

5 Finds

With the exception of two thumbnail scrapers (SF 1 & 2), which were both from the topsoil at some distance from the roundhouse, all the finds were from the fill of post-pits (*illus 2*). There are two possible points of such deposition. Objects can be incorporated, accidentally or deliberately, during the backfilling of a post-pit around the post, in which case they derive from contemporary or earlier occupation material cut by or surrounding the post-pit. Alternatively, material can accumulate in the hollow created as the backfilled material compacts, in which case it derives from contemporary occupation levels which have been otherwise ploughed away. The general lack of evidence of earlier activity around the roundhouse suggests that the small finds are likely to be from contemporary occupation.

Two of the finds – a scraper (SF 3) and half a glass bead (SF 5) – were found in post-pits on the outside of the porch. It is intriguing to speculate that these might be foundation offerings; however, there is evidence of the replacement of posts at the entrance, so it is probably safer to interpret them as incidental lost objects.

5.1 Glass bead by *Fraser Hunter*

SF 5 Half a glass bead of Guido class 13 (*Guido 1978*, 85–7). Translucent clear body with opaque yellow spiral trails; the intact spiral is anticlockwise. Hexagonal in shape, caused by squashing the triangular corners when marvering the spirals into the body. Glass very bubbly, external surfaces all slightly worn. D 15.5mm, H 10.5mm, cylindrical perforation D4 mm. Context: Feature 048/1 (*illus 10*; *illus 11*).

The Thainstone bead falls within the distribution of type, which concentrates strongly between the Moray Firth and the Mounth (*Guido 1978*, fig 34). Other recent finds come from Birnie, Moray (*DES 2000*, 59) and Dun Bharabhat, Lewis (*Harding & Dixon 2000*, 28–9), the latter adding to the evidence of contacts with other areas. Laing identified the type as Pictish (*Laing 1974*, 197–8) on the basis of a fragment from the ninth-century hoard from Croy, Inverness-shire (*Grieg 1940*, 193–4), but this undoubtedly represents expedient reuse of a decorative item, presumably intended as an inset for metalwork. Guido suggests a first- to second-century AD date for the type (*Guido 1978*, 86–7), which the Thainstone dates would support. The Bharabhat example comes from secondary occupation deposits with two associated radiocarbon dates (*Harding & Dixon 2000*, 26–7); statistical testing indicates these may be combined to give a 2-sigma range of 170 BC to AD 30. This suggests the type starts rather

earlier than Guido allowed; her dating of northern material was rather conservative, influenced as it was by ideas of diffusionism. Equally, the Bharabhat sequence has few dates, but it does open the possibility that the origins of the type lie in the first or second century BC, running to the second century AD. Henderson has recently suggested that the kindred Guido class 14 beads could have origins in the first century BC (*Henderson 1994*).

