

An Early Christian vallum in Dunning?

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with contributions by Rob Engl and Dennis Gallagher

Introduction

AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Perth and Kinross Council to undertake a programme of archaeological works in advance of a proposed extension to Dunning Primary School, Perth and Kinross (Illus 1). The proposed development area lies within close proximity to a wealth of prehistoric and Early Historic sites and find spots, including four Scheduled Ancient Monuments recognised for their national importance.

Location

Located at approximately 55m OD, the site occupies the southern edge of the River Earn flood plain. The main geology of the lowland area consists of extrusive andesites, basalts and tuffs. The landform is of undulating lowlands and mounds with gentle slopes (The Macaulay Institute for Soil Research 1982). The geology of the development area consisted of soft fine sand across low lying ground.

Archaeological and historical background

The identification of Neolithic findspots (NMRS: NO01SW66) and a standing stone (NMRS: NO01SW9) in close proximity to Dunning confirms the occupation of the area for several millennia, but it is only in the Roman period that we identify evidence for settlement in Kincladie Wood Temporary Camp (NMRS: NO01NW7), to the north-east of the village (Illus 1). Unfortunately very little of the camp now survives, even in cropmark form, though artefactual evidence suggests occupation during the mid second century (CFA 1993).

It is only in the Early Historic period that we identify evidence for full settlement, based largely on the presence of Pictish place names (Pitcairns), a ninth-century cross found within St Serf's (NMRS: NO01SW13.00; Alan and Anderson, 1903, 319–10), the existence of St Serf's Church and specifically the research of Stephen Driscoll into the Pictish state (1991, 1998). The parish church of St Serf was dedicated to a seventh or eighth-century saint whose main congregation was at Culross, but had an outlier in Dunning (MacQuarrie 1997, 145–57). A church is known to have existed here since the 13th century (Watt, 1996, 352), though the tower is thought to date from the 11th century (Driscoll 1991, 103). The recovery of a ninth century Pictish stone from beneath the floor of the church may indicate an earlier origin for the occupation of the site (Alan and Anderson, 1903, 319–10).

