

# The cairn at East Finnercy, Dunecht, Aberdeenshire

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with a contribution by J Mulville

## ABSTRACT

*Excavations carried out in 1925 and 1952 at a round mound in Aberdeenshire revealed quantities of early Neolithic artefacts and features. Publication of the site was funded by Historic Scotland.*

## INTRODUCTION

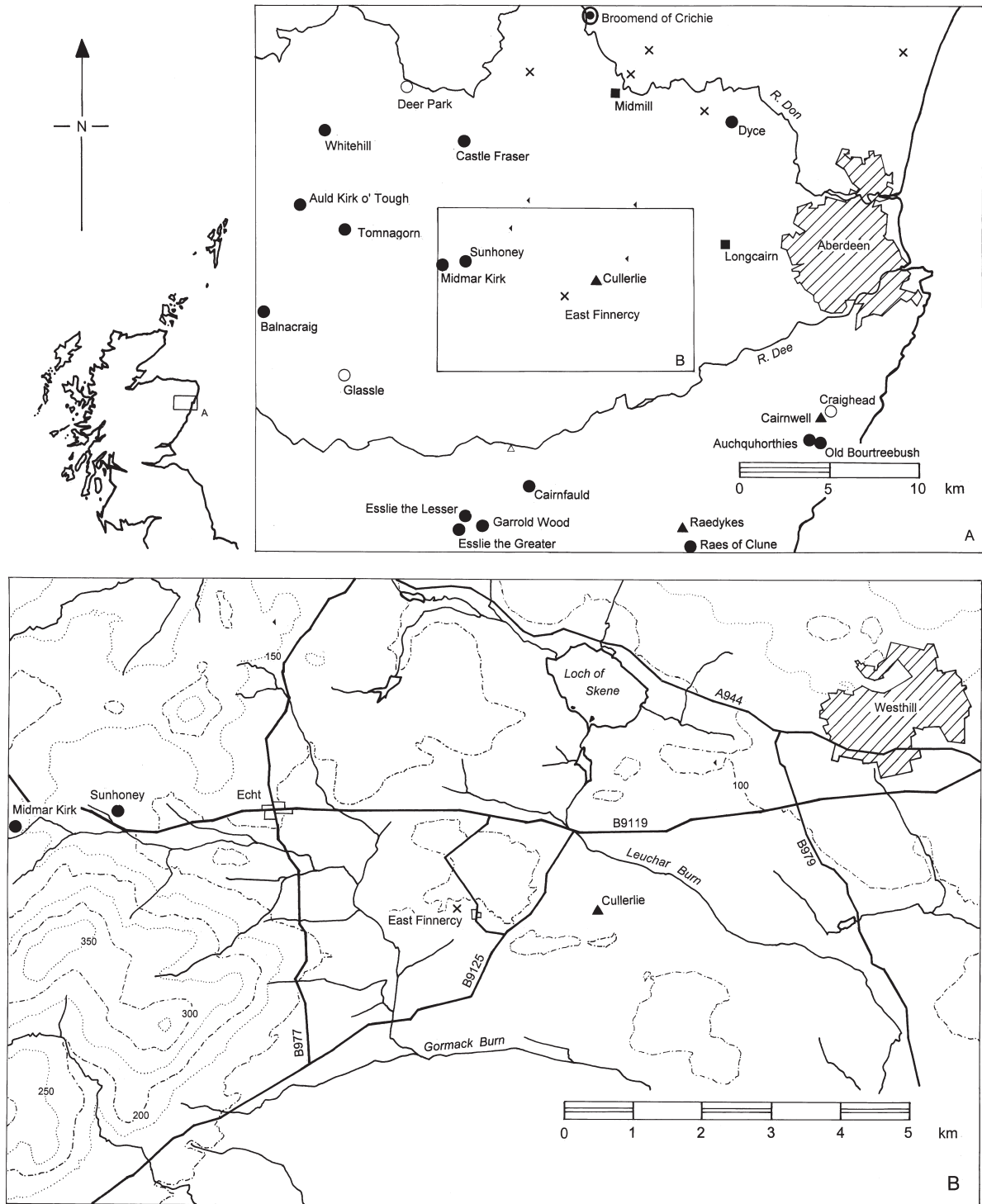
The cairn at East Finnercy (NGR: NJ 765 043) (see illus 1) lies 200 m west of East Finnercy farm and 3 km south-east of the village of Echt. The cairn stands at c 100 m OD on a low ridge running east/west, with higher land 3 km to the west. The monument presently survives to a height of 2.0 m and is 26.5 m long by 22 m wide. The site is scheduled (HS index no 6076; NMRS no NJ70SE3). When the cairn was excavated the immediate surrounding land was under the plough.

