



TAYSIDE & FIFE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
COMMITTEE
RSCM

Newsletter of the

Tayside and Fife Archaeological
Committee

Issue Forty-six – Sept 2024

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Big cairns in Perthshire

Anyone who has an interest in the prehistory of Perthshire will know that big round cairns are significant features within the modern landscape. Early in June your editor went hunting two possible cairns near Almondbank that he had 'spotted' on lidar data available on the National Library of Scotland map website (<https://maps.nls.uk/>). The first proved to be a reservoir but the second, located a little to the E of Pitcairngreen, is very much the genuine article. Pictured below, it measures 30m in diameter by at least 3.5m in height and it is situated on the E side of the Gelly Burn, just within the W end of a long strip of deciduous trees. This location within trees probably explains why the mound has remained unrecognised and therefore unrecorded until now.



A view of the Almondbank cairn from the NNW. Image copyright: JR Sherriff.

Whilst the size of the mound may be surprising in the context of it not having previously been recognised, it fits neatly into the corpus of prehistoric cairns in this part of Perthshire. For instance, the cairn at Cairnton Cottage (Canmore: NO02NE 16), just 725m to the N, measures 27.5m in diameter by 4m in height, and another cairn (NO02SE 1) 1.57km to the SSW, by the roadside at Huntingtower, measures 32m by 28m across and 5m in height.

2024 TAFAC Journal

Readers will be pleased to learn that this year's annual journal, which will be TAFAJ 30, will contain four very diverse, interesting and informative papers. A synopsis of each is provided below.

Earlier Bronze Age Burials on Kirkcaldy High Street, Nyree Finlay *et al* (University of Glasgow)

Rescue excavations in 1980 prompted by urban site clearance recorded Earlier Bronze Age burial cists at High Street, Kirkcaldy. One disturbed cist contained an adult male inhumation dated to 2141-1945 cal BCE with unusual cranial burning, found with a food vessel and flint artefacts comprising arrowhead, knife and strike-alight. Built into earlier wall foundations, a second disturbed cist contained the fragmentary remains of one human inhumation dated to 2131-1924 cal BCE along with separate cremation deposits, potential geofacts, later intrusive ceramic sherds of 17/18th and 13/14th centuries CE date and a piece of linoleum. A probable third short cist, built entirely into a later wall, was recorded only in section. New specialist studies and a programme of co-designed community public engagement events were undertaken to explore, celebrate and share outputs of this urban archaeological encounter, prompting new understandings of local bronze age burials and later buildings on the site.

A place with traces: Prehistoric structures and a medieval corn-drying kiln at Stanley Road, A9 Dualling - Luncarty to Pass of Birnam, Yvonne Robertson (AOC)

Excavations in 2020 at a site known as Stanley Road, located to the west of the A9 at the Stanley / Tullybelton junction within Perth and Kinross (NGR: NO 08308 32490) revealed traces of a multi-period site, set within a landscape repeatedly occupied over at least 4500 years.

The site contained evidence of Late Neolithic (c. 3000-2500BC) pits and a possible Late Neolithic four-post structure with an annexe or porch. The site was later settled between the Early (700-100BC) and Middle Iron Ages (200BC-AD400), with evidence for a roundhouse structure and pits. Medieval activity comprised evidence for grain production with a corn-drying kiln identified, and a scattering of pits possibly indicating more widespread settlement.

This paper focusses on the prehistoric and medieval occupation of the site and how this site fits with our current understanding of these periods within the Tayside landscape and more broadly in Scotland.

A Corn Drying Kiln at Glens of Foudland, Aberdeenshire, Kai Wallace (AOC)

During archaeological works related to the development of a new pipeline at Glens of Foudland, Aberdeenshire, a corn-drying kiln and ditch feature were discovered. The kiln has been radiocarbon dated to between the 16th and

the 18th centuries, and while the ditch could not be dated, it may be contemporary. A 'kiln den' is depicted nearby in late 18th century mapping, which may represent a replacement for the kiln. Known post-medieval settlement in the vicinity includes Bainshole, a small settlement containing a smithy, depicted on Roy's mid-18th century map, and Bog Farm, which is featured on mid-19th century Ordnance Survey mapping. The excavated kiln (see image right) had survived in good condition and contained the remains of both charred cereal grains and likely residual metalworking debris.



