

4 INTERPRETATION

The evaluation of Kingston Common has provided evidence for activity which, on artefactual grounds alone, spans six millennia, from the Neolithic to the 20th century. This long-term chronology for the site can be refined to indicate two distinct phases of human burial on the knoll, firstly the short-cists and secondly the early medieval cemetery. Within the latter phase, three sub-phases were recognised, sandstone cists without lintels, volcanic stone cists with lintels and dug burials. There was no evidence of a hiatus within the sub-phases.

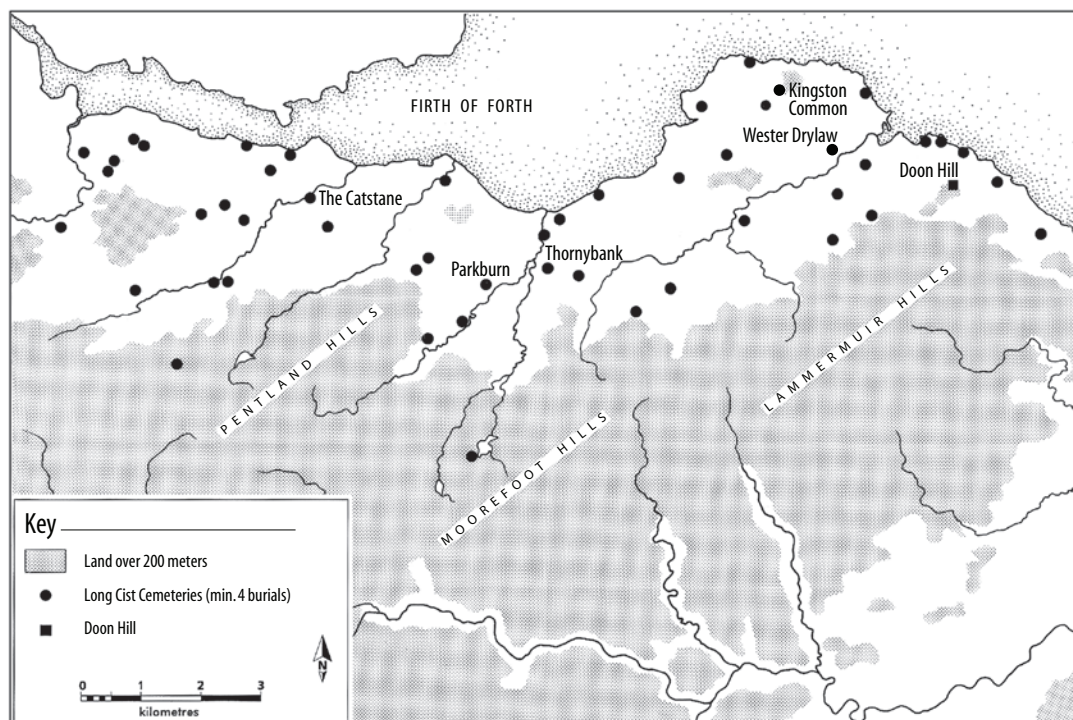
Notwithstanding the uneven topography of the Kingston Common site and the presence of surface bedrock, a well-ordered long-cist cemetery is apparent, similar to other examples to the south of the Forth (illus 12). The slight changes in alignment within or between the types of long-cists are probably of little consequence; alignments may have been chosen according to the time of year, the availability of space, or the alignment of existing buildings, burials or landscape features. At Thornybank (Rees 2002) and Lasswade (Henshall 1956), sites with few apparent space constraints, the grave alignments were fairly regular and close to north-east–south-west. The burials at Hallow Hill, Fife (Proudfoot 1996) were in general slightly south of east–west and at Lundin Links, Fife (Greig et al 2000) orien-

tations on both sides of east–west were recorded. At Kingston, the alignments were more variable, befitting the confined nature of the site and the local geology, where pockets of drift material alternated with both rotten and hard bedrock.

The appearance of what may be a child's long-cist amongst those of adults differs from the situation at Lundin Links, where their absence was assumed to imply burial in a separate location, perhaps associated with the age of baptism (Greig et al 2000, 606).

Alastair Rees (2002) includes a discussion on the locational characteristics of the early medieval cemeteries to the south of the Forth Estuary and summarises the activities that have led to their discovery. Suffice it to say that several themes common to long-cist cemeteries occur at Kingston. The site is visible, and in agricultural land. It is also close to a prehistoric burial site but this does not assume any intended association beyond use of a prominent location. The cemetery as a whole appeared to be unenclosed and was deemed sufficiently defined by its natural topographic location.

No recent excavations of early medieval cemeteries in south-east Scotland have reliably exposed the full extent of the site. Consequently, estimates of the numbers of graves in these cemeteries are fraught



Illus 12 Distribution of long-cist cemeteries south of the River Forth (adapted from Proudfoot 1996 with recent additions)

with difficulty. Poorly recorded early excavations are an additional handicap on many sites. At Kingston, 42 graves of all types were found in an area representing under 5% of the approximate Study Area (c 100m² of c 2700m²). This allows no more than an estimation of 200–300 interments on the site given the areas of bedrock and those areas shown to be without graves.

