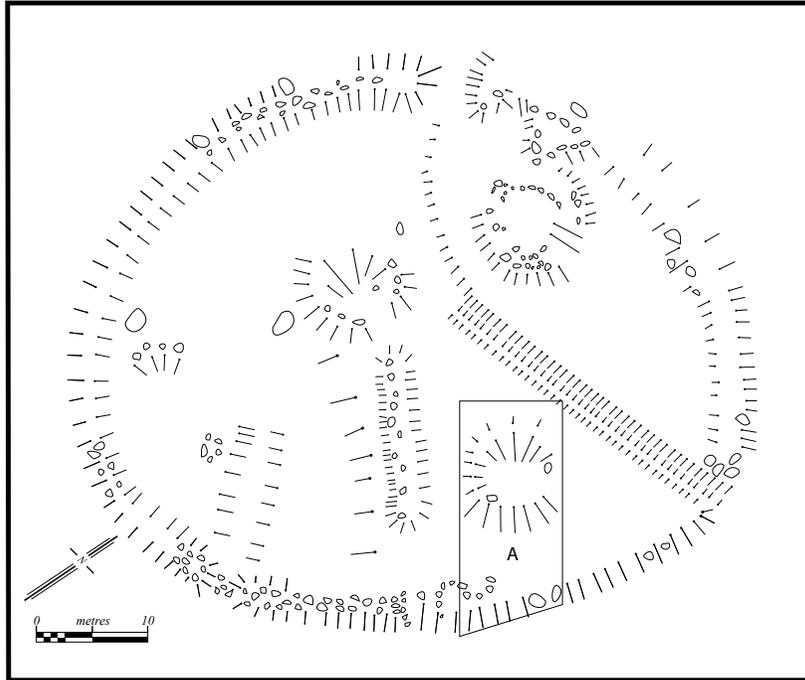


FIG. 2. Plan of Glencoyne Park 6 showing trench location.

### Topographic and geophysical survey

A topographic survey of all visible remains was carried out in 1999 by Helen Loney using a Leica Wild 1200 total station loaned by the University of Edinburgh. Survey data was collected using an automatic data logger and processed using Liscad V.3. The survey is presented in Fig. 2. The survey was concerned with relating the settlement to its surrounding archaeological landscape and to the major internal features.

During the course of our excavations familiarity with the site enabled us to identify subtle features that may have resulted from occupation in the near environment of the site. Consequently in 2005 a magnetometry survey was conducted by Helen Loney and Lorna Sharpe of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Glasgow. This survey was conducted using a fluxgate gradiometer and processed using Geoplot 3. The results of the geophysical survey allowed us to identify a set of external paddocks and structures to the enclosure, and thus demonstrate the utility of this technique in this type of landscape, contrary to conventional wisdom.

### The 2002 excavations

Prior to excavation a contour and offset survey of the house and adjacent areas was made. During our excavations in 2002 and 2003 the main effort was devoted to understanding the complex sequence seen in the remains of the roundhouse. The excavations at the house site suggested that it was built over that of an earlier house platform early in the Roman period. The house underwent several phases of