East Finnercy forms part of a dense concentration of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age sites (illus 1). Stray finds in the same parish include a stone axe from Barmekin of Echt (NMRS no NJ70NW 1.01), and a stone ball from Echt (NMRS no NJ70NW 19). In the immediate locality (area B, illus 1) are two recumbent stone circles at Midmar Kirk (at NJ 699 064), and Sunhoney (at NJ 716 058); the eight-stone ring at Cullerlie (at NJ 785 043); and standing stones at NJ 802 063 and NJ 738 083. Further afield (area A, illus 1) are a further 20 stone circles of varying types, a pair of long barrows, more standing stones, at least four Bronze Age cairns (Boghead Hill, Hare Cairn, Burgh Muir, and Waterside), and the large Neolithic timber building at Balbridie (NO 733 959). The north-east of Scotland, as a whole, demonstrates continuous activity in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (Henshall 1983, 24–33).

## HISTORY OF EXCAVATION

The site was investigated on at least three occasions. Firstly in 1924 or 1925 by the tenant farmer John Allan (Allan in correspondence held in NMS; Callander 1929, 37, 62–3, 77–80; Henshall 1983, 27–9 & 33); again in 1925 under supervision by W Douglas Simpson, in his capacity as a commissioner of the RCAHMS (Morris in correspondence held in NMS); and in 1952 by R J C Atkinson (1952, 4; 1962, 18–19), who was then a member of staff at the University of Edinburgh. None of these excavations was fully published, nor is there sufficient archive material to reconstruct these investigations with any real certainty. However, as the site was referred to regularly in a number of secondary sources (eg Simpson 1942; Atkinson 1962) and various

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ILLUS 1 The location of sites mentioned in the text: x — cairns; ● — stone circles; ○ — recumbent stone circles; ◉ — henge with stone circle; ■ — long cairns; ▲ — ring cairns; ◄ — standing stones. (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown copyright)

syntheses of Scottish Neolithic pottery (eg Callander 1929, 29–98; Phemister 1942, 132; Henshall 1983, 19–44), it was felt that the material merited as full a publication as possible. The writers were therefore commissioned by Historic Scotland to produce this report.

The only primary record of the first 1925 excavation is a letter from the tenant (John Allan) to W Douglas Simpson (the original spelling and grammar of this and all subsequent abstracts from correspondence have been retained):

In respect of the excavations we did here, I am sending you the pieces of pottery found and also some earth which I dug out yesterday. I said that I thought there were bones but they were only at one side of the mound, and so that is why I sent the earth as it contains small pieces of whiteness which I thought was bones. The mound or cairn as it is about equal of earth and stones, is about sixty feet square and 9 feet at the centre. Although not on the highest know it is placed on fairly high ground, and the stones in it seem to be all sharp edged as if they had been rough dressed, or broken. There is also layers of ashes in the mound, and some of the stones look like as if they had been in a fire. When we first started to excavate we didn't know whither there was anything inside the mound as there was nothing to show that it was not an ordinary cairn of lawn gatherings or surface stones from the adjoining fields. By getting some arrow heads and other queer shaped flints in the vicinity, and wondering why the people who trenched the field didn't drive the stones to the side of the field instead of leaving them almost in the middle, made us wonder if the mound contained anything. The quickest way we thought to find out was to dig about the middle of the heap, so we only dug about 4 feet square in the centre and another small hole on the east side where the boney substance is. (Allan in correspondence held in NMS).

