



TAYSIDE & FIFE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
COMMITTEE  
HISTORIA

# Newsletter of the

Tayside and Fife Archaeological  
Committee

Issue Nineteen – December 2013

TAFAC is registered in Scotland as a charity (SC002450).

## 2013 CONFERENCE

This year's annual conference – held for the first time in Glenrothes, was a great success. Notwithstanding the fact that more than a few people felt that the auditorium was a tad chilly and the lighting in some parts was insufficient, the general consensus was that the Rothes Halls was a good venue and that the Committee would be happy to return there in the future. A paying audience of 127 (including an unprecedented 65 who paid on the door) was an increase from 111 who attended the Perth Conference last year and the 85 in Dundee in 2011. Hopefully, this represents a trend that will continue when we return to Dundee next year on Saturday 1 November.



Dr Birgitta Hoffman: Image copyright:  
Glossopguild.org

The day got off to a great start with Dr Birgitta Hoffman, School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology at the University of Liverpool, telling us about the most recent news from the Roman Gask Project and plans

for the future. She mentioned the work that had been undertaken at Inchtuthil, in particular the geophysical and other survey which had led to a much greater understanding of the Roman remains and the discovery of numerous small finds which had provided valuable clues about the medieval and post-medieval settlement of the plateau, which at one time comprised at least three separate villages. Birgitta also talked about attempting to identify a vicus (civilian settlement), both here and at Stracathro, the most northerly fort yet identified. Birgitta also talked about the likelihood of a Roman road having been built that would have linked the Gask Ridge, SW of Perth (where we know there is a road), to the contemporary string of forts in Strathmore. She highlighted a number of 'old roads' that seem to be earlier in date than the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and basically asked the question – 'If the Romans did not build some of these lengths of road, who did?' I am sure the whole of the TAFAC audience awaits the answer to this and other tantalising questions with relish.



Black Spout, Pitlochry – under excavation. Image copyright: Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust

The second speaker of the day was David Strachan, manager of Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust, who provided a brief overview of the excavation at Black Spout (2005-09) and went on to explain the context of the site in relation to others with similar architectural traits. He pointed out the presence of a scarcement ledge and how these are also found in brochs, but that brochs have much thicker walls. He also conjectured how Black Spout may have been roofed, some of the possibilities perhaps being more realistic than others. David also mentioned the late Dr Margaret Stewart's excavations at Litigan and Queen's View, the latter site open to the public, and showed a slide that demonstrated how the distribution of these sites (formerly referred to as ring-forts or circular homesteads) complemented that of crannogs and other forms of open settlement. The book on the Black Spout Excavations was officially launched on 8 November in Pitlochry (see separate report on page 6).

Derek Hall was the third speaker of the day and he provided details of his excavation of a Bronze Age cremation cemetery at Kilmagadwood on the east shore of Loch Leven. Derek explained the circumstances of the excavation – in advance of house-building and provided details of the work. Amazingly, a total of 23 urns were recovered, adding to the one found close-by in the 1940s. All of the urns which were complete or near-complete were lifted with their contents intact in order for those

contents to be recovered under laboratory conditions. A full report on Derek's work here can be found on the website of the Archaeology Data Service. The reference and link is:- Hall, D W (2013) Archaeological excavation Kilmagadwood, Perth and Kinross. Perth: Derek Hall [doi: 10.5284/1020022](https://doi.org/10.5284/1020022)



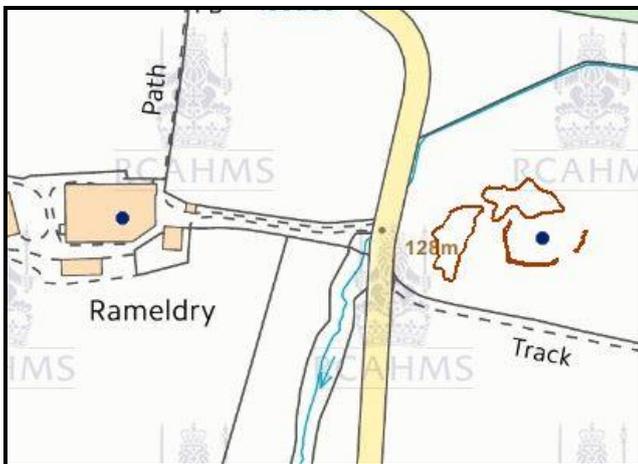
Urn 23. Image copyright: The University of York for the Archaeology Data Service.

