



TAYSIDE & FIFE
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Tayside and Fife Archaeological
Committee

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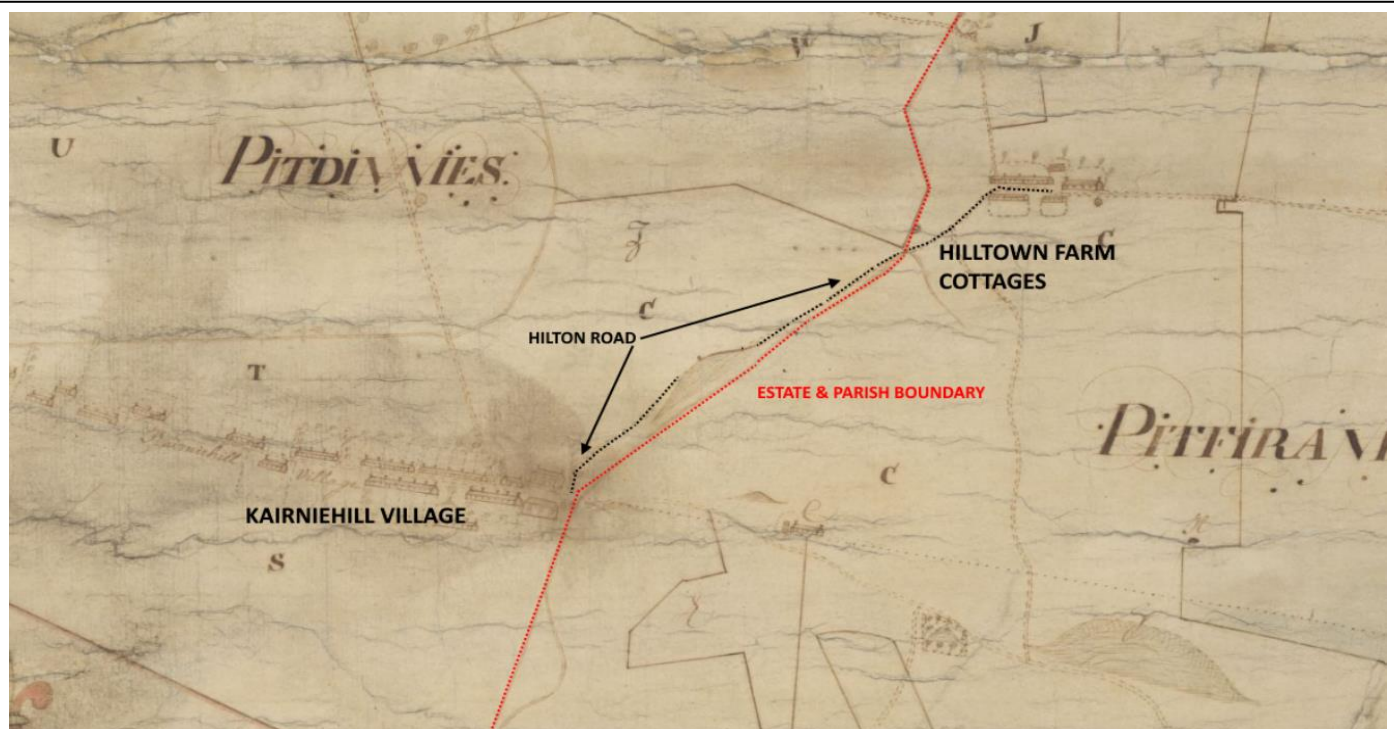
FIFE'S "UNDISCOVERED" PREHISTORY - Part 3

--Steve Liscoe

Fife's Historic Environment Record, (HER), maintained by Fife Council's Archaeological Unit, contains over 12,000 records of archaeological sites across the county. The HER is used as a tool to advise in planning and other service matters for the local authority and is a repository of archaeological information often consulted by private and public bodies. The Unit also maintains an active programme of investigating, assessing, and recording both old and new sites to add to the constantly growing corpus of information.