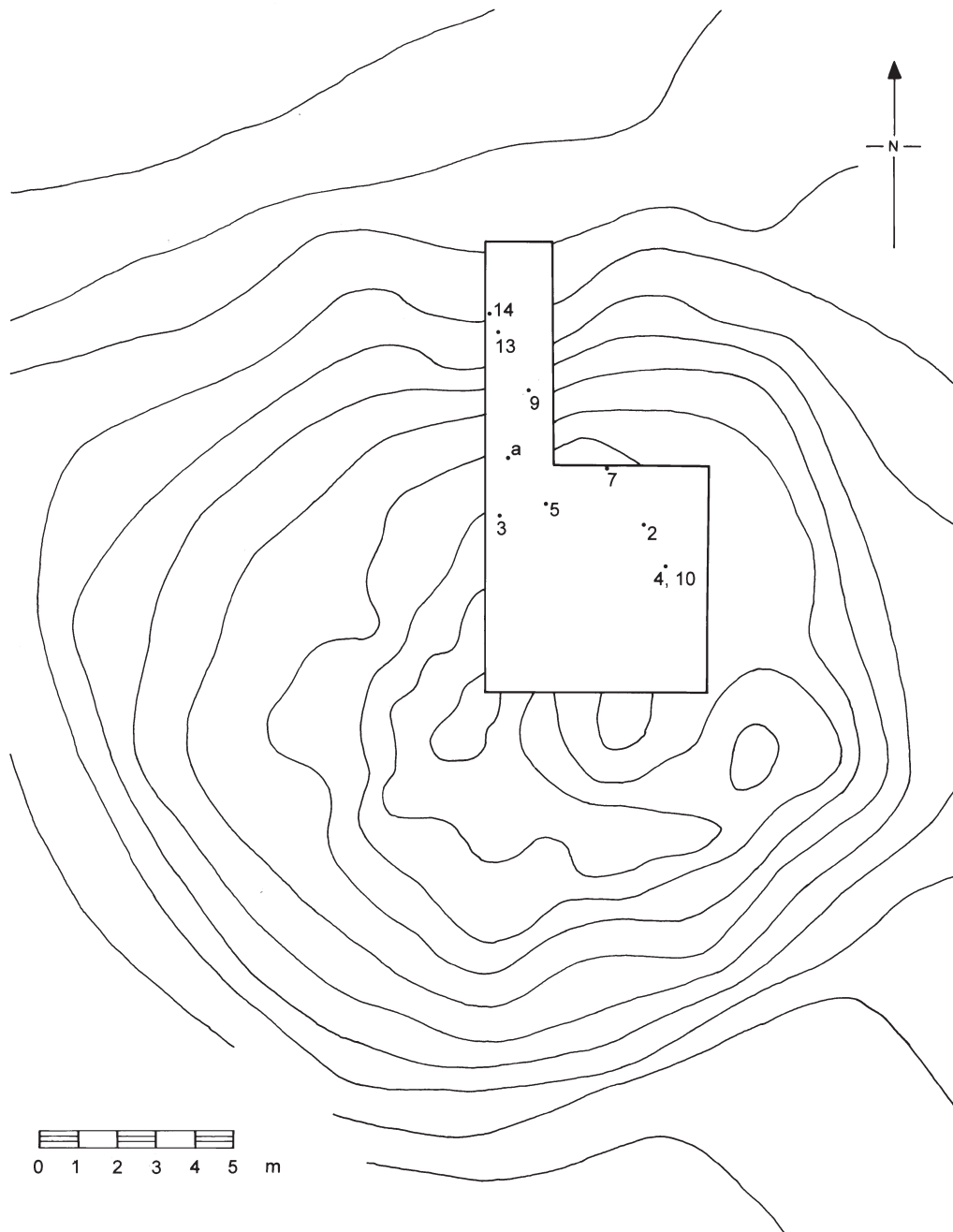
The second excavation in 1925 probably took place shortly after the first. No record of this exists, but Atkinson (1952, 4) records 'the cairn had been disturbed on at least two occasions previously', and there is a letter from David Morris (of the Estate Office of Lord Cowdray) to W Douglas Simpson, dated 30 January 1925 which reads:

I am instructed by Lord Cowdray to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 20th instant regarding the Cairn of the farm of East Finnercy on Dunecht Estate. His Lordship is quite interested and is very glad to know that you have asked the farmer to cease excavations at the Cairn.

As soon as our navy foreman is free from his other work he will take two or three men to Finnercy and open up the Cairn. In accordance with his Lordship's instructions I have to advise you prior to the work commencing so that you may guide us as to the best proceeding to be followed and if convenient it would be desirable if you could be present as often as you think necessary (Morris in correspondence held in NMS).

Although a complete site archive does not exist, photographs and profiles from Atkinson's excavations suggest that the earlier investigations consisted of amorphous cuttings in the centre of the mound (illus 2 & 3), referred to by Atkinson as the 'howk'.

The surviving finds from the 1925 excavations consist of 32 Neolithic sherds, one small fragment of charcoal, and a single piece of flint debitage (NMS EO 385–92 and unregistered). There is no contextual information associated with any of this material. The proposed reconstruction of the stratigraphic sequence (see below), in which the cairn of a single phase was constructed over earlier Neolithic activity and was cut from the top down to (if not through) the



ILLUS 2 The probable location of Atkinson's excavation and the finds from undisturbed contexts; contours at 1 ft intervals based on Atkinson's survey

old ground surface by the 1925 excavations, suggests that the finds could have come from any point in or beneath the structure.

Although Henshall (1963, 44) states that there are arrowheads from East Finnercy in the collection of the National Museums of Scotland none is mentioned in the NMS accession record for the site. Allan mentions arrowheads having been collected in the vicinity (Allan in correspondence held in NMS), and Atkinson recovered a single example in his excavations (Atkinson 1952, and see below).