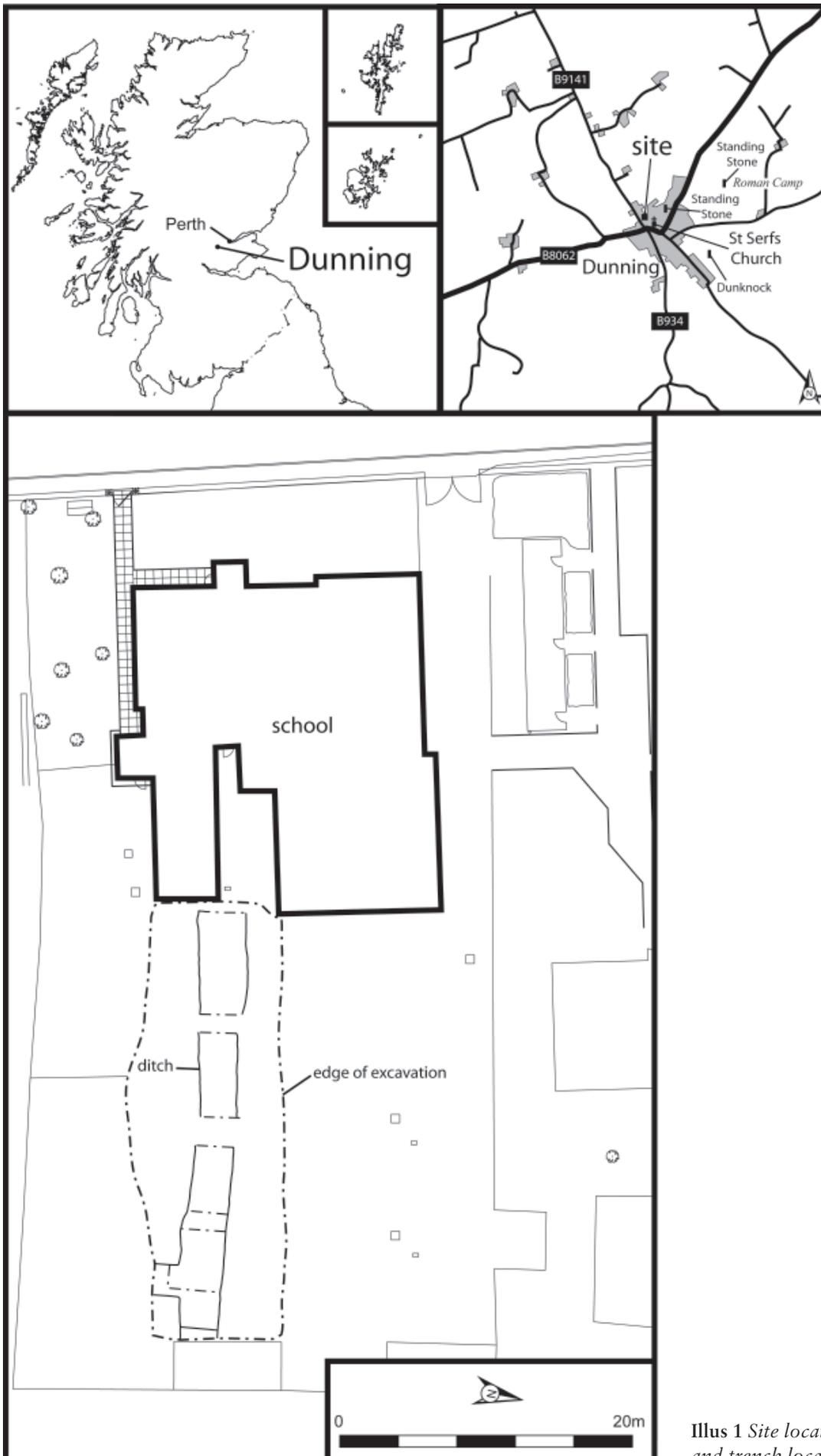
The village of Dunning itself formed part of a thanage (Driscoll, 1991, 92), an estate incorporating several square kilometres, managed on behalf of the king by the nobility (Driscoll 1991, 92) from the 11th century onwards (MacQueen 1996, 187). Although the term has its origins in the 11th century, historical and geographical evidence suggests thanages may have their origins in the Pictish period, perhaps as early as the ninth century (Driscoll 1998, 36). Comparable in size to rural parishes (see Driscoll 1991, Figure 5.5), a thanage would have been concerned with farming crops and raising livestock, necessarily occupying a range of land types from good agricultural land to higher hilltop locations (Driscoll 1991, 107). Politically, such an administrative system would have provided not only a regular and substantial income from the estates, but also able men for military expansion (Driscoll 1998, 39). For this administration to exist the thanage would have contained a hierarchical system governed by an elite, who were supported by a group of free farmers who occupied major farmsteads worked by dependant workers (Driscoll 1991, 107). The existence of a thanage by its nature requires a central but local, possibly fortified residence from which the estate was managed by the noble, but also a central meeting place where administrative matters such as local court may have taken place (Driscoll 1991, 107). Driscoll has suggested Dunknock, a multi-vallate fortification (NMRS: NO01SW18; Illustration 1) served as the caput of the thanage (Driscoll 1991, 104; 1998, 41).

The village of Dunning was made a Burgh of Barony in 1511 (MacQueen, 1996, 214), granting it specific rights, but generally much less than Royal and Ecclesiastical examples (MacQueen, 1996, 214–5). For example, baronial burghs were unable to undertake foreign trade and were only able to buy and sell within the confines of the burgh.