Notwithstanding the limited nature of the fieldwork, there was no evidence of structures contemporary with the long-cists within the excavated areas. Evidence relating to the layout of the cemetery was, however, forthcoming. The prehistoric short-cists lie on the lowest terrace to the east, where an increased soil depth may have allowed easy insertion of burials. Although unexcavated, a Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date would be consistent with the Impressed Ware ceramics in the overlying deposits and the structure of the cists, however, earlier dates should not be discounted. Impressed Wares were recovered at both Thornybank (Rees 2002, 317), and on the adjacent A68 Dalkeith bypass (Cameron et al forthcoming), where the long-cist cemetery developed around prehistoric, perhaps ritual, features.

Following the activity surrounding the prehistoric cists and the accumulation of the overlying soil, a long hiatus in the archaeological record is only broken in the mid 1st millennium AD with the appearance of long-cist burials. At Hallow Hill, Fife (Proudfoot 1996; 1998), the level of plough damage meant no distinction could be drawn between long-cists with capstones (lintel graves) and those without. Here, absence of ploughing and the varying geology employed in the construction of the graves allows us scope for the analysis of constructional change through time and a means of relative dating within the cemetery.

The sandstone long-cists are few in number but are located in the centre of the site. The second type of long-cist was much more numerous and used reddish-purple or yellow volcanic stone, with capstones. They were located on the flatter ground to the west and north-west in Trenches 2, 5 and the Water Pipe Trench, all outwith the upper and middle terraces. They were also recorded to the north-east of these terraces in Trench 1. Although no cists of the latter type overlay or cut the former, the spatial patterning, with the non-lintelled sandstone cists towards the centre (as defined by the terraces) could suggest that they pre-date those of volcanic stone. It should be remembered that with a spatially or topographically constrained site such as this, models suggesting radiating growth may not be correct. A radiocarbon date from a lintelled cist (F7) indicated that interments within volcanic stone cists were taking place in the 7th century AD.

These interments ceased in the late 1st millennium AD and a change of burial practice is manifested by the discovery of closely grouped dug graves (F11, F45), within an enclosure, the west wall of which

overlay a small, lintelled long-cist (F28), probably a child's grave. Their discovery suggests that burials continued into early medieval times.

A radiocarbon date obtained from a mandible (F45) within a dug grave demonstrated that burials were occurring within a period from the late 10th to the mid 12th centuries. The use of the knoll for burials may have ceased by the 12th century, or rather later, if ceramic evidence can be taken to signify continuing burials.

A second long-cist underlay the middle terrace, on which may have been sited a small building, perhaps a chapel. Ecclesiastical buildings are not normally associated with long-cist burial sites and Henshall (1956, 274) records only one, now destroyed, site of association, namely Mare's Craig Quarry near Newburgh in Fife (also see Close-Brooks 1986, 179). Ecclesiastical buildings at the recently excavated nearby sites of The Hirsell and Auldham appear not to be more recent than the long-cists (Pashmore, pers comm). Here, the putative structure was spatially associated with the later dug burials in the boulder-defined plot. Were this association to be accepted, it would be comparable in size to Phases 2–3 on the Isle of May, where similar burial structures were uncovered and dated to the early medieval period (Yeoman 1998, 84).

These early medieval chapels were constructed from turf, wood and wattle, sometimes on a stone foundation. Succeeding forms were built primarily of stone. The ratio of length to width (3:2) given by Bateman (1971) cannot be demonstrated at Kingston. As the excavated remains include stone foundations, with mortar present, caution in interpretation is demanded.

Circumstantial supporting evidence for a chapel is provided by the presence of the cross slab in the field wall. Described by Richardson (1906), the cross is of 'Maltese' type, with a recessed design and the date '1607'. He proposes that the date relates to the wall construction, and the current work would not contradict that. Richardson further recalls the names of the adjoining farms, Chapel and Sydserf (illus 1–2) and suggests the existence of an early chapel, not realising its likely proximity.

The Order of St John is recorded as owning 14 acres of tofts and crofts in the nearby town of Gullane in 1458 (Cowan et al 1983). Kingston is not mentioned, but were a chapel on the Common not to be the source of the cross, an origin in Gullane may be an alternative.

The final phase of activity saw the only clear settlement activity within the Study Area. The dwellings were abandoned and removed before 1894. To the north of the knoll proper, artefacts in Trenches 3 and 5 accord well with the cartographic evidence for the existence of cottages in 1854 and their demolition by 1894. The majority of the pottery assemblage dates from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with a concentration between 1810 and 1840. No trenches evaluated the actual site of the cottages.