ILLUS 3 View from the north-east of the central area of the cairn under excavation, showing the backfill of the previous excavations in section

Published reports of the 1952 excavations are limited to a brief note (Atkinson 1952, 4) and a brief discussion in Atkinson's synthesis of the Scottish Neolithic (Atkinson 1962, 1–38). There Atkinson records a visit to the site by himself and Stuart Piggott in 1951, at which time dry stone walling visible on the surface of the mound suggested to them the possibility that the site was a passage grave. Upon partial excavation the following summer:

[T]he dry stone walling proved to be a recent feature, built by the previous excavators to retain their dump. . . . The whole of the centre of the cairn, which stood to a height of some 5 feet, had been disturbed. None of the stones found in the central area, however, were of a size or character to have served as the sides or capstone of a cist, nor were stone-holes for the base of a cist found in the old ground surface beneath the cairn. Moreover, our informant was certain that in the earlier opening no trace of a cist, or indeed of a burial of any kind, had been found (Atkinson 1962, 18).

It is not clear why Atkinson and Piggott had so little information about the earlier excavations since W Douglas Simpson seems to have been involved in the organization of the 1952 excavation; a letter from the estate office concerning this season is addressed to him:

With further reference to your letter of 18th ultimo, I am now able to advise you that Lord Cowdray and Mr. Allan, the tenant of East Finnercy, have no objection to you proposal to excavate the pre-historic burial ground on East Finnercy in June and July. It is understood that any damage to crops,

fences or dykes will be paid for and that the site will be left in a tidy condition at the conclusion of your operations. (Laurie in correspondence in Cardiff University archive).

Again there is limited contextual evidence from these excavations as no plans or sections survive. However, Atkinson wrote that '[t]he work consisted of the cutting of a radial section six feet wide, and the stripping of a twenty-foot square at the centre' (Atkinson 1952, 4). This, together with photographs, his list of finds locations (see below, Table 2) and the contour survey, allow a probable reconstruction of the trench plan as in *illus 2*.

Atkinson (1962, 18) records that a substantial quantity of Neolithic material was recovered from the old ground surface, 'and to a lesser extent in the soil filling the interstices between the stones'. In the 1952 publication Atkinson (1952, 4) stated that the finds consisted of 'considerable quantities of Western Neolithic (Windmill Hill) pottery and a leaf-shaped flint arrowhead, associated with hearths'. By 1962, the assemblage had grown to include 'a single sherd of cord-zoned beaker, sealed beneath an undisturbed part of the cairn and only a few inches away from fragments of Lyles Hill ware' (Atkinson 1962, 18–19). The uncertainties relating to this sherd are discussed below. In addition small quantities of cremated bone, a single uncremated bone, some charcoal, and a flint flake were recovered.

#### 1952 EXCAVATION

The 1952 excavations consisted of a single L-shaped cutting (see *illus 2*). The central 20 ft square took in a portion of the 1925 'howk'. The 6 ft by 20 ft north/south cutting provided a section through undisturbed cairn material. Notation on some of the finds boxes suggests that it was not always possible to clearly distinguish between the 1925 backfill and the *in situ* material. *Illus 2* suggests that locations were recorded only for those finds from undisturbed contexts. The stratigraphic sequence in the cutting was reconstructed from the list of finds and was straightforward.

#### *Old ground surface and pre-barrow features*

At the base of the cairn material and sealed by it was a preserved old ground surface, recorded by Atkinson as 'natural', 'old surface', 'occupation surface', and most often 'old turfline'. Given the possible existence of a turfline it seems unlikely that the area beneath the mound was stripped. Pieces of a large closed bowl, a carinated fluted bowl and sherds from one other vessel (vessels 1, 3 & 4), were found on the old ground surface, as was cremated bone. On this surface were 'hearths', the number and location of which were not recorded. One of these contained small quantities of burnt bone. Towards the south-east of the central trench was a shallow oval pit. It is not clear whether this pit cut through, or was sealed by, the old ground surface, nor what its exact dimensions were. The pit was recorded as being at the base of the 1925 'howk' and therefore some truncation of both the pit and the land surface may have occurred. In the pit were fragments of seven vessels (vessels 1–7), together with charcoal.

#### *Cairn*

The cairn was built directly on the old ground surface. Its original form was probably circular, the irregularities visible in *illus 2* being a result of the 1925 investigations. From within the body

of the cairn came fragments of at least two vessels (vessels 3 & 11). It is possible that fragments of a further vessel (vessel 1) came from the cairn material, but given the uncertainty in distinguishing *in situ* cairn material from the 1925 backfill this pottery cannot be securely located. A leaf-shaped arrowhead was also recovered from the body of the cairn (see below) as was a piece of human femur (see below).

Atkinson (1952, 4) suggested that the cairn was of a single phase. In the letter quoted above Allan mentioned: ‘layers of ashes in the mound, and some of the stones look like as if they had been in a fire’ (Allan in correspondence held in NMS). In the archive photographs (illus 3) the visible cairn material appears to be rounded quartzite boulders and some earth, and there is no indication of the layering noted by Allan.