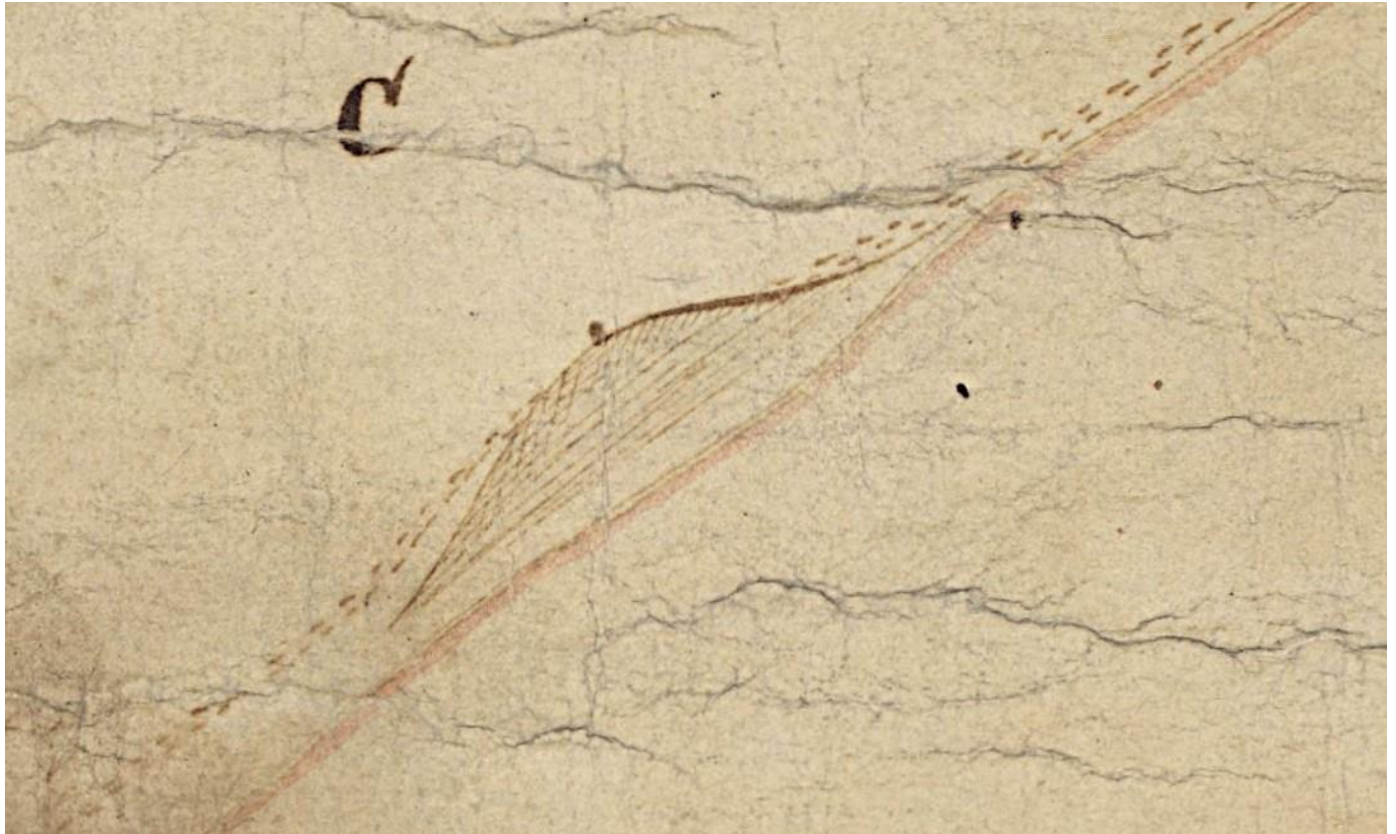
With centuries of antiquarian recording, and more current programmes of historic landscape surveys, you would expect that in Fife's heavily populated and utilised landscape all substantial and significantly upstanding archaeological remains were already known and recorded either in the regional Sites & Monuments Record or Scotland's National Record of the Historic Environment, (NRHE). Most certainly you would think there would be nothing of this nature still left to be discovered in the modern day.