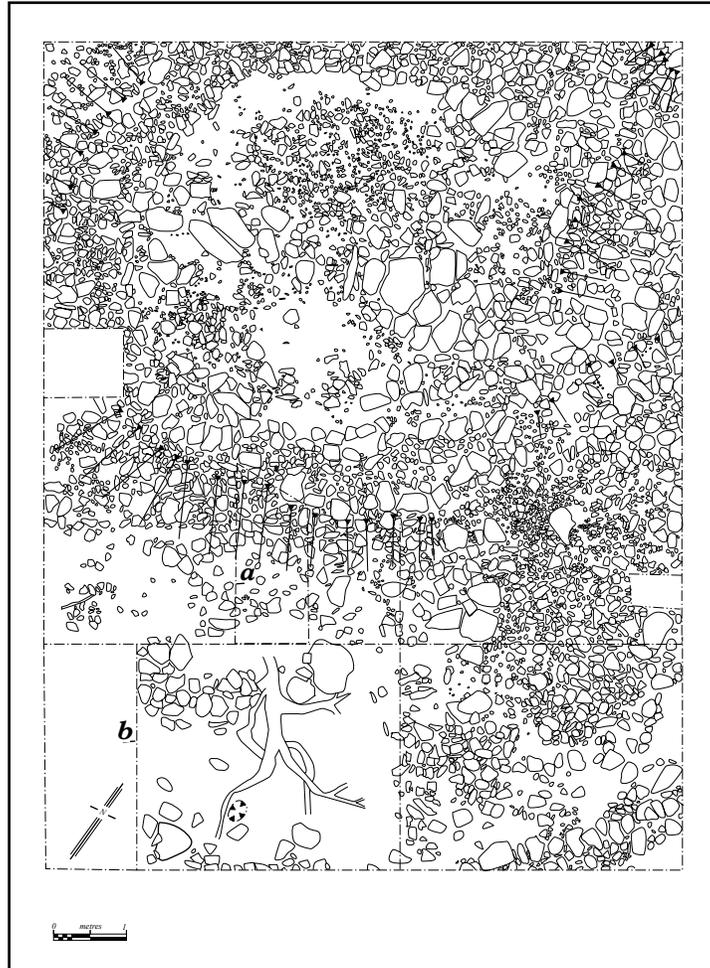


FIG. 3. Composite plan of excavations at Glencoyne Park 6 Area A. After removal of subsoil showing locations of sondages *a*, *b*. Area excavated in 2003, 2005-6 in SE corner.

modification before finally being abandoned at some point in the second century A.D. From the area of the house we recovered a relatively rich assemblage of finds including glass, lead and pottery (both coarse and fine wares). We have a number of radiocarbon dates from the abandoned hearth of this structure ((Table 1,  $1880 \pm 50$  BP, A.D. 70-170 (SUERC-8937);  $1900 \pm 35$  BP, A.D. 55-135 (SUERC-8938)).

From the contour survey it appeared that the house had been built on a platform terraced into the slope. We investigated the nature of this platform and its relationship to the enclosure wall by excavating two trial trenches. The first trench cut through the wall tumble and platform building material to the underlying sediments. The second trench was slightly offset from the first and was designed to examine the relationship of the platform to the enclosure wall.

TABLE 1. All dates AMS unless specified

Context number/ description	Material	Lab code	BP	1 s. d.	2 s.d.
28/hearth	Alder	SUERC-8937	1880±35	A.D. 70 - 170	50 - A.D. 230
28/hearth	Birch	SUERC-8938	1900±35	A.D. 55 - 135	20 -A.D. 220
167/layer beneath gravel make up	Alnus	SUERC-11031	1995±35	B.C. 40 - A.D. 30	B.C. 90 - A.D. 80.
167/layer	Alnus	SUERC-11515	2020±35	B.C. 55 - A.D. 30	B.C. 120 - A.D. 70
195/hearth below 167	Hazel	SUERC-26472	1985±35	B.C. 5 - A.D. 55	60 B.C. - A.D. 90
221/layer beneath enclosure wall	Charcoal (n.i.d.)	SUERC-26471	2145±35	B.C. 210 - 110	B.C. 260 - 50
221/ layer base of deposit above natural	Charcoal (n.i.d.)	Beta-171115	2810±50	B.C. 1010 - 905	B.C. 1105 - 835

The first sondage against the wall of the roundhouse demonstrated that the platform of the roundhouse was built on a thick, approximately 80cm, pad of gravel, which seemed to be spread across this portion of the excavated area. To further investigate this gravel spread and to see if it would provide information about the relationship between the house platform and the enclosure wall a second sondage was dug along the trench edge. This one metre wide sondage found that the gravel lensed and thinned and eventually butted against the enclosure wall, demonstrating stratigraphically that the house platform was constructed after the enclosure wall. More excavation in this sondage down to natural demonstrated that between 10 and 60cm of deposits underlay the Roman levels and further that between 10-20cm of archaeological sediments also underlay the enclosure wall indicating the great antiquity of the site.

### The 2003 excavations (courtyard area)

In 2003 we opened up an area of the site approximately 10 x 6m to the south and east of our initial excavation (Fig. 3). In the north-eastern half of the trench a large cobbled area formed a 'yard' along the side of the roundhouse. On this cobbled surface a number of finds of the Roman period were located including pottery and a piece of jet. This area was closed at the end of the 2003 excavations and not examined again. In addition we commenced the excavation of a small cairn adjacent to the settlement (Hoan and Loney, 2007).