The final speaker in the morning session was Trevor Cowie of the National Museums of Scotland, who relayed some of his thoughts concerning the deposition of so many Bronze Age artefacts on the eastern shore of Loch Leven. Trevor pointed out that prior to draining in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the eastern shore of the loch lay much closer to the present village of Kinnesswood and that the fields now used to harvest turf, in which most of the artefacts have been found, would have been under water 3,000-4,000 years ago.

The first speaker after lunch was Dr Simon Taylor, formerly of St Andrews University and now a member of the School of Humanities at the University of Glasgow. Simon talked about two forms of place-name that have relevance to what we consider today to be archaeological sites - those that reflect contemporary use, such as mills (Milton, Mill of..) and farmsteads (Bal, Pit, etc..) and those that reflect sites that were already part of the past.

In the latter category Simon referred to place-names containing the element 'Rath' = fort, which, for instance is preserved in Fife in place-names such as Rameldrie, Ramornie and Raith. And he stressed how important it was to establish the earliest documented form of the name.

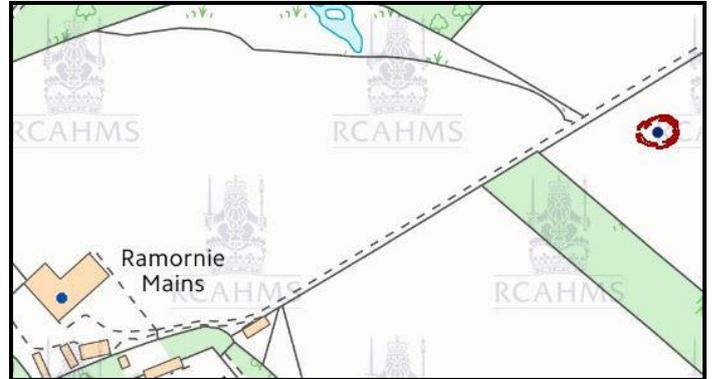
As far as at least two of the 'rath' place-names are concerned these appear to be associated with the cropmarks of ditched enclosures.



Screen grab from Canmore showing the relationship of the cropmark enclosure at Rameldrie with the modern steading. Image copyright: RCAHMS

A second type of association that Simon drew attention to was that between standing stones and place-names containing the gaelic 'coirthe' and 'cloiche' elements. He went on to show that the former, which is present in the names Pitcorthie and Milnathort, is probably most readily

associated with settings of large undecorated prehistoric standing stones. The former, however, seem to relate to single decorated or sculptured stones. However, care should be taken as 'Cloiche' can also be used to include natural features (eg Clatchard Craig) at Newburgh.



Screen grab from Canmore showing the relationship of the cropmark enclosure at Ramornie with the modern steading. Image copyright: RCAHMS.

Oliver O'Grady spoke about court mounds in Fife and Tayside, drawing together different forms of evidence to identify hitherto unsuspected sites. The first part set court mounds in context by discussing medieval law. The second part discussed the relevance of place-names and in particular he mentioned the gaelic 'Comhdhail' = 'assembly of a court', which is present in modern place-names containing the element 'Cuthil' -- Cuthil Towers, Kinross, being just one example.

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Mark Hall talked about the assassination of King James the First in Perth in 1437, setting it in the context of the recent discovery of the site of King Richard the Third of England's tomb beneath a car park in Leicester and the subsequent recovery and identification of his skeletal remains. Mark noted that there were good documentary references to James having a tomb and that money was paid in the late 1430s and 1440s for its upkeep. James's heart had originally been taken on an ultimately aborted trip to the Holy Land but returned to Perth in 1443.