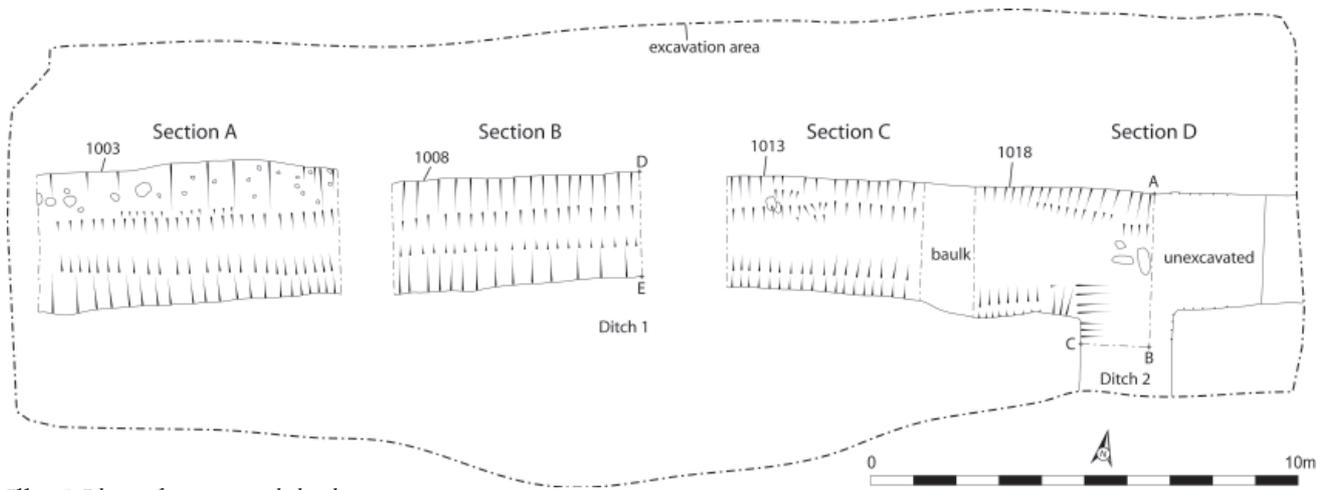
The archaeological works

Two phases of archaeological work took place: an initial evaluation which identified a single linear ditch (Wilson 2006) and a subsequent excavation of the ditch and further archaeological features (Cook 2007; Illus 1).

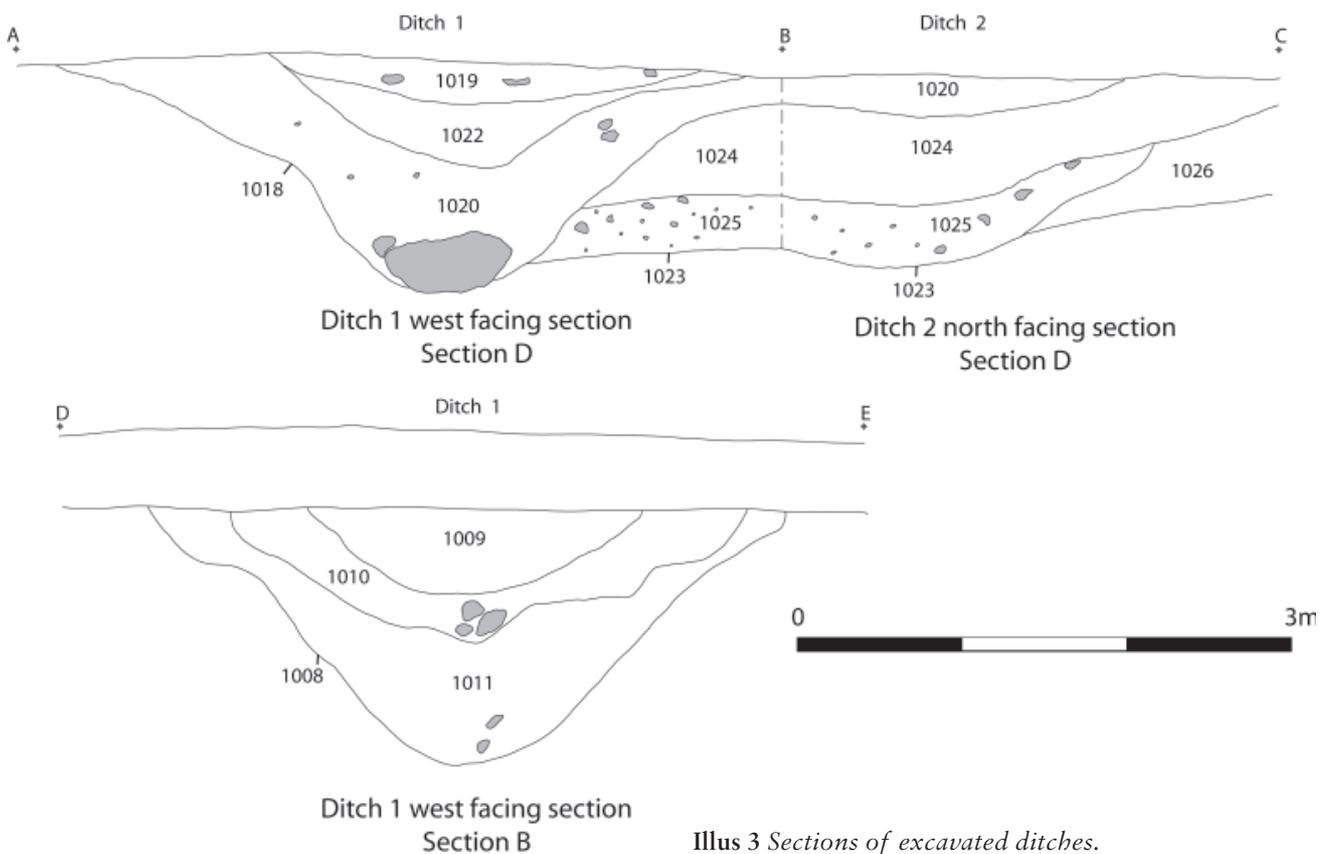
The majority of the site was covered by a thin layer of tarmac, which overlay 1 m of modern overburden. In total, a basal area of approximately 360 m² was stripped by a mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. All the archaeological features were excavated by hand.