### *Twentieth-century disturbance*

The cairn material was cut by the trenches of the 1925 excavations (see above). The entire site was covered by modern topsoil and turf. One of Atkinson’s finds boxes (box 12 in the Cardiff numbering system) is labelled ‘below turfline finds’ and given the contents, which include Neolithic pottery, cremated bone, and coke, it seems most likely that this refers to the modern rather than the preserved turfline.

## THE FINDS

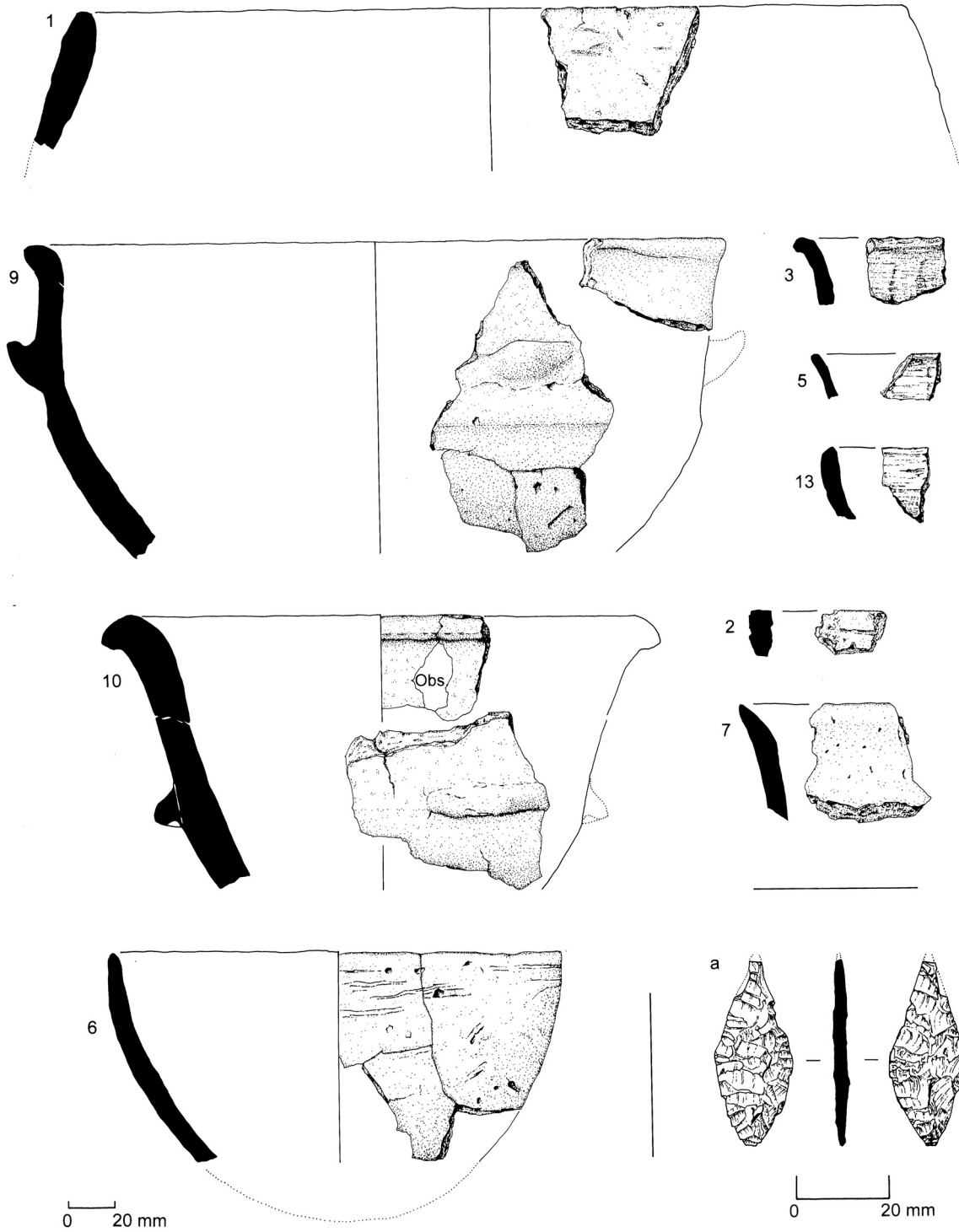
### POTTERY

Sixty-six sherds of pottery survive from the 1925 and 1952 excavations. All of the material is Neolithic in date and belongs to 13 different vessels of six different fabrics. The material from the 1925 excavation was catalogued by Henshall (1983, 27 & 42). The 1925 material was re-studied in the writing of this report, with some modifications to Henshall’s numbering, which are detailed below. Where contextual information is given it can be assumed that the sherds in question were retrieved in 1952.