The focus of our investigations within the enclosure was the south-eastern portion of the new area. Here our earlier sondage had demonstrated the presence of up to a metre of sediments below those of the Roman period roundhouse. This area did not appear to be cobbled although it did have what appeared to be two poorly constructed walls or divisions, which may have formed a 'cell' against the wall of the roundhouse (Fig. 3). In part of the newly opened area was a flagged surface overlying the layer of gravel identified in 2002. A single posthole was the only cut feature identified beneath the subsoil. The gravel was removed over the next two seasons of excavation to reveal a thick layer of gleyed sandy silt with abundant charcoal fragments. The only find from the gravel was a fragment of blue Roman glass bottle.

### **The 2005/6 excavations**

In 2005 we completed the excavation at the cairn (Trench E) and continued to work on the extension to Trench A. Removal of the surface gravel at Trench A revealed a large number of features filled with gravel cut into the underlying silt deposit (Fig. 4). The gravel-filled features were excavated during 2005-6. Within one of these features (a back-filled posthole) a large iron object was located. Unfortunately, this was very corroded and even after X-ray all it is possible to say is that it had been some sort of socketed tool possibly an axe or an adze. The gravel-filled cut features largely comprised the remains of pits, slots and postholes, some of which had been truncated. No other finds were located within these features.

The majority of these gravel-filled features appear to be associated with a shallow or truncated slot, possibly a small fence and a series of posts perhaps for some form of gate. As with many postholes excavated in relatively small areas it is difficult to resolve these into any kind of structure.

After removal of the gravel-filled features the underlying silt was excavated in 2cm spits. This revealed further cut features that were not gravel-filled. These earlier features were filled with a charcoal-rich silty sand, one of which was possibly a hearth. All of these features were cut into an anthropogenic deposit that had accumulated within the interior of the enclosure after it had been constructed. Charcoal from the thin layer of silt above the hearth feature, together with the charcoal from the hearth, dates to the end of the first millennium B.C. (Table 1).

The final phase of excavation in 2006 consisted of sectioning the enclosure wall. From the small area excavated it appears that the wall was constructed in two phases each with differing orientations and construction techniques.

The later phase enclosure wall on the southern or down slope section of the settlement is almost three metres across and represents a substantial bank. This phase of the wall incorporated an earlier wall feature for at least some of its length (Fig. 5).

The earlier wall consisted of a level platform cut into the underlying sediments with an approximately 15cm revetment on the upslope against which large upright blade shaped boulders, up to a metre in height, were placed. The outer wall was of drystone construction with approximately three courses surviving. From the excavation and in the section it appears that this wall may have been up to seven courses (1-1.5m) high and approximately a metre in width. At the base of this wall a small cup-marked stone was located. Charcoal from sediments beneath the first phase wall has been radiocarbon dated to the last centuries of the first millennium B.C. (2145+/-35 BP, 210-110 B.C. (SUERC 26471) Table 1). This early phase of construction was either deliberately slighted, and tumbled, prior to construction of the second-phase enclosure wall, or had fallen out of use and was partially collapsed when the second-phase enclosure wall was constructed. In Fig. 5 the remains of the tumbled exterior wall may be clearly seen in section. Beneath the first-phase wall there is approximately 10-20cm of anthropogenic silty deposits still to be excavated. Based on the profile it is possible to suggest that this is an earlier ditch but without excavation this cannot