The title of David Monro's (Kinross (Marshall) Museum) talk was 'Eyes in the Hills: The Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership ([www.lllp.org.uk](http://www.lllp.org.uk)). This is a Heritage Lottery Fund sponsored initiative that has the support of several partners details of which may be seen on the website. The physical area in which the Partnership will be working includes the Lomond Hills Regional Park, Lochore Meadows Country Park and surrounding areas and a series of projects on a broad spectrum of 'conservation' themes will aim to involve as many of the wider community as possible. Details of how the Partnership will be undertaking archaeological projects would have been of particular interest to many of the TAFAC audience, but the This information is probably not yet available so early in the project.

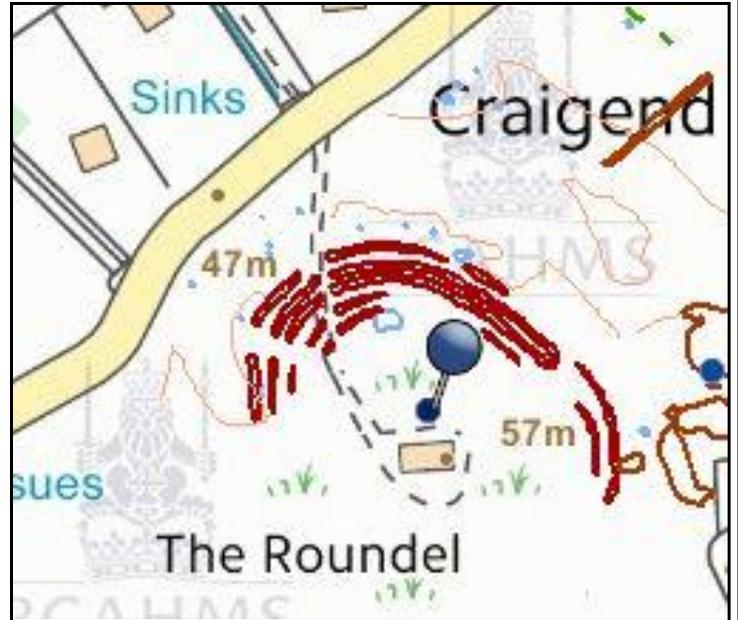
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The last speaker of the day was Peter Klemen (Rathmell Archaeology) who talked about the 'Community Excavation' that was carried out earlier this year on the site of Dunfermline's new museum, which is within the precinct of the medieval abbey. Peter explained how about eighty members of the local community participated on the excavation in varying capacities and he provided a summary of the results of the excavation and the artefacts that were recovered.

The site had clearly been heavily disturbed in the post-medieval period and late artefacts included fragments of clay pipes. However, there were tantalising glimpses of earlier remains and pockets of medieval water-logged deposits (which were not fully excavated) produced well-preserved fragments (off-cuts?) of leather. Other finds of medieval date included pottery and re-used masonry.

## NEW SERF DIG

The autumn saw the SERF team return to Strathearn to undertake the latest dig in their programme of examination of forts in that area. This time they were at Hilton House, between Perth and Bridge of Earn.



Screen grab from Canmore showing the cropmarks of the fort at Hilton House. The name 'The Roundel' derives from earlier maps, dating to before the house was constructed in the 1950s. Image copyright: RCAHMS.

The fort was discovered from the air by John Dewar in 1975 and it has been photographed by RCAHMS several times since. The interior occupies a rocky knoll on the edge of an old river terrace, with the house on the highest part. Up to five ditches were revealed by the aerial photographs and it was on the NW, where these are most evident, that SERF sunk their trenches.



A ditch revealed on the NW side of the fort. Image copyright –the Editor but shown here by kind permission of the excavation director Dr Poller.

