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Reader R (2012) Over the ditch and far away: Investigating Broxmouth and the landscape of South-East Scotland during the later prehistoric period. PhD Thesis. University of Bradford.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This study narrates the changing character of the later prehistoric landscape in East Lothian. Utilising excavated and unexcavated data, the changing nature of enclosed sites is described, explaining what digging a ditch meant to later prehistoric communities. This study transcends the conventional chronological boundaries to explore the phenomenon of enclosure from c.1200 cal BC through to the early centuries AD. Archaeological evidence is utilised alongside the wider landscape evidence for settlement during this period, to construct the biographies of these sites and contextualise them within their landscapes. East Lothian has benefitted recently from a surge in research projects (e.g. the Traprain Law Environs Project (TLEP) (Haselgrove 2009); the Traprain Law Summit Project (e.g. Armit *et al*/2006)), commercial excavations (e.g. the A1 upgrade – Lelong and MacGregor 2008)) and backlog project publications (e.g. St Germain's (Alexander and Watkins 1998)) and Dryburn Bridge (Triscott 1982; Dunwell 2007)), this thesis being a product of the latter (the Broxmouth Project – Armit and McKenzie in prep.). Although not all of this work has yet reached fruition, this thesis benefits from the recent work and has summarised and interpreted the data within a wider, landscape-based framework. Combining excavated data with a typological settlement study, experiential studies and GIS analysis, alternative ways of interpreting the phenomenon of enclosure in this area can be presented.

## 1.2 The Broxmouth Project and the Research Framework in East Lothian

### 1.2.1 Origins



Figure 1.1 Location map of Broxmouth (courtesy of the Broxmouth Project)



Figure 1.2 The cropmark of Broxmouth, prior to excavation looking north. The remains of the ditches and entranceways are clear, with partial survival of the interior features (courtesy of the Broxmouth project)

Carrying out the research in conjunction with post-excavation work on Broxmouth hillfort has been fundamental to the shaping of this thesis. The site was located 2.5km south-east of Dunbar (see Figure 1.1) and was first recognised as a cropmark by St. Joseph (1955; see Figure 1.2). The cropmark revealed a site  $c.0.46\text{ha}$  interior area with three concentric, circular ditches and a fourth appended on the west side. Two entrances were clear in the east and the south-west. At the time of the excavation, the Hownam sequence (C.M.Piggott 1950) originally defined by Margaret Piggott in the 1940s was the dominant interpretative model. The Piggotts (Margaret and Stuart) were responsible for numerous excavations of hillforts in southern Scotland and the Hownam sequence was elaborated to encompass the results. The earliest sites were either unenclosed or enclosed by a palisade and then over time became more complex with the addition of ditches and

ramparts until multivallate. Finally, sites became 'undefended' with houses spilling out onto the ramparts (Piggott 1950; Armit 1999a). The model went largely unchallenged until the late 1970s when numerous rescue excavations of newly discovered (and not so new) cropmarks took place, including Broxmouth.

In 1977, the Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Ltd (now LaFarge) gained permission to extend their quarrying operations at their Dunbar plant, which would obliterate the site at Broxmouth. The work was scheduled to begin in spring 1978 and in February 1977, Peter Hill was appointed by the Inspector of Ancient Monuments of the Department of Environment (the forerunner to Historic Scotland) to undertake a trial excavation. The aim was to assess whether the site had the potential for total excavation and a linear trench was placed through the southern ditches. The excavation revealed the extent of destruction to the site through centuries of ploughing but was equally fruitful in revealing a previously unknown palisade and interior features including a posthole and a pit, as well as the preservation of bone and shell. This was enough to instigate a full investigation of the site; therefore a seven month excavation scheme was set up under the aegis of the Dunbar Archaeological Committee. Due to insufficient financial resources, help was enlisted from the government's Job Creation Programme and work commenced on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1977 (Hill 1982b, 142-143).

### 1.2.2 Excavation



Figure 1.3 Oblique aerial photograph of the site under excavation, taken in 1978, looking east (courtesy of the Broxmouth project)

Initial assessments of the plough damage had been “unduly pessimistic” (Hill 1982b, 143) and full excavation (see Figure 1.4) revealed that the preservation was unparalleled in this region. Interior structures of both timber and stone survived and the depth of ditches reached 3.5m in some places. The inner ditch area preserved a good structural history of the site with unenclosed structures superceded by a ditch sequence, followed by structures and midden deposits over the silted ditch. The high level of preservation meant that the project overran and numerous extensions were granted, overrunning by seven months, until November 1978. Supplementing the excavation, a sub-rectangular enclosure at Gurgie Mire

was excavated by Pete Topping in November 1977, which was found to be a natural geological feature. During excavation of the northern part of the ditches, a burial was discovered beyond the hillfort boundary and excavation by Jean Comrie in October 1978 revealed a cemetery on this side (Hill 1982b).