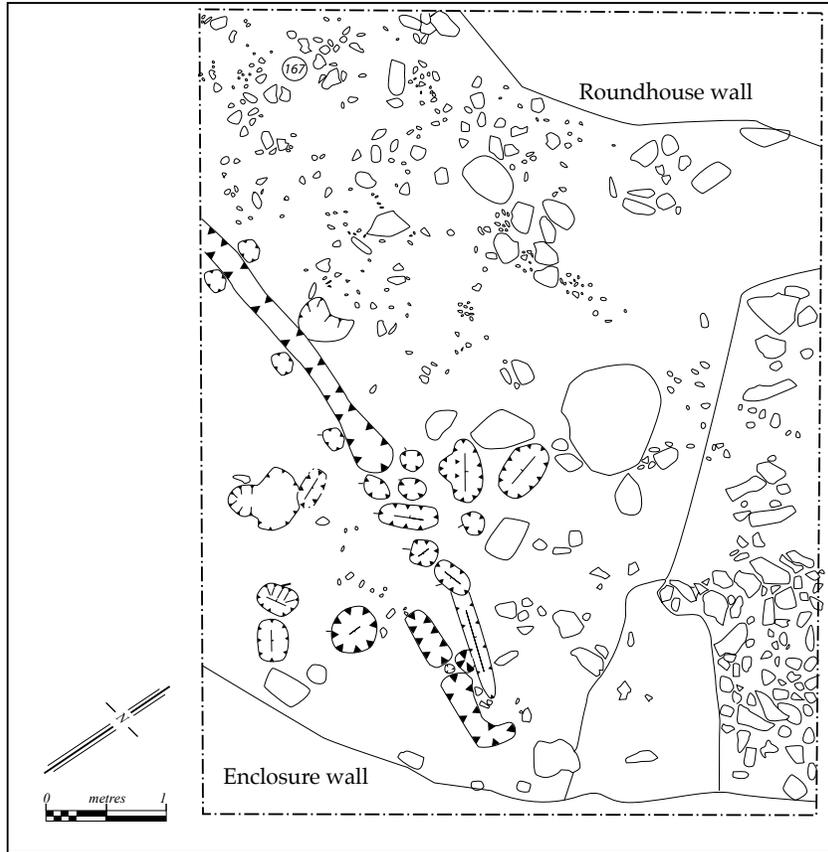


FIG. 4. Gravel-filled features of the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age.

be confirmed. From the base of the deposit, underlying the enclosure wall, just above the natural a radiocarbon date of 2810 $\pm$ 50 BP, 1010-905 B.C. (Beta171115) was obtained (Table 1). There is no evidence for a hiatus in deposition, therefore indicating (but not demonstrating) occupation at or near the site throughout the first millennium B.C.

### Discussion

The site has a long and complex use history. It lies on the more fertile soils within the valley system developed over Skiddaw slates of the Llanvirn series. By the historical accident of being incorporated into one of three deer parks on this side of Ullswater the remains at Glencoyne Park are reasonably well preserved and little of the area of the Park has been subjected to later agricultural improvement.

In our excavations we have found evidence for at least six distinct phases of activity between *c.*B.C. 1000–A.D. 200. This includes two phases of remodelling of the enclosure wall, two phases of house building and several phases of re-organisation of the enclosure interior.

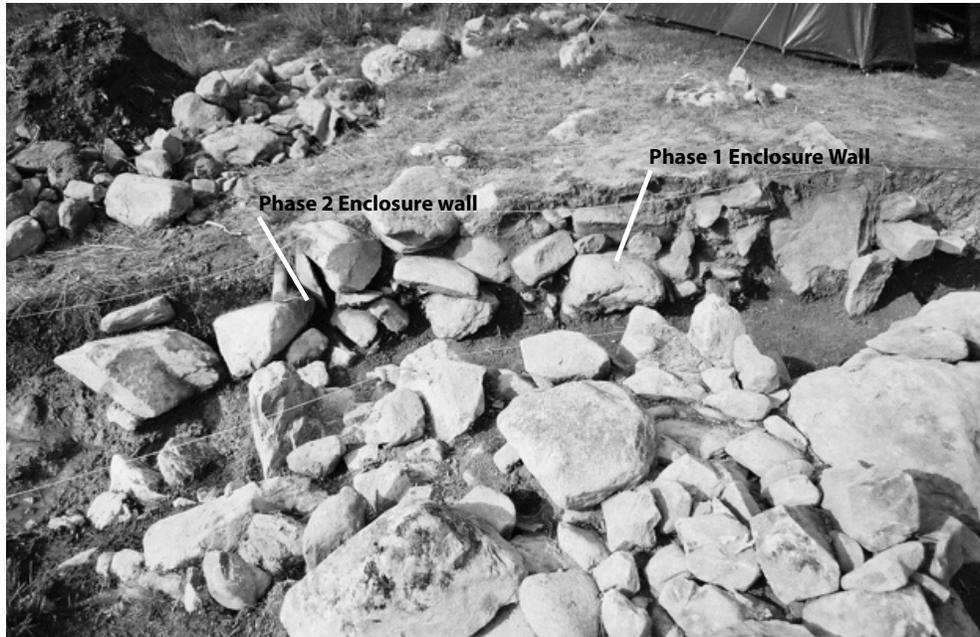


FIG. 5. Photograph of the east-facing section through the enclosure walls at Glencoyne Park showing earlier phase 1 collapsed wall in centre.