Illus 1 Site location plan and trench location.



Illus 2 Plan of excavated ditch.



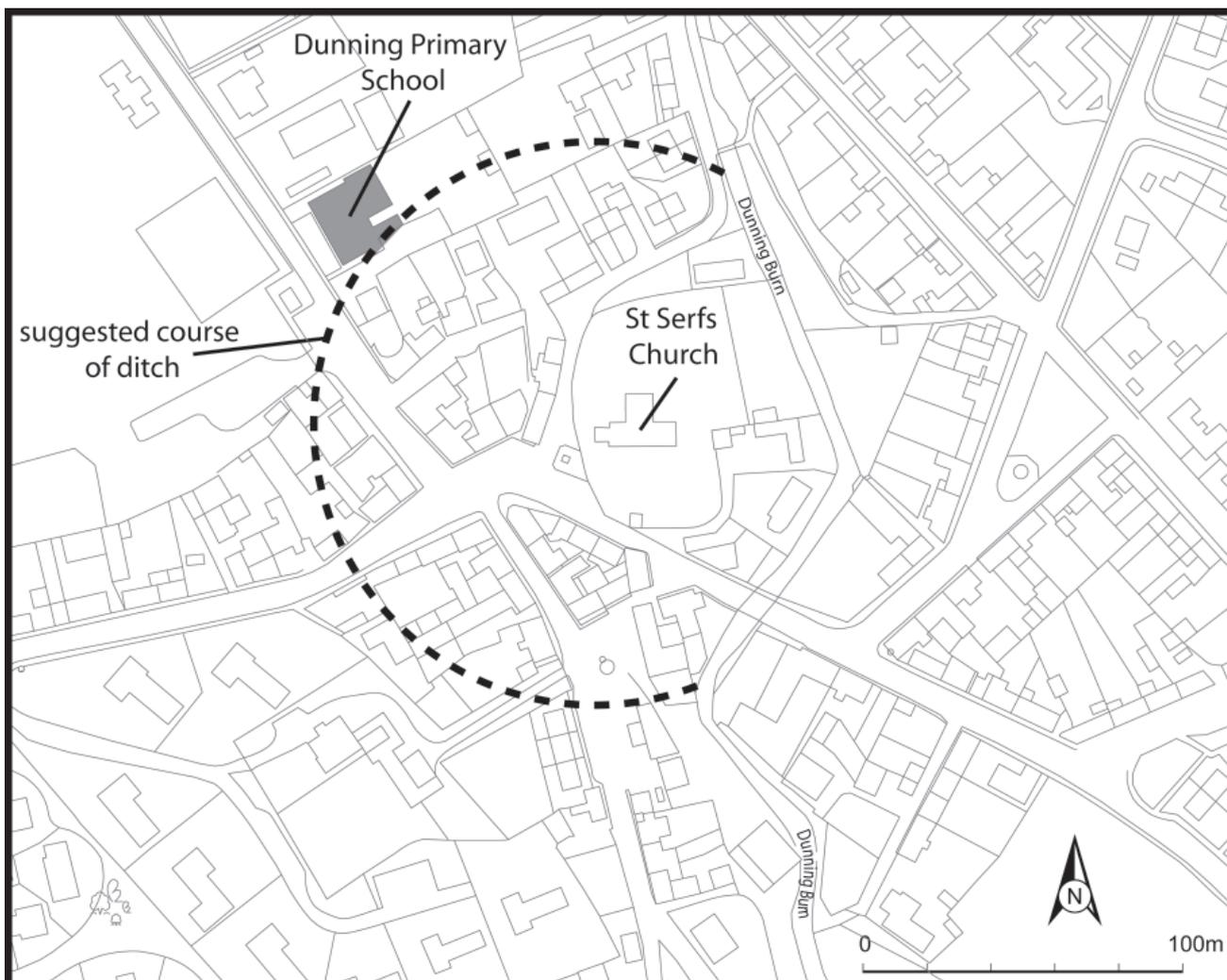
Illus 3 Sections of excavated ditches.