Figure 1.4 Vertical aerial photograph showing the area excavation. Most of the interior was excavated, as well as the entrances and a cemetery to the north, which was discovered by accident (courtesy of the Broxmouth project)

### 1.2.3 Post-Excavation and Broader Developments

Industrial expansion was having a significant impact on the later prehistoric archaeology of East Lothian at this time. The neighbouring cropmark site of Dryburn Bridge was threatened by the same quarrying operations as Broxmouth. The site was located 2km south-east of Broxmouth and, again with public funds, was excavated between October and December 1978. The success of this initial

excavation led to further investigation between April and July 1979. This site was a palisaded enclosure with houses in the interior, as well as numerous burials, not all contemporary with the palisade (Triscott 1982, 117). In the west of the county, another cropmark site was threatened, this time by open cast coal mining at St. Germain's. Another cropmark site, *c.*1.2km to the west of St. Germain's had already been destroyed, therefore excavation began in spring 1978 with subsequent seasons until Easter 1982 (Alexander and Watkins 1998, 206). Other rescue sites outside of East Lothian, including Candyburn in Peeblesshire (Lane 1982; 1986), the Dod, Roxburghshire (Smith 1982) and Douglasmuir, Angus (Kendrick 1982; 1995) were also excavated around this time.

These excavations turned the Hownam sequence on its head and a conference on the nature of later prehistoric settlement in south-east Scotland presented the results of these and also the burgeoning research deriving from this work. This included Hill's work on timber to stone roundhouse transition (1982a), Diana Reynolds' work on timber construction (1982) and Macinnes' work on settlement patterns (1982). An interim report on Broxmouth was also published as part of conference proceedings (Harding 1982a), which brought together excavation reports mentioned above. The aim was to publish a full report, however the nature of archaeology in the early 1980s meant there was not sufficient funding set aside for post-excavation work. Peter Hill was eventually called to Whithorn and spent several successful seasons there, eventually publishing the work (1997). Dryburn Bridge and St Germain's equally suffered, St Germain's more so as they suffered a break-in and an arson attack on the site hut which led to the loss of primary archive (Alexander and Watkins 1998, 208). However after the Whithorn excavations wound down, Hill was offered the opportunity to come back to the Broxmouth

archive and produced a comprehensive report in 1995. However due to personal reasons and time factors, again the archive was left unpublished.

#### 1.2.4 Breathing New Life: the context of the Broxmouth Project

This initial surge in research was not matched in the 1990s, with many key excavations still awaiting publication and very little new research taking place. Post-excavation was seen as a semi-amateur process, with limited funding and this attitude was cited as one of the reasons as to why many projects languished. Time factors, lack of resources and the immense process which was at that time, not fully appreciated also contributed to the lack of publication (Barclay and Owen 1995, 1-2). Historic Scotland tried to avoid backlogs and the situation improved in East Lothian after the mid 1990s; it is within this context that Broxmouth will shortly reach publication (Armit and McKenzie in prep).

Despite the stalling of key projects, work did continue in East Lothian throughout the 1990s. Two cropmark enclosures at Port Seton were threatened by a housing development and although excavation was undertaken by two separate teams (one by AOC Archaeology, the other by the University of Durham), the two were brought together and published as one report (Haselgrove and McCullagh 2000). After years of post-excavation, St Germain's was finally published (Alexander and Watkins 1998), despite the initial setbacks from the early 1980s on site. A re-investigation of Traprain Law began in 1999 (Armit *et al* 1999; 2002; 2006) and this is due for publication soon. Traprain Law has long dominated interpretations of the social and political climate of the later prehistoric period in this area, however most of the sites previously investigated are not located close to Traprain. With this in mind, the

TLEP was set up to investigate the relationship of smaller sites to Traprain, in terms of chronology and social and economic status. This was partially inspired by the success of the Danebury Environs Project (see chapter 2) in understanding the wider context of this important hillfort (Haselgrove and Fitts 2009, 4). Between 2000 and 2004 three sites were comprehensively excavated and another three were trialled, as well as thirty sites undergoing geophysical survey (Haselgrove 2009a). Alongside this, the A1 was upgraded in East Lothian to a dual carriageway and GUARD (Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division) carried out the excavations between 2001 and 2004 (Lelong and MacGregor 2008). The route was deliberately placed to avoid known cropmarks and only one was partially affected, however previously unknown later prehistoric sites were discovered and excavated.

#### 1.2.5 The Broxmouth Project (2008-2012)

The Broxmouth Project came to the University of Bradford in 2008, with the aim of re-assessing the primary archive to then deposit with the RCAHMS and also to produce a monograph on the results. Bringing the project to an academic environment also meant that there were further opportunities to exploit this dataset. Historic Scotland funded the post-excavation work and the publication of the site, with an application made to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for the provision of three Collaborative Doctoral Award students to carry out research on the archive and furnish further discussion of particular aspects in a wider context.