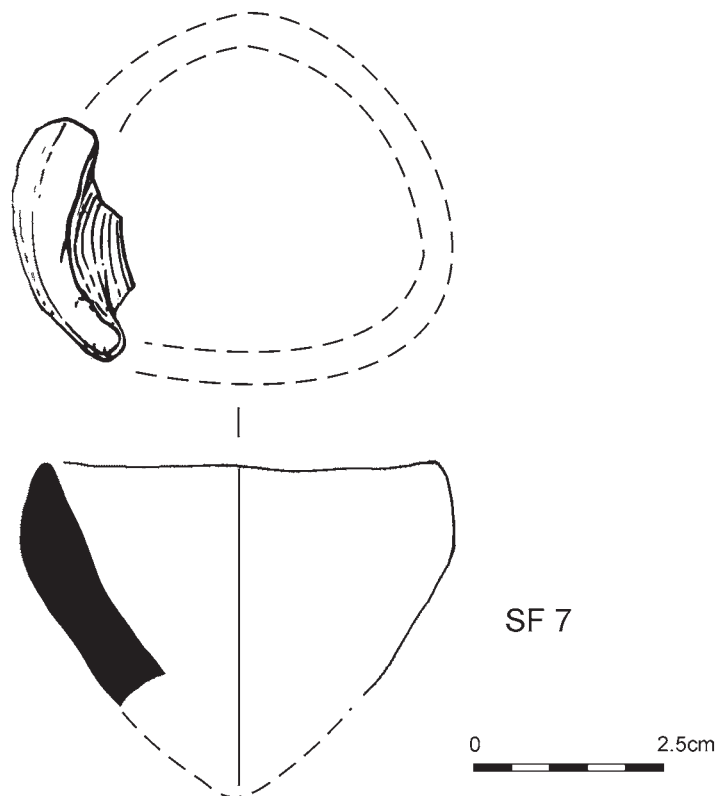
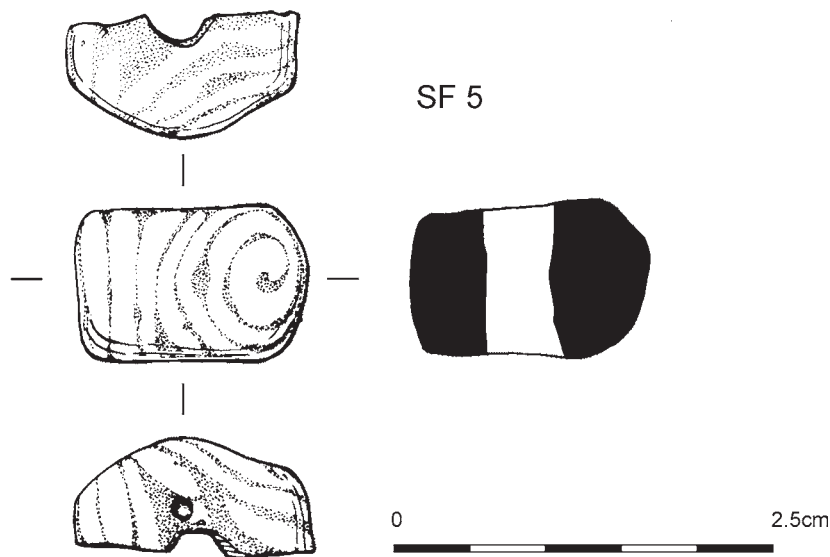
5.2 Crucible by *Andrew Heald*

SF 7 Crucible fragment. Rim and body sherd, the rim in-turned at one end. Exterior and interior have no signs of vitrification. XRF analysis revealed traces of copper and tin, indicating that the vessel was associated with bronze-working. Although fragmentary, the crucible appears to be of the open triangular form. This type was used from the first millennium BC to the mid- to late first millennium AD and is the most common form recovered from Scottish Iron Age sites. The Thainstone crucible is not from an independently dated feature, but is most likely to be contemporary with the other Late Iron Age activity on the site. There are few crucibles of this date from north-east Scotland, and it seems bronze-working was a craft restricted to more important sites. For example, similar crucibles were recovered from Birnie, Moray, argued to be a status site from the discovery of two Roman coin hoards and a range of other prestige goods, including Roman brooches (*DES 2002*, 81; *Hunter 2002*). The Thainstone and Birnie crucibles should be seen as part of the goods and expertise circulating at this high level of society. H 34mm, W 31mm, T 5mm. Context: Feature 062 (*illus 10*).

5.3 Flint assemblage by *Torben Ballin*

In total, five flint artefacts were recovered from the site: two thumbnail scrapers from areas outside the main building (SF 1 & 2), and three from likely or certain post-holes within it (SF 3 & 6) or from the immediate surroundings of post-holes (SF 4). SF 2 has a slight sheen or gloss, most probably from deposition in a sandy matrix (*Donahue & Burroni 2004*), whereas the remaining pieces appear to be fresh. None of the pieces is burnt, and the abraded cortex of CAT 1–4 suggests procurement from a pebble source.