The archaeological works identified two curvilinear ditches. Ditch 1 comprised a NE to SW aligned curvilinear feature, having shallow sides running in to a broadly U-shaped base (measuring 2.20–3.20m in width by between 1.00–1.20m in depth) and was filled by three individual contexts (Illus 1–3). A small selection of finds and limited environmental material in the form of charcoal were recovered from the fills of Ditch 1.

The location of the artefacts in the upper fills of the ditch suggests that they represent redeposited material. The charcoal however, was recovered from the primary fill of the ditch cut, and is considered to

represent material contemporary to the use of the ditch. Although the ditch was excavated in four sections (Sections A–D), all four shared the same basic profile and content and reflected the conclusions of the earlier work. The cut of Ditch 1, Section D [1018] cut through the fills of Ditch 2 ([1024] and [1025]), clearly demonstrating the earlier age of the latter. Generally, the three fills were sterile, comprising a combination of silts, sands and clay deposits.

A secondary ditch [1023] (Ditch 2) aligned N identified to the immediate south of Ditch 1 was partially excavated (Section D) (Illus 3). The excavation found Ditch 2 to



Illus 4 Projected course of ditch.

be earlier than Ditch 1. Ditch 2 measured 2.20m wide by 0.70m deep and, as with Ditch 1, contained three main fills ([1020], [1024] and [1025]; Illustration 3). No artefacts were recovered from Ditch 2. The lower fills of Ditch 2, Section D ([1024] and [1025]) were truncated by the excavation of the later cut [1018] of Ditch 1 clearly demonstrating the later nature of the latter.

Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity

A single Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age barbed and tanged flint arrowhead, a retouched blade and a retouched flake were recovered from the middle layer [1020] of Ditch 1. The position of the artefacts in the fill suggests they were not in situ.

Early Historic activity

The ground plan of Ditch 1 suggests it may curve in the east towards Dunning Burn and to the west to the south-west of St Serf's Church, possibly enclosing an area in and around the church site (Illus 2 and 4).

Post-medieval activity

A single clay pipe bowl relating to the post-medieval period was recovered from the upper layer [1004] of Ditch 1.

Specialist reports

The following specialist reports are edited versions. The full texts, drawings and appendices are stored with the rest of the site archive in the National Monuments Record of Scotland (RCAHMS).

Radiocarbon dating

Martin Cook

Dating was restricted by the availability of suitable, taphonomically secure material. While it was possible to date the basal fill of Ditch 1 [1016] (same as [1011] on Illus 3), no datable material was recovered from Ditch 2. Two radiocarbon dates were obtained from

Table 1 Radiocarbon dates.

context	laboratory code	sample	C ¹⁴ bp	δ ¹³ C	Cal 1 sigma 68.20%	Cal 2 sigma 95.40%
1016	SUERC (GU-16074)	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	1315±35	-27.9‰	AD 650–710 (50.4%)	AD 650–780
1016	SUERC (GU-16075)	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	1320±35	-25.7‰	AD 650–770 (51.4%)	AD 650–780

Ditch 1. A Radiocarbon date of AD 650–780 (Cal 2 sigma) was obtained from samples of both Hazel (*Corylus*) and Alder (*Alnus*) respectively. The calibrated dates indicate that Ditch 1 was excavated at latest by the 8th century AD and therefore Ditch 2 had been filled (at the latest) by this stage.