# FORTINGALL ROOTS by Neil Hooper

The Fortingall Roots Project originated with the growing realisation of the importance of the history and prehistory of Fortingall. The ancient yew tree and the arts and crafts village have long been tourist attractions, while Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age remains, as well as mediaeval, were known but little publicised. Fragments of Pictish crosses could be seen inside the church, but their significance was not fully appreciated before Niall M Robertson's 1997 article on *The Early Medieval Carved Stones of Fortingall* in "the worm, the germ and the thorn" and their display and interpretation in the church for the Millennium; while further discoveries of simple cross marked slabs in the churchyard were made by the Pictish Arts Society. RCAHMS aerial photography had revealed a curvilinear cropmark in the fields round the kirk that was interpreted as an early monastic *vallum*, and this led to archaeological surveys in 2011 by Oliver O'Grady and his excavation in 2012. This confirmed what a substantial construction the *vallum* had been and suggested a role for the monastery in the religious and political history of early Scotland.

Fortingall Roots was then set up so that the site and the heritage of the area as a whole could be explored and the community involved, with the Breadalbane Development Association co-ordinating the interests of local bodies, including the Breadalbane Heritage Society, Fortingall Kirk Session and the James M MacLaren Society. It was decided to start with the conservation and display of the intriguing ancient stones in the kirkyard, and the gathering together of stray stones into some kind of shelter. The advice of Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust was to begin with an accurate survey of the kirkyard, perhaps using techniques developed by the Moray Burial Ground Research Group. The group's chair, Keith Mitchell, was invited to



Members of the Fortingall Roots Project leading visitors around Fortingall Churchyard during Perthshire Archaeology Month in June. Image copyright: Neil Hooper.

demonstrate their work and in July he came with colleagues to Fortingall. By this time local volunteers had already managed to strip the greatly overgrown ivy from the kirkyard dyke, revealing stones on top of and beside it. As an introduction to what there is in Fortingall, the Breadalbane Heritage Society led walks for Perth & Kinross Archaeology Month to sites in and around Fortingall. In August the survey proper started under the direction of Clare Thomas, who has completed an accurate plan showing the position of all the monuments and other stones. The recording of all the visible stones using the Council for Scottish Archaeology Gravestone Recording forms is currently under way. Once this recording is complete, we shall go on to discover what stones lie just beneath the turf. Using a probe as developed by MBGRG to identify such stones without damaging them, we can plot their location, peel back the turf, and record any inscription and marking on them. The turf will generally then be replaced, unless something of great significance is involved.

Having a definitive record of the kirkyard inscriptions will be of immense value for the many visitors that come looking for traces of their family origins, and our experience in this task will be a base on which we can build future development of the heritage of Fortingall.

