





*Illus. 2—Post-excavation plan of excavated features at Parknahown 5 (Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd)*



*Illus. 3—Aerial view of excavated features at Parknahown 5 (Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd)*

### **Enclosure ditches**

Topsoil-stripping for the excavation revealed the double-ditched enclosure, a third earlier enclosure, an enclosed cemetery and a possible structure among other associated features (Illus. 2 & 3). Only 50% of this site lay within the area affected by the road scheme, and the enclosure ditches continued as partly visible upstanding earthworks outside the area of the proposed road.

One of the earliest features on this site was a remnant enclosure ditch, just inside the south-western portion of the double-ditched enclosure. It was cut by the double-ditched enclosure and was therefore earlier in date. This represents the original settlement enclosure and is associated with a number of domestic finds, including bone needle fragments, part of a very fragmented decorated bone comb and some corroded iron knife blades. A radiocarbon date of AD 420–640 (Beta-218638; see Appendix 1 for details) has been recorded from one of the basal fills of this ditch. The southern and south-western portions of the enclosure were backfilled in antiquity with material extracted during the excavation of the double ditch. The western and northern portions were subsequently incorporated into the larger double-ditched enclosure in an effort to enlarge the site.





*Illus. 4—Zoomorphic penannular brooch from the larger ditch of the double-ditched enclosure (Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd)*

The internal diameter of the double-ditched enclosure was 60 m, with the larger of the two ditches having a width of 4 m and a depth of 2.2 m. The ditches respected each other, demonstrating that they were probably contemporary. Both evidently filled up over a long period of time, as indicated by the varying silt deposits within them. Only one enclosure ditch was evident to the north of the site. Charcoal from a silt deposit at the base of this feature has been radiocarbon-dated to AD 410–600 (Beta-218647). This enclosure also contains evidence for a recut, which, according to radiocarbon analysis, was carried out prior to AD 960–1220 (Beta-218648).

A large quantity of animal bone, including cow, horse, pig, sheep and deer, among others, was retrieved from the double-ditched enclosure. This has yet to be analysed, but cut-marks resulting from butchery were evident on a large number of bones.

An impressive penannular copper-alloy brooch decorated with a zoomorphic design of bird heads was recovered from the upper fill of the larger ditch of the later enclosure (Illus. 4). It is Anglo-Saxon in style and probably in origin too, and dates from the late seventh century. Examples of similar types are known from Clogh, Co. Antrim (Henry 1965; Graham-Campbell 1974), and moulds for this type of bird-headed brooch are known from Dunadd, Scotland (Campbell & Lane 1993).



*Illus. 5—Detail of burial with stone ‘ear-muffs’ to keep the head in position (Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd)*

### **The cemetery**

The cemetery was located on the brow of the hill within the north-east quadrant of the double-ditched enclosure, and was itself enclosed by a much smaller ditch with a maximum width of 0.7 m and depth of 0.4 m. The topsoil above the burials was removed by hand and a large quantity of human remains, both articulated and disarticulated, were revealed in this area. Approximately 50% of this cemetery lay within the footprint of the road. The burials dated from at least the early medieval period. It was apparent on excavation that the cemetery had been reused over a long period of time; stratigraphy identified at least eight different phases of use. In total, 472 burials were recorded, as well as large quantities of disarticulated bone amounting to approximately 800 litres in volume.

Most of the burials were inhumations aligned west–east, with the head positioned to the west in the Christian fashion. Some exceptions included one adult male lying east–west and a number of crouched inhumations. All the burials were inserted into simple earth-cut graves. Occasionally stones were used to roughly line the grave-cuts. Some burials

contained examples of 'ear-muffs' (Illus. 5)—stones placed on either side of the head at the ears to keep the head from falling to one side. In some cases, human skulls and long bones belonging to earlier burials had been inserted into the graves of later burials. This practice of re-interring disturbed remains in newly dug graves was common, as these bones were easily recognisable as human. At least two instances of double burials were encountered: one example of two adult females and another of an adult female and an infant. One definite example of foetal remains was also identified in association with an adult female. Fifty per cent of the burials in the cemetery were of adults, 18% were of juveniles and 32% were of infants. There was a marked concentration of infant burials in the upper levels. A shallow slot/boundary was also revealed. These two factors may indicate the use of the cemetery as a *cillin*, or children's burial-ground, in more recent times. Radiocarbon analysis will be used to determine whether this is the case.

Beads were associated with a number of infants from the lower levels of the cemetery and all appear to be early medieval in date, ranging from simple bone and glass examples to ornate glass beads with intricate designs and associated copper rivets. Other finds from the cemetery included copper-alloy pins, bone pins, a fragmented jet bracelet, a copper-alloy mount with inset enamel and a perforated horse tooth.

### **Settlement evidence**

The majority of the settlement evidence from this site consists of domestic finds. A circular slot-trench and post-holes were exposed approximately 20 m south of the burial area. These may represent the remains of a house or similar structure; these features have not yet been dated, however, and had been badly truncated. There was an increase in the number of domestic features, such as pits and deposits, close to the edge of the road boundary. This suggests that further settlement evidence may exist outside the area affected by the road.

### **Conclusion**

A combination of factors, including the settlement evidence, burial evidence and an assortment of finds, reveal that Parknahown 5 represented a high-status site in the early medieval period. The settlement evidence suggests that, although the site was once inhabited, it became a focal point for the burial of generations of individuals and was obviously deemed a significant and suitable location within the immediate hinterland. Radiocarbon-dating analysis of the burials has yet to be completed; finds from the earlier phases of burial represent early medieval activity, however. This would suggest that the earliest burials are roughly contemporary with the original enclosure ditch located inside the double-ditched enclosure. These burials probably represent the original inhabitants of Parknahown 5. The subsequent enlargement of the site may relate to the main burial phase rather than settlement as few domestic finds were retrieved from the double-ditched enclosure. Once complete, scientific dating analysis of the human remains will indicate the duration of the period of use of the cemetery. Many questions regarding this site currently remain unanswered, but the results from post-excavation analysis will allow a comprehensive interpretation of all the surviving evidence in the near future.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Sylvia Desmond, project archaeologist with Kildare County Council National Roads Design Office, and to Emer Larkin, Fran Coady (supervisors) and Denise Keating (oste archaeologist) for their hard work and assistance during the excavation. Thanks also to Niall Gillespie, Aidan Kenny, Martin Halpin and Tomas Pszon for their photographs and illustrations.