However, as previous articles in the TAFAC newsletter have illustrated, unrecorded and upstanding prehistoric archaeology can still be found hiding in plain sight; it just takes the right pair of eyes to notice them.



Plan reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Scotland. (see full reference in text)

With the Fife Council's Archaeological Unit staff comprising of the overall grand total of two we have limited resources for a proactive programme of exploration, but fortunately we maintain a liaison with many archaeologically enthusiastic groups, societies and individuals throughout Fife who report their research and discoveries to us. And so, it was with the identification of yet another prehistoric boundary stone that had remained hidden from the archaeological record. In 2012 Tony Spence contacted the Archaeological Unit to report a stone he had noticed, whilst cycling through woodland, which he immediately realised was of some significance. The stone was laying recumbent on the woodland floor but from the photographs Tony provided of the stone it was immediately apparent that previously it had been standing upright for a very considerable time.



Detail of plan clearly showing the stone on the top of the knoll.

A site visit by FC Archaeological Unit found the stone to be situated on the crown of a small hilltop that is now covered in woodland known as the Walk Plantation. The stone was smaller than anticipated, measuring approximately 1.03m x 0.78m x 0.38m. The shape and differential erosion visible on the stone suggested that almost half of it had been beneath ground level when it had once stood upright.

The weathering of the stone bore some striking similarities to the Tuilyies group of standing stones, which lay only a little over a mile distant to the west, and the recently identified Pilkham Hill stone, described previously. Like these stones, it exhibited the prominent vertical erosion pattern that you only see on stones that have stood upright for 3,500+ years and it is this erosion pattern, amongst other things, that tells us that this stone is a prehistoric standing stone.

Other prehistoric sites are recorded in the vicinity, as well as the Tuilyies stones there is an ancient settlement identified by aerial photography very close to modern Cairneyhill, and BA urn burials found within the village itself; so the stone is set within a landscape that had been occupied by an early community.



The stone as it was found lying on the natural dolerite ridge. Image copyright: Steve Liscoe.

A discussion with Simon Taylor drew our attention to an estate plan from 1764 held in the National Library of Scotland (<https://maps.nls.uk/view/216586936>) entitled "A Plan of the United Estates of Pitfirrane, Knockhouse and Pitdinnies" which clearly showed "Kairniehill Village" and many pertinent features still easily identifiable today. At modern Cairneyhill a farm track, that was formerly the main route to the 18thC settlement of Hilltown, runs north from the kirk to Hilton House, and passes within yards of the site of the stone. That same road can be easily identified on the 1764 plan where it is clearly shown running immediately alongside, to the west, of a distinct knowe. Immediately to the east, of the same small knowe, the boundary between the Pitfirrane and Pitdinnies estates is also shown on the plan as a red line running immediately alongside it. The modern parish boundary between Carnock and Dunfermline now also runs only yards away from the site of the stone. So, the hill was a feature in the landscape that had defined and marked boundaries for some time that can be directly correlated to the hill now covered by the Walk Plantation. On the estate plan the knowe is shown with a distinct marker stone on its summit. This is almost certainly representing the fallen stone when it was still erect. The hill is also shown bare of trees on the plan, implying that the woodlands have been a later addition, possibly from a deliberate planting of the improvement period.

As with the Pilkham Hill stone, that at the Cairneyhill Walk Plantation stands within yards of a modern parish boundary as well as a division between the agricultural lands of Pitfirrane and Pitdinnies. This implies that it has served at various times as a marker stone or as a standing stone on a small hill in a prehistoric landscape that continued in existence as a marker defining later boundaries between land ownership and parochial administration. In this context, it is significant that the stone lies very, very close to a parish boundary that was probably originally formalised during the 12th century. However, there is strong body of evidence to suggest that the boundaries chosen in the 12th century followed much more ancient boundaries that originally marked prehistoric land territories.