SF 1 Thumbnail end-scraper on primary bipolar flake or bipolar core, fine-grained light olive-green flint (28 × 27 × 12mm). SF 1 has one fully corticated face and one uncorticated face. The end opposite the scraper-edge is a typical bipolar crushed terminal, or knapping seam. The piece is approximately circular, and at the working end it has a regular convex, steep (82°) scraper-edge. This retouch also covers most of the two lateral sides. Most likely, the modi-



Illus 10 Glass bead (SF 5) and crucible (SF 7)

fication was carried out in the form of pressure-flaking. Overhanging edge-areas indicate that the scraper was used and re-sharpened. Context: north end of Trench 9 in topsoil ([illus 12](#)).

SF 2 Thumbnail side/end-scraper on primary bipolar flake, fine-grained honey-brown flint (26 × 22 × 7mm). SF 2 is an approximately oval flake with a typical bipolar crushed terminal at the proximal end. At the distal end it has a convex, acute scraper-edge (55°), and along the right lateral side it has a slightly convex to straight, steep scraper-edge (88°). In the present case, the difference in steepness between the two working-edges is most likely the result of more or less extensive use. Most likely, the modification was carried out in the form of pressure-

flaking. Context: c 40m south-east of roundhouse, found in topsoil during watching brief prior to excavation ([illus 12](#)).

SF 3 Secondary hard-hammer flake with edge-retouch, medium-grained brown flint (39 × 29 × 9mm). The coarse convex retouch is located at the distal end of the right lateral side. A short segment (c 8–10 mm) of the right lateral side, and of the retouch, may have broken off, as well as the outermost distal tip of the piece. The retouch possibly represents the working-edge of an expedient scraper. Context: Feature 054 ([illus 12](#)).

SF 4 Distal fragment of secondary indeterminate flake with sporadic fine retouch or use-wear, medium-grained light olive-green flint (22 × 22 × 8mm). The edge-modifi-