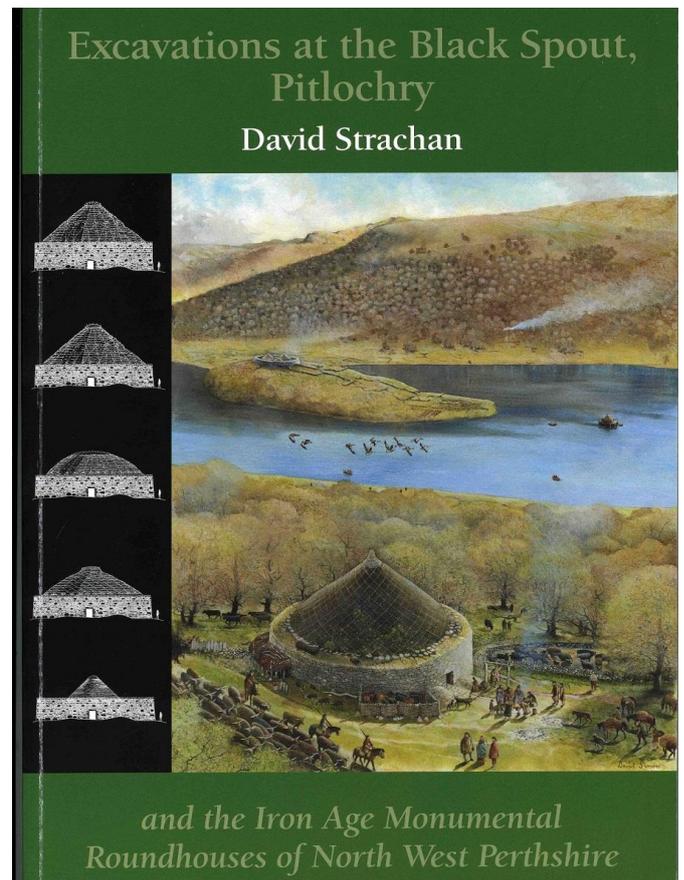
## Black Spout Book

The Editor had the pleasure of attending the launch on 8 November in Pitlochry of David Strachan's publication of 'Excavations at the Black Spout, Pitlochry'. This is not an official review or critique of the book as such, but having had the chance to have a good look at it since the launch I feel compelled to write what is effectively a

recommendation to anyone interested in Perthshire archaeology, Scottish archaeology or even just 'the past' to go out and buy this book, which, at £15.00, represents astonishingly good value.

The book is more than just an excavation account. The excavation has acted as a catalyst for David to look at the whole subject of what he is calling 'Monumental round houses' (ring-forts to those of us over 50) and he has brought the subject fully up to date with an imaginative exploration of historical accounts, previous excavations and survey, topographical and geographical setting and their relationship with other domestic monuments.

With regard to the excavation itself, the suggestions aired for the possible types of roof the Black Spout structure may have had are interesting and will surely be a source of some debate.  
Ed.



# RCAHMS survey at Denoon Law, Angus

This summer, RCAHMS undertook a survey of the large fort on Denoon Law, in the Sidlaw Hills, a little to the south of Glamis (see also Newsletter 18). The site is less well known than comparable sites elsewhere in Strathmore and Angus, for instance those on Dunsinane Hill, Barry Hill or Finavon Hill and, of course, the Caterthuns. This may be because being tucked away out of obvious site of anyone travelling through Strathmore it is less obvious than those other sites. Or it may be because its remains were considered less spectacular than those other sites – no huge ruined stone walls and no large lumps of vitrification.

Despite being included and illustrated (below) in David Christison's mighty survey of forts over a century ago (PSAS 34 (1899-1900), pp 91-3, Fig. 45), the fort on Denoon Law has been hardly mentioned in later works. Christison's survey and resulting plan is actually very good for the day, though he failed to recognise the large annexe-like enclosure at the SW end. He also failed to recognise the complexity of the inner rampart (it has three component parts) or the significance of the buildings within the interior.