Flint artefacts

Rob Engl

Introduction

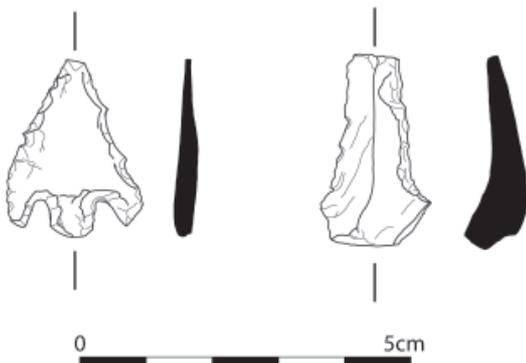
All the artefacts were macroscopically examined and a general characterisation of the material was undertaken. A complete description of each artefact is given below and illustrated (Illus 5 [two of the three flints] and 6 [pipe bowl]).

Barbed and tanged arrowhead

This artefact is a small well made example of a barbed and tanged flint arrowhead of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date. The arrowhead is made on pale grey flint with white patination covering 50% of the surface. The arrowhead is invasively worked with fine ripple flaking covering the point. The artefact is almost complete with the exception of the extreme tip of the artefact, possibly as a result of impact. The arrowhead has a square tang and a square barb on the right hand side. The left barb is pointed.

Edge retouched blade

This artefact is made on an overshot, secondary blade of fresh honey coloured flint. It has fine, abrupt regular retouch along its left lateral edge. The right lateral edge has possible use-wear along its length.



Illus 5 Flint artefacts.

Edge retouched flake

This artefact has irregular abrupt retouch along the right lateral edge. It is made on a tertiary flake of grey flint with small blooms of developing cream patination on the ventral face.

Discussion

Little can be said of the assemblage given the paucity of artefacts and the fact that they were recovered from the fill of the ditch feature. It is likely that these few pieces represent the ‘background noise’ of general prehistoric activity within the area and they may relate to a ploughed out feature or deposit.

Clay pipe

Dennis Gallagher

This is a figurative pipe with a short stem and a collar, designed for a detachable vulcanite stem. The bowl is in the shape of a head wearing a top hat and monocle. The face has thin elongated features but with an exaggerated, slightly negroid appearance. There is no maker’s mark.

This is known as a ‘Yankee Doodle’ pipe, and of unknown manufacture. The form of pipe, with the detachable stem, dates from c 1880–1900. The pipe is probably not of Scottish manufacture. Scottish makers produced pipes for the American market and also pipes in the form of portraits (cf Gallagher and Sharp 1986, 38 for a Queen Victoria pipe), but caricature pipes were



Illus 6 Clay pipe bowl.

atypical of their products in the late 19th century. Caricature pipes were produced earlier in the 19th century by James Wyse of Glasgow (Fleming 1923, plate LV) but these were highly unusual. Similar examples of Yankee Doodle pipes are known from England but they are far from common (pers comm, Peter Hammond). It fits a southern English tradition of comic pipes, for example, Ally Sloper pipes (Hammond 1985, 69 and 76) and political caricatures (Hammond 1985, 102). The maker is unknown but it may be from a London pipemaker.

The Yankee Doodle pipe presents a symbol of the American nation, in a similar way to the Uncle Sam image which gained in popularity after this date. It is based on the song widely used in the American War of Independence but which had a continued popularity during the 19th century, encouraged by the publication of American music. The figure wears a style hat that is an attribute of the 'Uncle Sam' but the face appears to be based on the distinctive long features of Andrew Jackson, President of the United States 1829–37. Jackson was a national hero after his victory over the British at the battle of New Orleans in 1812. In his later career he fought to preserve the Union. It is probable that the pipe was not purchased by a local but was an 'exotic', brought in by an outsider.

Discussion

Inevitably we are restricted in the conclusions that we can draw from the results of any archaeological excavation, and the proposed plan or role of the ditches presented here is not conclusive. However, their form, course and date when considered alongside the historical information provides convincing evidence for an ecclesiastical function.