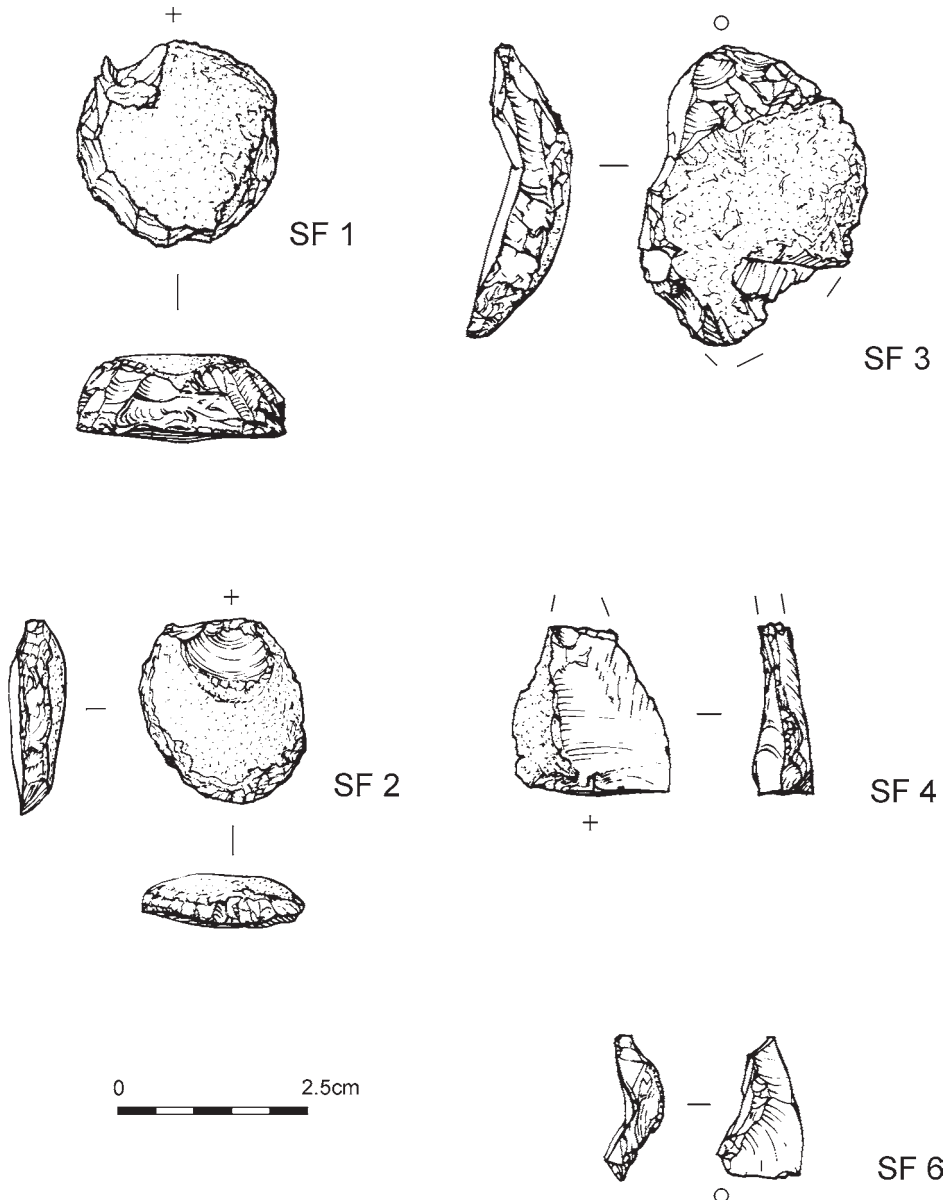


Illus 11 Glass bead (SF 5)

cation is along the right lateral side. Context: by Feature 055, surface (illus 12).

SF 6 Tertiary bipolar flake with use-wear, fine-grained cream-coloured flint (12 × 19 × 5mm). This piece has an extremely irregular shape, and the operational schema responsible for the production of CAT 5 was highly unsystematic. Macroscopic use-wear at a distal corner suggests work in a graving/shaving fashion, and the piece may be an expedient tool. Context: Feature 056 (illus 12).

The five lithic objects most probably represent different prehistoric periods, with the two regular thumbnail scrapers dating to the Early Bronze Age, and the remaining expedient pieces to a later period. Based on typo-technological attributes, it is only possible to suggest a date of the Later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age for these pieces, as precise technological profiles have not yet been produced for potential Iron Age assemblages. There is some disagreement in the specialist community (eg Saville 1981a; Saville 1981b; Ford *et al* 1984; Herne 1991; Young & Humphrey 1999; Humphrey & Young 2003;



Illus 12 Lithic artefacts (SF 1, 2, 3, 4 & 6)

Martingell 2003) as to when ‘... regular production and use of flint artefacts for everyday domestic activities declined and ceased...’ (Saville 1981b, 6). Unfortunately, the typo-technological attributes associated with possible Iron Age industries (eg Young & Humphrey 1999, 232; Humphrey & Young 2003, 87) fit Later Bronze Age industries just as well (eg Ballin 2002), and more work needs to be carried out to refine the presently too coarse technological profiles of potential Iron Age assemblages.

A number of assemblages from the Scottish quartz province (the north and west of the country) indicate that, at least in this area, lithic production continued well into the Iron Age – eg Jarlshof (Hamilton 1956, 39); Kebister (Clarke 1999, 164; Owen & Lowe 1999, 148); Burland (Ballin 2003). As suggested by Herne, the final abandonment of

regular flint or quartz use may have occurred at different times in different regions according to the relative availability of lithic raw materials and metal (Herne 1991, 73).

In the present situation, a possible Iron Age date is suggested by the distribution of lithic artefacts throughout the main building. Though finds from post-holes frequently pre-date the structure their posts are supporting, the recovery of flints from the site’s pits only (or, in the case of SF 4, the immediate surroundings of an almost destroyed pit) suggests a connection between those pieces and the building – and thereby a possible Iron Age date. However, even if an Iron Age date is accepted for these finds, it does not solve the general dispute, as three flints may just as well represent *ad hoc* production as ‘... regular production and use...’.