Consequently, it is reasonable to suggest that this stone is of some prehistoric significance. It will probably never be known when or how it was originally used but it could easily have been a Bronze Age standing stone, a later boundary marker from the Iron Age to the 12th century

date and then served as a parish boundary stone and land ownership marker of the 12th-17th centuries. It was then forgotten and lost during the period of agricultural improvement and the creation of the Walk Plantation, which has obscured it to this day. The fact that the location is named as a "Plantation" adds weight to that premise. The estate map can be seen to be evidence that the stone was still upright in 1764, and that later operations to create the plantation may have been the cause of it being toppled.



Two views of the stone. The 1m photographic scale is in 200mm divisions. Images copyright: J R Sherriff.

The hill itself was found to be an outcrop of a Dolerite ridge and where the geology is exposed near the summit this was seen to be of a dolomitic conglomerate, such that its surface had the distinct appearance of comprising piled up stones and cobbles. It is considered that this outcrop, when formerly denuded of trees, and therefore the distinctive geology less obscured by soils, was probably the source of the place-name 'Cairney Hill' which is now attributed to the village that lies in its shadow.

It is yet another example of a prehistoric landscape marker coinciding very closely with a mediaeval parish boundary, which cannot be considered to just be happenstance. And it is also providing a very strong candidate for the origin of the settlement identity, nothing to do with cairns/barrows in a burial context as is commonly used today, just a descriptive for a 'stoney hill', or a hill with a stone on it.

Will this be the last discovery of a previously unrecorded Bronze Age standing stone in Fife ??

Recently discovered fort near Crieff

Regular readers will know of your editor's interest in searching out previously unrecorded archaeological sites using lidar data layer available on the National Library of Scotland's map website (<https://maps.nls.uk/>). So, it is with great pleasure he can report the presence near Crieff of the site illustrated below.