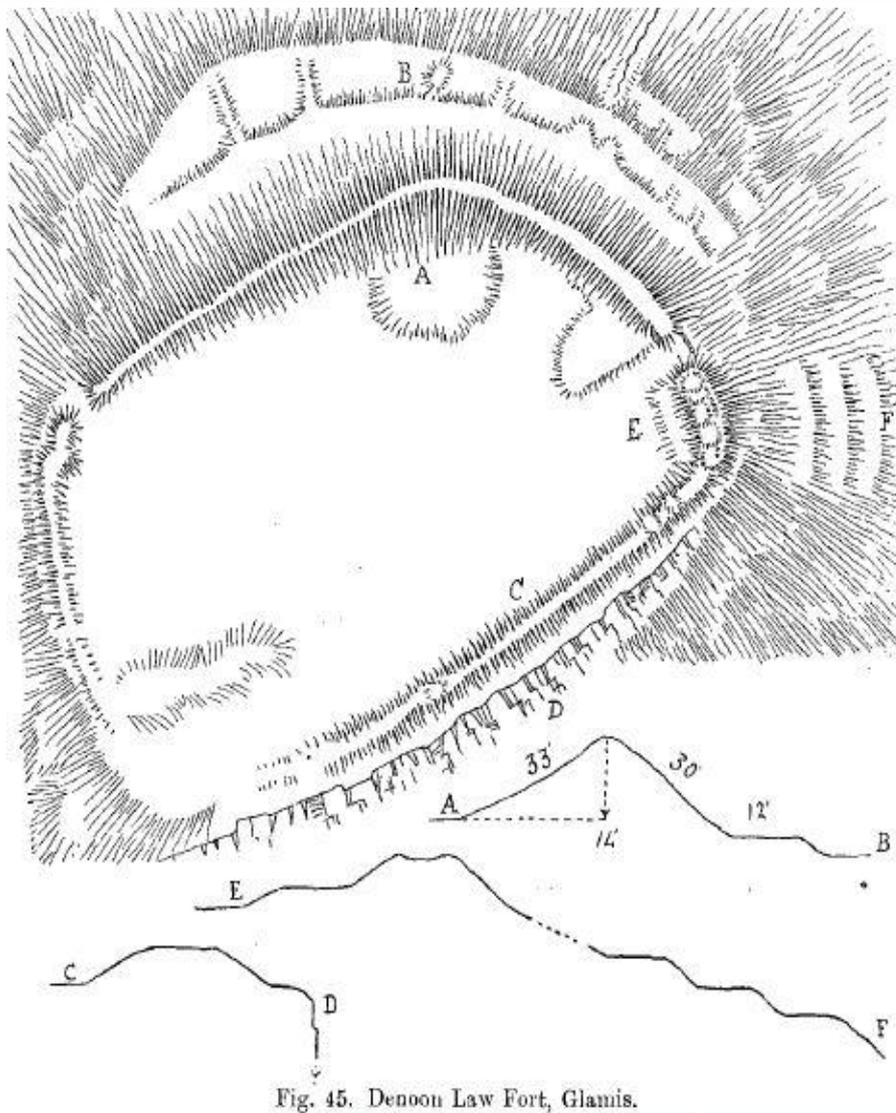
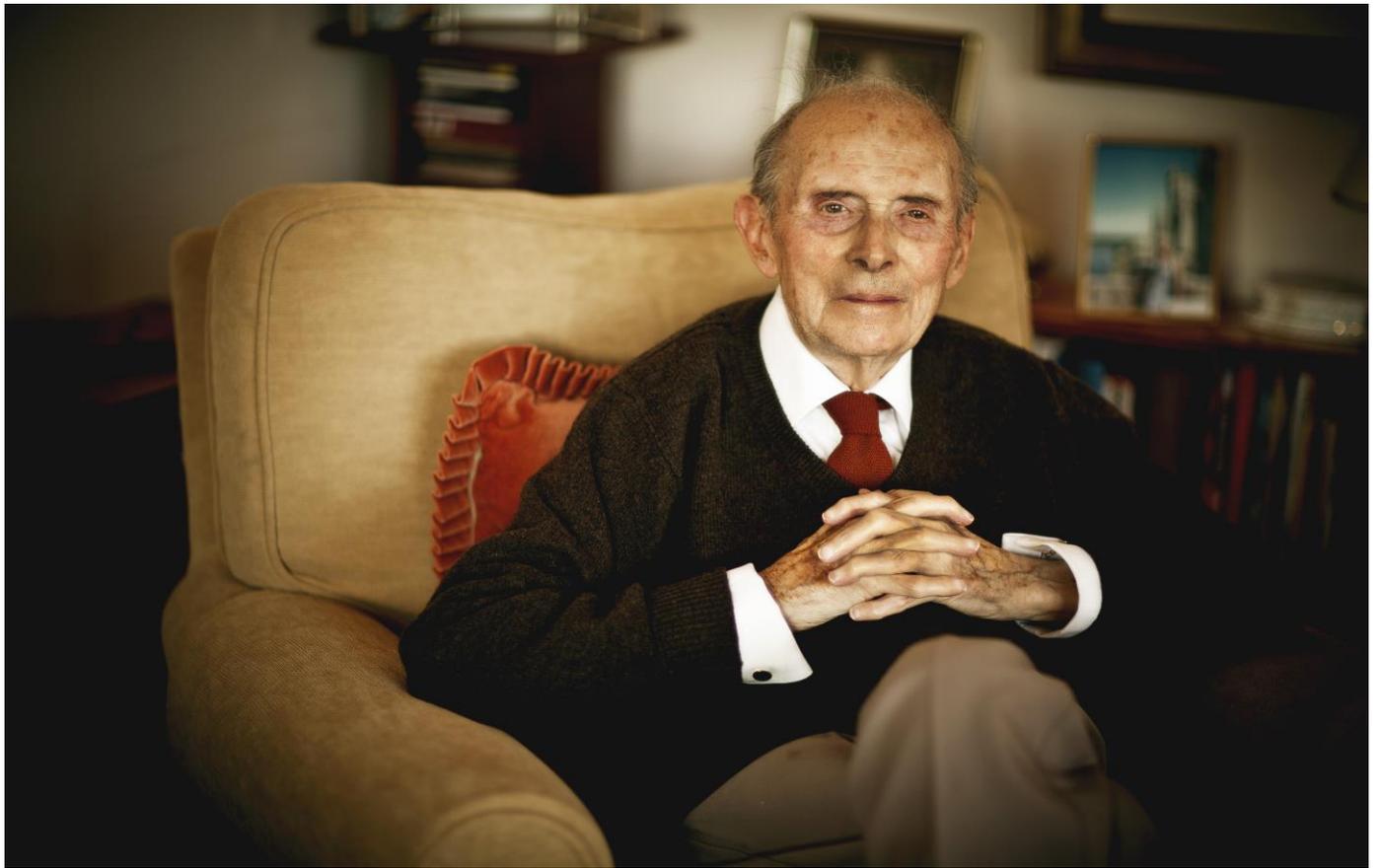