The Gallatown and Fife Potteries, Kirkcaldy, Scotland – A potted history and its wares

George R Haggarty

This paper describes the history, operation and manufacturing processes of two 18th/19th century potteries in Kirkcaldy. Using pottery assemblages in the collections of Kirkcaldy Museum and elsewhere the range of wares produced at both sites are discussed and illustrated and some consideration is given to the ease of identifying which particular vessels were made at which pottery.

Image right: - Early 1820s Creamware pottery made at the Fife Pottery, Kirkcaldy (Leslie Collection).



2024 Conference (Recent Archaeological work in Tayside and Fife)

TAFAC is pleased to confirm that this year's annual conference will be held in St Matthews Church, Tay Street, Perth, PH1 5LQ, on Saturday 2nd November between 9.40am and 4.30pm. Again, the conference will be available 'in-person (£20), online (£12.50). Tickets are available through [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/tafac-2024-conference-tickets)

STUDENTS !!!

Thanks to a generous grant provided by the Russell Trust, students may apply for a bursary covering the ticket price and travelling expenses. Applications will be considered on a first come – first served basis and at the discretion of the Committee. Applications should be made directly to TAFAC Treasurer at johnraesherriff@outlook.com

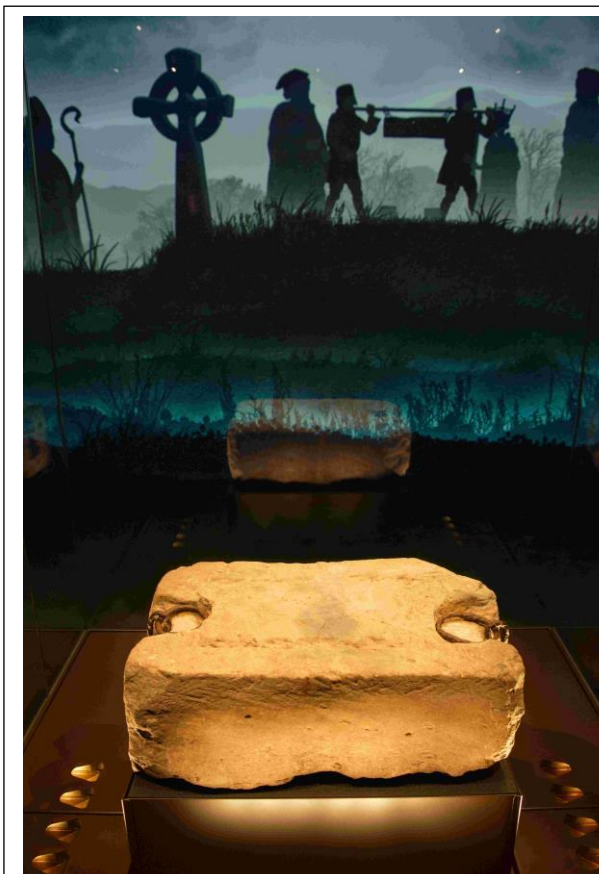
Speakers include:

Mark Hall – The Return of the Stone: Making a new Perth Museum, all questions welcome!

Perth Museum opened its doors at the end of March this year after a £27 million redevelopment of the former City Halls. The new museum, which has already attracted well over 100,000 visitors, highlights the objects and stories that illustrate the history and archaeology of Perth and Kinross. Pride of place is rightly given to the Stone of Destiny.

Perth's Archaeology and World Cultures curator Mark Hall invites the audience to ask their burning questions about the recently opened new museum in Perth.

Image right: The Stone of Destiny in its new setting within Perth Museum. Image copyright. Perth Museum, Culture Perth & Kinross.



Leonie Teufel – Optimum distance between land and sea; excavations at Colinsburgh

AOC Archaeology has been excavating at the south-east end of Colinsburgh and uncovered remains of eight structures. Two comprised sunken floor buildings with stone revetments and postholes and the remaining were made up of flagstone floors with hearths. Additionally, a number of cut pit features were found, one containing a disc-headed pin which likely dates to the Late Iron Age to Early Historic Period. Additionally, a large number of quern stones were found, including one with a protruding handle which is likely Late Iron Age in date. Despite these finds not being from within the structure themselves, it is likely that the stone building structure were Late Iron Age to Early Historic in date.



Perforated stone Colinsburgh, Fife. Image copyright: AOC Archaeology.



General view of the excavations at Colinsburgh, Fife. Image copyright: AOC Archaeology.