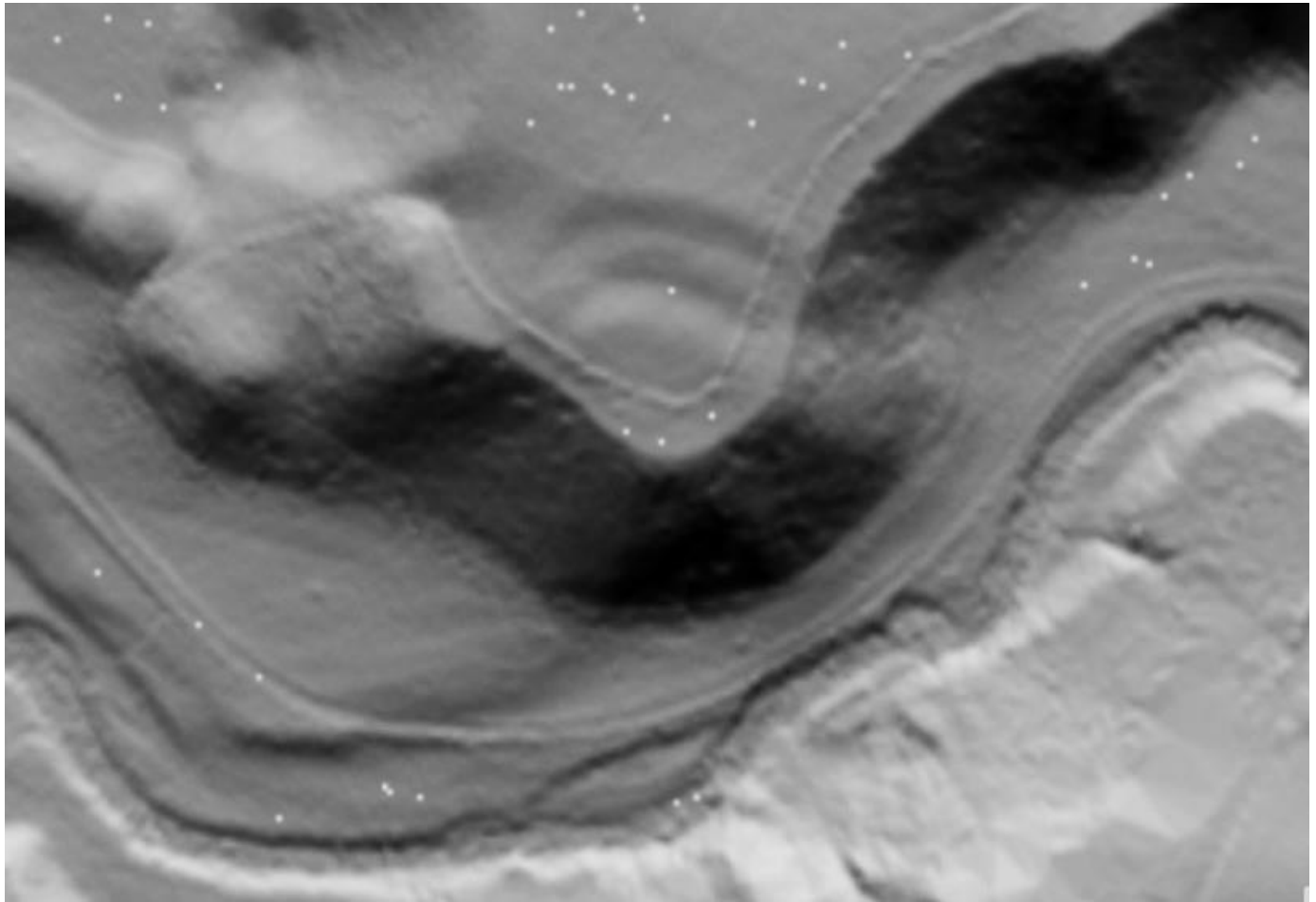


Image: Black and white image altered from a colour original available on a NLS lidar data layer. The editor acknowledges NLS copyright on this image.

This 'new' fort is situated just 400m WSW of Monzie Castle (NN82SE 23) where it stands on a promontory that protrudes from the leading edge of a steep 6m high S-facing river terrace. The roughly oval interior measures some 46m from E to W by 26m transversely and on the N, where the approach to the site is easiest, there is an arcing suite of banks and ditches that run from the edge of the promontory on the E but fall short of reaching the steeper ground on the W. Here there may well have been an entrance gap. Although the defenses have been heavily affected by cultivation, they still survive as visible earthworks and appear to comprise three thick banks with median ditches, spanning a distance of 45m overall.

The inner bank is spread to a thickness of 12m and 0.5m in height, the middle 10m by 0.3m and the outer 14m and up to 0.8m. As such, they represent the remains of what must have been substantial banks or ramparts, the erosion of which has effectively obscured what were probably equally impressive ditches. On the S side of the interior, on the top edge of the escarpment, there is a distinct but low bank which may be contemporary with the defenses. Certainly later than the defenses is a ruinous stone wall that traverses the fort and is depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Perthshire 1866, Sheet XCV). The fort has clearly previously been under the plough, but the land-use now appears to be permanent pasture.

Lindores Abbey 2024

Derek Hall, Prof. Alison Beach (University of St Andrews), Prof. Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom (Brandeis University), Calum Muir and Dr Kimm Curran



The 2024 Lindores MAFS 2024 Team and Students.
Image copyright: Monastic Archaeology Field School 2024.

The first year of St Andrews University's Monastic Archaeology Field School has just finished at Lindores Abbey in Fife. Lindores Abbey is a 12th century foundation of the Tironensian order and is potentially the site of the first production of whisky (Aqua Vitae) in 1494. In future years the project aims to explore water management and use in the abbey and surroundings, largely within the area that is scheduled by Historic Environment Scotland. This year the four trenches opened targeted specific questions regarding



Ceramic bird whistle, Scale = cm/mm.
Image copyright: Derek Hall.