Fig. 45. Denoon Law Fort, Glamis.

The description of the fort by the Ordnance Survey in the 1970s is good as far as it goes, but it lacks the detail that the recent RCAHMS survey has been able to provide. For instance, the inner rampart can now be seen to comprise a thick (up to 12m) lower bank which probably represents the remains of some form of timber-reinforced turf and earth wall or bank. Set on top of this is a 6m thick wall, which again has probably been composed largely of earth and turf, probably also timber-reinforced, but has also had a dry-stone face, at least at the foot of the wall. The latest phase of the rampart is a thick wall (up to 2m) which runs around the entire circuit. Whilst the first two phases of the rampart

may confidently be assigned to the prehistoric period, the latest is undated. It may, however, relate to the series of buildings within the interior that suggest the possible presence of a hitherto unsuspected medieval power centre here. Currently the final plan is being prepared. Watch this space.



## **Umquhile ALEX DARWOOD — An appreciation by Andy Sherriff**

At the beginning of August this year I was saddened to learn of the passing of Alex in his 92<sup>nd</sup> year. I was an acquaintance of his for many years in Anstruther via several societies. He introduced me to many aspects of history here in The East Neuk. He was founding chairman at the launch of the burgh collection, which encouraged people to take a pride in their local heritage, an active member of the Anstruther Improvements Association and a member of the East Neuk of Fife Preservation Society. He conducted a survey of Fife's road milestones, which prompted Fife Council to ensure they were preserved and restored.

Alex enjoyed researching local history as it was something he liked doing in his retirement from his teaching career. In 2003 we combined forces to produce a short article for TAFAC Journal Volume 9 on the Apotropaic Markings and other items I had discovered 20 years previously in my home. This involved several meetings on the subject with Alex and I were always well provided with sandwiches, cake and tea by his wife Margaret.

The word “Umquhile” - pertaining to deceased adjacent owners, turned up in my earliest property deeds and as Alex seemed to like this word I have included it in this appreciation. In 1999 Alex was involved in a field walk at Kilrenny which I was fortunate to take part in and a variety of treasures turned up. The one I liked best was a fragment of medieval pottery with a clear finger print on the salt glaze. His service to the community was acknowledged in 2001 when he was named citizen of the year by Kilrenny, Anstruther and District Community Council. In Anstruther a memorial garden in memory of Thomas Chalmers, a leader of the Free Church of Scotland, had long been the dream of Alex Darwood, who, with his wife Margaret, had lived for many years in the Thomas Chalmers birthplace house in Old Post Office Close.