Mhairi Maxwell researched the artefacts of the site, utilising recent theoretical developments in material culture studies and adopting a materiality approach to the

finds. Lindsey Büster examined the roundhouses and their biographies to understand how construction and habitation of roundhouses affected and was affected by the inhabitants of the site. The present thesis had the broad remit of investigating the hillfort landscapes of East Lothian, however this has subsequently evolved.

### **1.3 The changing focus of the thesis**

Each thesis was initially given a broad remit, although this was always open to change and the author's research ideas were allowed to shape the direction of the study. The given title for this thesis was "Marking the Land: Broxmouth and the Hillfort Landscapes of Southern Scotland". The initial aim was to develop understandings of hillfort design and construction in southern Scotland and to also examine the perception and use of the landscape during this period. However the literature review (chapter 2) reveals an over-emphasis into the research of hillforts and a subsequent study of the settlement pattern in East Lothian (chapter 6) reveals how these categories appear to have been applied with little theoretical rigour. East Lothian is predominantly a cropmark landscape and it was felt that focusing on hillforts would unduly take attention away from the rich archaeological landscape which is not defined by hillforts in the classic sense. This research thus investigates the origins and eventual decline of enclosure which is not necessarily bounded by the chronological period of the Iron Age. The term 'later prehistory' therefore is adopted to incorporate the origins of enclosure in the late Bronze Age (c.1200 – 800 cal BC) and the decline into the Roman Iron Age (c.0 – 400 cal AD). Whilst recent projects like TLEP and the A1 upgrade have theoretically engaged with the changing nature of the archaeological record during this period, they have

not explored this in relation to the nature of the changing landscape and social relationships reflected through the act of enclosure. As it has been three years since the TLEP publication, the present author now has full utilisation of the available dataset and can utilise and expand on the conclusions of three years ago.

With this in mind, the question this research asks is:

**How did the creation of enclosure boundaries affect the landscape and influence social relationships during later prehistory?**

The aims of this study therefore are:

- To explore the meaning of enclosure construction and maintenance for later prehistoric communities
- To examine the impact of enclosure construction on the landscape of south-east Scotland in later prehistory

The objectives are:

- To conduct a theoretically engaged analysis of the development of the Broxmouth enclosure system
- To contextualise Broxmouth in its Iron Age landscape by examining evidence for contemporary settlement forms in East Lothian
- To explore the use of phenomenological and GIS-based studies to contextualise the sites within their landscapes

## **1.4 Thesis Structure**

The study has been influenced by the re-examination of the Broxmouth ditch sequence (undertaken by the present author), which identified certain themes in relation to the creation of enclosure boundaries. This evidence has been taken

forward to study excavated data in detail to chronologically refine creation, maintenance and decline, as well as to contextualise this in a wider landscape, through a traditional 'typological' study of settlement and more experiential studies with regards to the visual impact of these sites.

Chapter 2 focuses on the history of hillfort studies and the interpretations of them, as well as their gradual incorporation into a wider landscape framework of study. Landscape archaeology is a huge area of study and relevant aspects of its development, with regards to Iron Age studies is outlined, in particular in southern Scotland.

Chapter 3 outlines the methods adopted for this thesis, in light of the re-assessment of the literature. This thesis aims to incorporate excavated and unexcavated data; therefore the methods reflect this with a detailed re-examination of enclosure sequences across East Lothian and also a typological based settlement study across a wider landscape area.

Chapter 4 offers a detailed re-examination of the Broxmouth enclosure sequence and identifies several themes which are examined at other broadly contemporary sites, including creation, maintenance and neglect. The biography of Broxmouth is constructed to allow comparisons chronologically and to also allow for the changing nature of the site and its landscape.

Chapter 5 offers an introduction to the East Lothian landscape and investigates the archaeological and historical development of this area; it assesses the preservation

of sites in the area and also evidence for land use continuing into and after later prehistory.

Chapter 6 opens out the study to the wider landscape, carrying out a broad scale quantitative and spatial analysis of a key study region. Primarily based on the cropmark record, 226 sites are categorised according to morphology, size, entrance orientation and number of ditches and themes identified from chapter 5 are briefly discussed here. Further evidence of landscape utilisation, including pit alignments and open settlements are highlighted.

Chapter 7 takes the themes identified from chapter 4, as well as the further evidence from chapter 6 to examine the excavated data from East Lothian and beyond. This is not just restricted to enclosed sites but draws strands of evidence from excavated examples of landscape features, such as pit alignments, within the contemporary landscape to begin to build a chronological picture of changing enclosure forms and patterns in the area.

Chapter 8 investigates the visual impact of enclosure, identified as a running theme throughout later prehistory. Experiential studies were carried out on several sites and the topography examined and analysed in conjunction with viewshed analysis, to investigate how creation, maintenance, use and decay of enclosures affected the landscape and people's interactions within it.

Chapter 9 brings together the strands of evidence to discuss changing attitudes to enclosure, the wider landscape and the impact on social relationships throughout later prehistory.