the layout of the abbey and its precincts, and evidence was retrieved for demolished buildings and at least one wooden structure to the east of the Abbey church and cloister. In the southern part of the complex adjacent to Lindores Abbey distillery deeply stratified archaeological deposits producing medieval pottery and animal bone were recovered. They were of a similar nature to those recovered in the site evaluation works by Rebecca Shaw in 2016. A standing wall-line that has been previously identified as forming part of the southern abbey precinct line, has been confirmed to be of a later date and part of a post-monastic orchard boundary. Ceramics from this season's work have included sherds of medieval Scottish Redwares, Scottish White Gritty wares

dating from the 12th to 15th centuries, sherds of imported German (Rhenish) stoneware dating to the 14th/15th centuries and either French or Low Countries Highly Decorated wares of 13th/14th century date. A single fragment from a ceramic bird whistle (image above) is either from France or southern England and is of a post-monastic date. This season has proved a valuable introduction to the archaeology of the site for the project team and has been ideal for the on-site training of the team of 15 American students. All the members of the project team would like to acknowledge the support and interest of Drew and Helen Mackenzie-Smith, Friar John Claw, Vesper and their team at Lindores Abbey Distillery.

Enigmatic feature near Crieff



The mound viewed from the south showing the quad bike track that runs over it, cutting into the top to a depth of 0.5m. The 1m photographic scale has 200mm divisions. (Image copyright: JR Sherriff)

One of your editor's recent forays into Perthshire was to explore a feature near Crieff that he spotted on Lidar data available on the National Library of Scotland map website (<https://maps.nls.uk/>). The feature appeared to comprise a mound measuring about 10m in diameter enclosed within a ditch with an external bank. The lidar data made it clear that the feature had been disturbed/distorted somewhat by later tracks. A visit to the site, located 1km north of Crieff on a quad bike course, confirmed the lidar data. What remains unknown, however, is what this earthwork represent. Is it prehistoric ditched barrow? Probably not as it is set on a distinct south facing slope. Could it be a Roman signal station/watch tower. It is not far off the overall dimensions of the watchtower at Fendoch, 6.7km to the NE, and, despite it being located on a south-facing slope, the site, but for current tree-cover, would have excellent views both to the SW and NE along the valley of the Shaggie Burn towards Monzie Castle.



A view from the south of the ditch on the east side of the mound. The 1m photographic scale has 200mm divisions. Image copyright: JR Sherriff.

Moncreiffe Hill Guided Walk – Archaeology of the Hillforts

To mark Scottish Archaeology Month the Woodland Trust is hosting a free guided walk at Moncreiffe Hill in Perthshire, on Saturday, Sept 14th, 2 - 4.30pm. Led by John Robb, one of our volunteers, he will be discussing the history of the site, with a focus on the Iron Age hillforts and other interesting archaeology in the area. Located between Perth and Bridge of Earn, Moncreiffe Hill offers lots of fascinating wildlife and history to explore, including an Iron Age hillfort which we will visit as part of the walk. We'll also be rewarded with panoramic views of the Fife and Lomond Hills on our climb to the hillfort.



A view to the SW, looking down Strathearn from within the smaller of the two Iron Age forts on Moncreiffe Hill.
Image copyright: Jill Jennings

Please meet at Moncreiffe Hill Tay Car Park on the north side of the wood. The walk will begin from the car park. The event is free but please book your place in advance on the following link:

[Moncreiffe Guided Walk – Archaeology of the Hillforts Tickets, Sat, Sep 14, 2024 at 2:00 PM | Eventbrite.](#)

In the next Newsletter

The next Newsletter will appear in September and contain information about the November Conference and the next Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal (TAF AJ). As always, there is an open invitation to readers to contribute to the contents of the Newsletter and your editor invites articles, snippets captioned photographs, etc. Submissions should be by email to johnraesherriff@outlook.com, preferably as a Word attachment, and photographs and other illustrations should be in jpeg format.

The next issue will also contain articles regarding early (pre-19th century) mining remains in Fife, a mainly unrecorded pre-Improvement landscape on Bishop Hill, Kinross, and a large previously unrecorded prehistoric cairn near Perth (Teaser below).