### *Description (illus 4)*

The material was examined using a hand lens of x10 magnification and placed in fabric groups on this basis. Inclusions were identified using Peacock’s (1977, 30–2) Algorithm. The classification of the fabric is based on the categories suggested by Orton *et al* (1993, 231–41), but slightly modified to take into account the more variable nature of prehistoric pottery. While Orton *et al* use ‘feel’ as a category of classification we felt that the surface damage to much of the pottery precluded such a division. We also added a classification of fabric thickness on a three point scale of thin (10 mm or less), moderate (10–15 mm) and thick (15 mm or more).

Most of the surviving pottery belongs in fabric group 1. This fabric is generally thick, and contains sparse quartzite and sandstone inclusions together with some grog and dark mica. There appear to be at least four vessels in fabric group 1. Vessel 1 is a large closed bowl with a simple rim, approximately 360 mm in diameter, and traces of grass impressions on both surfaces. Vessel 9 is a carinated bowl of neutral shape with a slightly everted rim. It is 300 mm in diameter at the rim and has up-turned lugs above the shoulder. Sherds making up vessel 9 were illustrated by Henshall (1983, figs 6:14.7 & 6:14.9). Vessel 10 is also a carinated bowl with an everted rim but of open form and with down-turned lugs above the shoulder. This vessel is approximately 240 mm in diameter at the rim. Sherds from vessel 10 were illustrated by Henshall (1983, figs 6:14.8 & 6:14.10). The profile of the lugged sherd (Henshall’s fig 6:14.10) leads us to suggest that



ILLUS 4 Pottery and worked stone finds from the site: pottery at 1:3; worked stone at 2:3. Obs = area of vessel obscured by conservation material



vessel 10 had a down-turned lug, rather than the up-turned form illustrated by Henshall. Vessel 11 is a shouldered, burnished bowl of indeterminate form.

Most of the sherds from the site belong to vessels 1, 9 and 10. Vessels 9 and 10 were recovered during the 1925 excavations. Vessel 1 came from the old ground surface and the central pit, while vessel 11 came from the cairn material.

The vessels from fabric group 2 are in a moderately thick, soft fabric with quartzite inclusions and some metasediment and grog. There are at least two vessels in fabric group 2. Vessel 2 is a hemispherical bowl with an upright rounded rim and a possible cord impression externally below the rim. Small inclusions of quartzite and metasediment are particularly plentiful on the exterior surface. Vessel 7 is a carinated bowl with a simple rim. The rim sherd was illustrated by Henshall (1983, fig 6:14.1). Vessel 2 was recovered from the central pit and vessel 7 came also from the pit and from the 1925 investigations.

There are also two vessels in fabric group 3 which is a hard fine fabric containing ?dolomite, quartzite, sandstone and grog inclusions. Vessel 3 is a slightly open, carinated bowl with internal and external fluting and an everted rim. There is burnishing on both surfaces. Vessel 8 is a very abraded rim fragment, illustrated by Henshall (1983) as fig 6:14.3. Sherds of vessel 3 came from the old ground surface, the central pit and the cairn material, while vessel 8 came from the 1925 excavations.

In fabric group 4 there are at least three vessels. These vessels are of soft, thin fabric with quartzite and mica inclusions. Vessel 4 is of indeterminate form. However, vessel 5 has a simple, slightly out-turned rim. There are grass impressions and burnishing on parts of both surfaces. Vessel 6 is a hemispherical bowl with grass impressions and a simple upright rim. It is 200 mm in diameter at the rim and was illustrated by Henshall (1983, fig 6:14.5). Vessel 4 was recovered from the old ground surface and the central pit, vessels 5 and 6 from the central pit and the 1925 excavations.

Fabric group 5 is a hard, thin fabric with quartzite inclusions. All the sherds in fabric group 5 are from an indeterminate vessel listed as vessel 12, all sherds of which were recovered during the 1925 excavations.

Fabric group 6 is a thin, fine, hard fabric with sparse quartzite inclusions. The only vessel in this group is vessel 13 which is a hemispherical bowl with a simple upright rim. Vessel 13 came from the 1925 investigations, but was not illustrated by Henshall.

Vessels 1, 9 and 10 in fabric group 1 are large, relatively coarse vessels with both lugged and carinated forms and can be paralleled at other sites in the region, for example Boghead (Henshall 1983, fig 4:6) or Leggatsden Quarry (Henshall 1983, 41, fig 6:10). In general the fabric group 2 pottery is neither fine enough to be classed with the fluted carinated bowls such as those from Boghead, nor as coarse as the larger vessels in fabric group 1. The possible cord impression on vessel 2 may point to a later date for these sherds. Vessel 3 is a typical example of the carinated, fluted bowls common at sites such as Easterton of Roseisle and Boghead (Henshall 1983, 19–29). However, in contrast to these sites the fine wares form a very small proportion of the total assemblage at East Finnercy. Vessel 6 can be paralleled in the small, relatively fine, hemispherical bowls from Boghead, especially vessel 7 (Henshall 1983, fig 4:7).