The eighth century radiocarbon dates obtained from the material in Ditch 1 eliminate a prehistoric origin for the features. Equally, the proposed function of Ditch 1 as either a burgh or town ditch is obstructed by its seventh or eighth century date of origin. Dunning did not become a burgh until 1511, while there is no evidence for the existence of the actual village prior to the establishment of St Serf's church at earliest in the 11th century (discussed above). Though Dunning was thought to be the centre of a thanage from the 11th century, this may have included little more than a series of large enclosed farmsteads associated with a larger defended caput (Driscoll 1991, 1998). As a defensive unit itself, the location seems unlikely, its position being overlooked by a range of slight hills, including Dunknock to the south. Indeed, the author is aware of only one secular contemporary secular enclosure, Barflat, Rhynie (NMRS: NJ62SE35) dated by analogy with Maiden Castle, Inch (NMRS: NJ62SE2) (pers comm. Murray Cook).

More convincing based on the radiocarbon dates, is an interpretation of the ditch as a vallum for a pre-

cursor to St Serf's. Curvilinear vallums were seldom defensive, but rather served to symbolically demarcate the holy from the profane and the living from the dead (Laing 1975, 380). As earlier suggested, the ditch may roughly curve around the north of St Serf's, with perhaps the river forming an eastern boundary to the enclosure (Illustration 6). The use of a water channel in enclosing areas is common to early ecclesiastical sites (MacDonald and Laing 1967–8, 126 and 131). Although St Serf's dates to the 11th–13th century and Ditch 1 dates to the seventh–eighth century assigning the ditch a use as a vallum, is not considered unrealistic. It is not uncommon for church sites to have extended histories, such as Ardwall Island, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway, where a fifth or sixth century cemetery was truncated by a later wooden chapel and subsequent stone chapel (Laing 1975, 383). The existence of the earlier 11th century tower may indicate such a development at St Serf's. Taking into account the combination of the possible early origins of thanages, the presence of Pictish remains and place names and the dedication to a seventh or eighth century saint, it is not unlikely that the area was populated between the seventh and ninth centuries. If this were the case, the area, Christian by this time, would have required a church, the most obvious place being the site of the later example.

Without knowing the exact course and extent of the enclosing ditch we are unable to offer realistic analogy with other examples. However, comparison with three known examples may provide some indication. The early church sites of Govan, Glasgow and Auldham, East Lothian enclose approximately 3.6 hectares (Driscoll 2004, Plan 1, 2) and 0.63 hectares (Hindmarch, pers comm.) respectively while the possible monastic site at Kirk o' Moss, Caithness encloses 4.3 hectares (MacDonald and Laing 1967–8, 124). If we assume that St Serf's church lay at the approximate centre of the enclosure as at Govan, the projected size of the ditch would enclose approximately 1.6 hectares (Illustration 6), falling within the range of area enclosed by two proposed vallums at Auldham and Govan.

The identification of the stratigraphically earlier Ditch 2 requires some explanation. Both ditches share the same basic profile and approximate size suggesting similar origins. Though stratigraphically earlier, the lack of any datable material from Ditch 2 means we cannot date it absolutely. However, an analogy can be offered. The monastic site at Iona, although completely different in size and scale underwent various stages of development (Barber 1981, 362). The excavations identified at least two stages of vallum, the primary example later being deliberately backfilled as it was superseded by the latter (Barber 1981, 355–6). It is not unfeasible that the religious site at St Serf's expanded over a short period of time, the earlier smaller enclosing ditch being replaced by a larger one. An analogy can also be found at Govan, where the enclosing ditch was expanded to accommodate later development (Driscoll 2004, 12).

Conclusion

Despite the limited nature of the excavation, the archaeological works have proved wholly worthwhile, confirming anthropogenic presence in the area from the Neolithic period onwards. However, the most significant result is the seventh or eighth century AD date for the ditch feature. Based on the evidence it seems likely that the feature may represent an Early Christian vallum. The occurrence of this Pictish ecclesiastical activity in Dunning supports the proposed early importance of the town, as reflected in it being the probable centre of an 11th century thanage.

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Abstract

The excavation of a fragment of an Early Historic ditch, possibly representing an Early Christian vallum was undertaken in advance of the construction of an extension to Dunning Primary School, Dunning, Perth and Kinross. A Neolithic barbed and tanged arrowhead, a retouched blade and flake, and a caricature clay pipe were recovered from later fills of the ditch.

Keywords

Dunning
Early Historic
thanage
vallum

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