
3 Archaeological Background *by Paul Duffy*

The immediate environs of the Grant's complex are a rich palimpsest of archaeological remains, attested from a variety of sources, and the general area has considerable cropmark evidence of human activity from the later prehistoric onwards. Cropmark evidence shows three enclosures and a ring ditch (NMRS: NX19NE 26, NX19NE 50 and NX19NE 31) present to the east of the investigation area, while to the west there is cropmark evidence for a possible fort (NX19NE 29), a ring ditch (NX19NE 28) and undated linear cropmarks (NX19NE 29). To the south, on the lower-lying ground at Girvan Mains, are two possible Roman marching camps (NX19NE 24 and NX19NE 47), and further east, at Enoch, is cropmark evidence of enclosures containing putative timber houses (NX19NW 18, 19, 21 & 22). There are also two possible duns in the area, one located about 2.5km south-east of Gallow Hill at Brae Hill (NX29NW 7) and the other slightly further afield, located on Dowhill (NX19NE 7).

Physical evidence, in the form of numerous surface lithic scatters to the south and west of the valley, has long demonstrated a human presence in the area from the Mesolithic onwards (MacNeill 1973; Morrison 1981; RCAHMS 1983, 7–8; Ashmore 1997). Excavated evidence for this presence was more recently provided by the discovery of a lithic tool preparation area at the nearby site of Littlehill Bridge (MacGregor & Donnelly 2001), and from an excavated pit dated to the late Mesolithic from Gallowhill (Donnelly & MacGregor 2006). The latter

site also produced evidence of continuity of human occupation through the Neolithic and Bronze Age, and into the Romano-British period. Significantly for this project, a number of burnt mounds were also identified, in what is effectively the neighbouring valley to the Grant's site. Similar fieldwork has also identified Neolithic activity, attested by the Bargrennan tradition of chambered cairns in the region (Henshall 1972). Bronze Age funerary activity is attested in the form of a cremation cemetery excavated at Coalpots Road (MacKie 1966), and three cairns on Saugh Hill (NX29NW 6 & NX29NW 8).

In the valley itself, little previous work had been carried out. The eastern end of the valley had a considerable amount of cropmark evidence, which included cropmarks interpreted as a medieval moated enclosure at Ladywell (NS20SW 28). This end of the valley also contained the putative site of the Chapel of St Donan, and the now destroyed farm settlement of Littlehill, noted on Roy's map of 1745–7. This range of material testified to an occupational history stretching from at least the early medieval period, while the cropmarks hinted at earlier remains as well. With the wealth of sites in the surrounding area, it was also very likely that prehistoric remains might have been present within the valley. It was considered likely that this would include Mesolithic to Neolithic material, although the potential for Bronze Age or Iron Age remains seemed high.