### *Archaeological phases of the enclosure wall*

#### First-phase wall (Late Iron Age)

The first-phase enclosure wall was formed by cutting a level platform into the pre-existing anthropogenic deposits as described above. The outermost wall collapsed eventually, either deliberately as part of the remaking of the enclosure, or because it had fallen into disrepair. After this collapse the orientation of the enclosure wall at this point was changed from running up the contour to following along the contour of the slope.

#### Second-phase enclosure wall (Late Pre-Roman Iron Age)

The second-phase enclosure wall was constructed using a different tradition of two lines of large kerb stones between which rubble and field stones were piled to make a bank. This new wall is much wider than the original wall, up to 3m wide in places and holding a great volume of stone presumably the result of field clearance or robbing from adjacent monuments. There is tumble from this second-phase wall incorporated into the later sediments of the interior of the enclosure.

### *Archaeological phases within the enclosure*

#### Phase 1 (Late Bronze Age)

The earliest phase is the layer of anthropogenic soil identified beneath the enclosure

boundary. This is at its thickest beneath the enclosure wall but has been shown to extend for up to 4-5m into the interior of the enclosure where the layer lenses out. The deposit shows no clear signs of abandonment in section.

### Phase 2 (Late Pre-Roman Iron Age)

In this phase a large number of features were cut into the silt layer, including postholes, stakeholes, slots and possible stone holes. Few of these can be resolved into meaningful structures (Fig. 4). To the north of the slot there may be an area of poorly preserved cobbling. The identical gravel fill and lack of post pipes and other features suggest that the posts which would have filled these features were removed simultaneously as part of the preparation of the site for the next phase.

### Phase 3 (Roman Iron Age, *c.* 1st century A.D.)

At some point during the late first century A.D. when Roman material becomes available (a fragment of Roman blue glass bottle was found within the gravel) this area is reorganised. All the phase 2 features are removed and back-filled with gravel. The gravel is used to build the platform on which the house sits. Within one of the postholes the socketed iron object was deposited. At around the same time a layer of cobbles was laid across the eastern half of the trench.

On top of the gravel a number of features were identified. Chief amongst these is the wall of the Roman period house. Although it was not possible to excavate these walls it did appear from their surface appearance that they had not been stable and from their irregular nature it may be inferred that the house wall had to be rebuilt on a number of occasions.

There are two short stretches of walling, one of which butts up against the house wall. These walls enclose a small open-ended cell approximately 2 x 3m in area. The most westerly of these walls was built into the house perhaps to act as a buttress or support for the house wall at this point. The more easterly wall may have acted as an internal division between the cobbled yard and the uncobbled gravel area.

The final feature is an isolated area of flagging which overlies the gravel. A small posthole had also been dug into the subsoil but this presumably post-dated abandonment.

### **Conclusion**

To date we have examined sediments that cover the period from *c.* 200 B.C. to *c.* A.D. 200. The dating evidence indicates that still to be excavated are sediments covering the remainder of the first millennium B.C. The site at Glencoyne Park is thus an important example of a rarely excavated multi-period settlement in the north of England. Glencoyne Park is likely to represent the subsurface reality of quite a few settlements currently identified in the SMRs as single period 'Romano-British' or 'Native' settlements, which can now be looked at with a fresh perspective.

We have discussed elsewhere the regional implications of the site and the potential role of larger curvilinear sites in a hierarchical system of settlement (Loney and Hoan, 2006). The site conforms to the general impression that material culture in this part of Britain was largely comprised of perishable items and items that have not been preserved in the harsh soil conditions that prevail in the north of England (Edmonds and Evans, 2007; Hodgson and Brennand, 2006; Haselgrove, *et al.*, 2001). Preliminary analysis of a pollen core from a nearby kettle hole indicates that the mire deposits were truncated, and therefore do not cover the Roman period. Funding is currently being sought for the analysis of the carbonised material from the excavations. There is a need to excavate settlements on the better soils or a wetland site to examine if this lack of material culture is a question of taphonomy or actual absence of material.

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