### *Discussion*

The pottery studied here is a small proportion of what was presumably a larger assemblage from East Finnercy. The most obvious difference between East Finnercy and other local sites is the low representation of fine fluted bowls. However, since only a small part of the site was excavated it is difficult to draw firm conclusions on this subject. In other respects the pottery appears entirely typical for an early Neolithic assemblage in this part of Scotland (Cowie 1993, 16; Henshall 1983, 24–33). Radiocarbon determinations associated with comparable assemblages at Midtown of Pitglassie (Shepherd 1996, 15) and Boghead (Burl 1984, 71) would suggest a date in the first half of the fourth millennium BC. The presence of lugs and some fluting in the East Finnercy pottery serves to strengthen Sheridan's contention (in Johnston 1997, 219–20) that the 'north-eastern style' of pottery should be regarded as modified Carinated Bowl pottery. The coarser elements of the East Finnercy assemblage also seem to have much in common with Cowie's (1993, 16–17)

class of ‘Heavy bowls’ in eastern and central Scotland. Both of these indications might point to a date after the earliest part of the Neolithic for the Finnercy pottery, but as the material may not constitute a closed deposit of a single date, this suggestion must remain tentative.

#### WORKED STONE

Matt Leivers

The surviving lithics from East Finnercy consist of only three pieces of worked flint, of which two came from the 1952 excavations. Those pieces with known locations came from the make-up of the mound. A leaf-shaped point (illus 4:a) is thought to be of Buchan flint. An edge-retouched flake and the single piece of flake debitage which survives from the 1925 work appear to be pebble flint, which may have been collected locally.

Given the extremely limited nature of the assemblage, and the probability that the majority of the recovered worked stone was not retained (Allan in correspondence held in NMS), it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the material. The leaf-shaped point is the only possible chronological indicator, and beyond the fact that it demonstrates Neolithic activity, little more can be said.

#### HUMAN BONE

Jacqui Mulville

A single human bone survived, recorded as from the ‘N section [of cairn material] amongst stones’ (see Table 2). The bone was identified by reference to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History bone collection, as the mid-shaft of a human right humerus. The shaft fragment is highly eroded; much of the surface has flaked off, and the bone has been subject to severe rodent gnawing. No metrical or ageing information could be recorded, although the fragment was of adult age. The contextual integrity of this find could not be guaranteed so a decision was taken not to attempt to radiocarbon date it.

A small quantity of apparently cremated bone was recovered from the site. On analysis it became apparent that while most of this material was indeed cremated, a small proportion with an extremely chalky texture appeared to have been subjected to some other process (J Robb pers comm). Initially it was assumed that the bone was human skeletal material. The highly denuded and fragmentary nature of the assemblage makes certainty impossible, but some fragments appear to be non-human, and one at least may be sheep (A Powell pers comm).

#### ARCHIVE

The archive material has been stored in two locations. That from the 1925 investigations was sent to the then National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMS: EO 389–392), while the 1952 material was stored in the school of History and Archaeology at the University of Wales, Cardiff (Table 2).

The material from Cardiff is contained in a number of cardboard finds boxes, some of which were numbered in 1952. Most of the boxes were subsequently re-numbered and catalogued at Cardiff. Several boxes contain a considerable quantity of material. Consequently many of the individual pieces from 1925 and 1952 are not identified by unique numbers.

A hand-written list survives detailing the quantity of sherds present in different locations (Table 1). It is not clear whether this list refers to pottery from the 1952 season or from all the excavations. In either case, the numbers of sherds recorded by Atkinson do not tally with the numbers now surviving in the two archives. The discrepancy of 1 in the ‘total’ column is due to the addition of a Corded Beaker sherd to the list at a later date. This Beaker sherd cannot now be traced in any of the collections of East Finnercy material. Isobel Smith, who was present for part of the three-week season, has no recollection of any Beaker material associated with the site (Smith, pers comm). The possibility therefore arises that the Beaker sherd has been wrongly attributed. Dr Smith has also pointed out that this sherd was added to the material listed as coming from the ‘howk’, in contradiction to Atkinson’s 1962 statement that it was stratified beneath the cairn and associated with early Neolithic pottery.