Bess Rhodes - 'Faire and fertile ground': Perceptions of the Tay Valley, c.1400-1700

David Strachan - Four Forts on the Tay: excavations Abernethy, Moncreiffe Hill, and King's Seat, Dunkeld

Rich Hiden - How to build a Prehistoric Village and a Crannog in 2024

The story behind the rebirth of the Scottish Crannog Centre three years after the fire that destroyed the original reconstructed crannog at Oakbank.

A new visitor attraction has risen from the ashes, but at a new site across the Loch at Dalerb.



Above: a roundhouse under construction showing timber frame.

Below: daub or mud being applied to the external face of the round-house wall. Images copyright: Eva Bennett.

For more information about the Scottish Crannog Centre, which includes a café and an excellent museum displaying some of the spectacular artifacts from the Iron Age crannog excavations, please see the [website](#).

This will inform you of the list of forthcoming events, what the site has to offer visitors, opening times and admission prices.



Gavin Lindsay – Rome's Caledonian Corridor

This paper unpacks some of the research underpinning *Rome's Caledonian Corridor*, a popular-format booklet published earlier this year by Innerpeffray Library which explores the archaeological remains of the Roman military in Perthshire. In particular, this paper will offer a fresh take on timber tower architecture with a discussion on what this can reveal about their role, phasing and visual signalling potential.



The Roman watchtower and road at Kirkhill, looking W along the Gask Ridge towards Innerpeffray. Low level drone photography@Harald Saan, with post-processing by George Logan.

Marc Oxenham - Pox, Plague and Pestilence: Scotland's Relationship with Disease and Epidemics Over the Past 5,000 years

This paper explores the evidence for serious epidemics, including some non-epidemic diseases, and their devastating influence on Scottish communities over the past five millennia, but with a particular focus on the previous 500 years. Of particular interest are three quite different epidemics, at least one of which has a very long history of reoccurrence. The first is the pox, or venereal syphilis, which appears suddenly in Scotland, apparently for the first time, in the late 15th century. The second is pestilence, in this instance tuberculosis, which has a long history globally while seemingly only first appearing in Scotland during the 12th/13th centuries CE. The final epidemic discussed here, the plague, has a very long history in Britain, first appearing 4,000 years ago, with perhaps the most notorious outbreak globally, including Scotland, occurring during the mid-14th century. A series of individual case studies and large picture overviews will serve to bring home the appalling degree of suffering and misery these epidemics caused Scottish communities in antiquity.

Derek Hall – ‘The Church by the water’ – Reflections on Season 1 of the University of St Andrews Monastic Field school at Lindores Abbey, Fife.

2024 saw the first season of the University of St Andrews Monastic Archaeology Field School at Lindores Abbey in Fife. This paper will consider the challenges of working on and adjacent to both a Scheduled monument and an operational distillery. The results of the three trenches that were opened will be described and discussed and our planned further work in 2025 outlined.



Lindores Abbey – laying out the site grid. Image copyright: Monastic Archaeology Field School 2024.



Lindores Abbey – Excavations in progress in the southern Precinct. Image copyright: Monastic Archaeology Field School 2024.

Anyone wishing to learn more about this project should check out the University of St Andrews Monastic Archaeology Field School [project website](#). The field school activities over the course of its four weeks at Lindores this year are detailed (trench by trench) and we meet the team.

For enquiries about applying to the field school in the following seasons, please contact [Prof Alison I. Beach](#).

Coralie Mills - Grave origins: Tree-ring revelations from Whitefriars, Perth.



Whitefriars, Perth. General view of the wood lining of a grave after the bones have been removed. Image copyright: Derek Hall.



Part of DB Young's painting of Inverkeithing High Street. Image copyright: Fife Cultural Trust on behalf of Fife Council.

Inverkeithing Gas Lamp

The introduction of coal gas for the lighting of public spaces in the first half of the 19th century, saw stone and iron lamp standards become ubiquitous in towns throughout Scotland. And although many of them were later converted to the use of electricity, nearly all have since been removed.



Image copyright: JR Sherriff.

However, a rare survivor in Inverkeithing has been recorded and entered via MyCanmore into the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE). Interestingly, an oil painting (Inverkeithing High Street, 1870, by the artist David Buchan Young (1833–c1920) shows two identical lamp posts further to the S than the Church Street example, but both have been removed. The painting is owned by Fife Council (Asset ID:956).