TABLE 1

Atkinson’s list of East Finnercy Pottery, 1952 Excavation: all layer descriptions as those used by Atkinson (howk = 1925 excavation backfill; OTL = old turf line)

Type	Howk	OTL SE corner	OTL	Total
Fine wares (Incl fluted)	23 (12)	3	7 (3)	33 (15)
Coarse sandy	49	9	6	54
Coarse sandy Secondary Neolithic type	41	7	20	68
Corded Beaker	1			1
				165

TABLE 2

Finds from 1952 excavations in University of Wales, Cardiff: All layer descriptions as those used by Atkinson (howk = 1925 excavation backfill; OTL = old turf line)

Atkinson no	Cardiff no	Contents	Cutting	Layer
2		bone	N. section	Among stones
5	10	2 sherds & charcoal	Central main	? original cairn material
7	4	Burnt bone, flake, 1 sherd	Main central	original cairn material (above natural)
8	2	8 sherds	Main central	? pit at base of howk (S)
9	11	14 sherds, charcoal	Main central	central pit
	1	Burnt bone	Central	Old surface
	3	1 sherd	Main Central (West)	? Cairn material
	6	Burnt bone	Central west	OTL (hearth opp N trench)
	7	7 sherds	Central west	On OTL
	8	Charcoal	Central w	Occupation surface
	12	7 sherds, charcoal & burnt bone	–	Below turf line finds
	14	1 sherd	N trench	Undisturbed cairn material
	–	Flint arrowhead	North trench	Undisturbed cairn
	5	1 sherd	Central (west)	prob. undisturbed cairn
	9	3 sherds	N trench	Surface of OTL
	13	2 sherds	Cutting n. trench	? Cairn material but probably howk

## DISCUSSION

The date and construction of the cairn is problematic. When Atkinson (1952, 4) wrote his interim report in 1952 he believed East Finnercy to be ‘of normal Bronze Age type’. However, by 1962 he thought ‘it was improbable that the site was a normal cairn of the Bronze Age . . . [and] that the cairn was built by the makers of the [Neolithic] pottery’ (Atkinson 1962, 19). What is puzzling

about Atkinson's proposed dates is the relationship between the cairn and the alleged single sherd of Beaker. In 1952 when no Beaker pottery was recorded Atkinson considered the cairn to be Bronze Age. By 1962 the presence of Beaker was taken to indicate a Neolithic cairn and a late survival of early Neolithic pot styles.

With hindsight this last suggestion now seems unlikely. The presence of parts of Neolithic vessels in and beneath the mound would seem to indicate residual material incorporated in the mound make-up during its construction. It seems more likely that the Neolithic material represents an earlier phase of activity on the site. Having said this, it is not possible to ascertain the length of time between this activity and the construction of the mound. The presence of a Beaker sherd sealed beneath the cairn would point to a considerable time lapse. However, given that this sherd cannot now be located and is not mentioned by Atkinson prior to 1962, its provenance is doubtful.

The presence of early Neolithic pottery and lithics in the body of the cairn provides a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the mound. No *terminus ante quem* can be provided on the basis of material culture associations. Neolithic dates have been suggested for other non-megalithic round mounds in the area (Shepherd 1996, 48).

In view of the incomplete nature of the excavation of East Finnercy, and the inadequacy of the records, it is impossible to be certain of the nature of the pre-mound activity. The pit in Atkinson's central trench is certainly a pre-mound feature, but it has no recorded stratigraphic relationship with the old ground surface. However, some light may be thrown on the pre-mound activity by a consideration of other sites falling within the non-megalithic round mound category (Kinnes 1992). At Boghead cairns under a low mound sealed an old ground surface on which was a black soil layer containing sherds, cremated bones and flints (Burl 1984). At Midtown of Pitglassie a ring cairn and low mound sealed a series of pits, hollows, burnt areas and hearth residues from which were recovered fragments of early Neolithic pottery in the north-east Scottish style, charcoal, cremated bone and a leaf-shaped arrowhead (Shepherd 1996). Despite the differences in the covering mounds at Boghead and Pitglassie the material from these sites resembles that from East Finnercy strongly enough to indicate comparable activity in the early Neolithic. Given the radiocarbon determinations from Boghead (c 4000–3500 cal BC) and Midtown of Pitglassie (c 4000–3400 cal BC) it is possible to suggest a date in the first half of the fourth millennium for the pre-mound activity at East Finnercy, with the pottery evidence perhaps indicating a date in the latter part of this span (Sheridan, in Johnston 1997, 219–20). The single piece of human tibia from the body of the cairn may be a fragment of a later inhumation.

In summary, the cairn at East Finnercy covered a number of early Neolithic features. It was itself either Neolithic or Early Bronze Age in date. The nature of the surviving record means that many questions must remain unanswered. However, the limited nature of the earlier excavations does mean that the site would be potentially informative if it was investigated further in the future. As was suggested by Henshall (1983, 32), Atkinson's (1962, 19) assertion that Neolithic bowl styles survived in Scotland until the Beaker period can now be seen to be unfounded. The development of radiocarbon chronology has made the point somewhat academic, though the association of Beaker and early Neolithic pottery styles had made its way into the discussion of a number of Scottish sites in the 1950s and 1960s. Coles & Simpson (1965, 46–7), for example, use the East Finnercy association to date the building of the Pitnacree round cairn to the very end of the Neolithic period. This unnecessary elongation of the Neolithic bowl chronology, and the consequent late date for some sites, can now be seen in the context of the diffusionist explanations of the time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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