Bishop Hill – an unrecorded landscape

Having driven past Bishop Hill many hundreds of times, wondering each time what archaeology might be up there, your editor finally visited it in the spring of this year. The hill, which rises to a height of 460m (1509ft) and covers an area of approximately six square kilometers, overlooks Loch Leven from the E. A perusal of Canmore revealed that very little archaeological recording has been undertaken there. Most of the hill is situated within Portmoak parish (Perth and Kinross); it was never visited by RCAHMS, and any field recording that has been done in the general area in the past 50 years has been directed to the Lomond Hills, situated immediately to the N, in Fife. Canmore did contain some sites identified in the early 1980s as a result of the RCAHMS aerial survey programme, but none of these sites were ground-visited and, as a result, the records contain limited information.



A view from the NNW of the southern end of the limestone quarry at NT 1847 0373. The quarry has already been abandoned by the time it was depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Fife 1856, Sheet 23). Image copyright: JR Sherriff.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect to the current archaeological record for Bishop Hill is the paucity of information regarding the widespread quarrying of limestone on the hill. Large areas of the summit especially have been transformed to such an extent that the natural profile of the land has been completely lost – replaced by open quarry-pits and spoil-tips. However, the archaeological record (P&K Heritage Environment Record and the National Record of the Historic Environment) neither records the extent and character of these industrial archaeology remains nor their context in relation to the other archaeology on the hill or further afield.



Building on Bishop Hill. Image copyright: JR Sherriff.

Probably contemporary with the period of greatest extraction is a small rectangular building (image left) that has been reduced to its grass-grown footings. Measuring just 6.6m in length with a doorway midway along its SSE side, the building is likely to have been a shelter/storehouse for use by the quarriers. Or it may have been a magazine. It is depicted unroofed on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Fife 1856, Sheet 23).

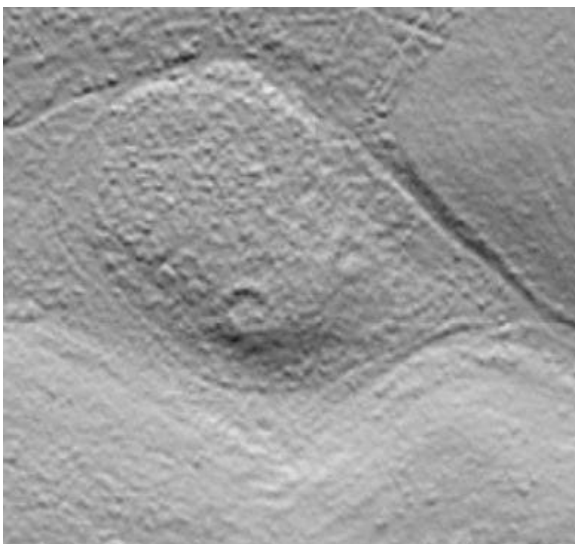
Another feature of Bishop Hill is a remarkable series of turf-built enclosures that are visible across its summit and its E flank, but also to a lesser extent on other parts of the hill. None of these enclosures are depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map yet at several locations they can be shown to date earlier than the system of stone dykes that enclose much of the area. A good example is shown below (left). Here, close to the high NW corner of the summit is a series of rectangular enclosures at least two of which are of two phases of construction. The site is now recorded in ([Canmore ID: 297319](#)). Quite what purpose these rectangular enclosures served is unknown with any great certainty, but it is likely that they were associated with the keeping of stock on the hill. There are no lambing pens or obvious fanks therefore it seems probably that the stock was cattle. Further, there is little evidence of any habitations associated with the enclosures and no evidence of cultivation.



All lidar images this page have had the colour removed in order to make features clearer. Images copyright: National Library of Scotland.

The image (above right) shows enclosures of a slightly different character – again of more than one phase, the latest being a thick-walled circular enclosure 12m in internal diameter. The interpretation of this as a fank or sheepfold is supported by what appears to be a stone-built pen attached to its W side. This site is now described in Canmore ([ID: 361098](#)).

That sheep farming was undertaken on the hill is evidenced by a stone-built pen constructed over the ruins of the farmhouse at Harperleas, low down on the E flank of the hill. Harperleas ([Canmore ID: 78708](#)) is known to have been abandoned in the first half of the 19th century.



Evidence of prehistoric settlement on Bishop Hill takes the form of small hut circles measuring about 6m in diameter within thick grass-grown walls. The example shown on the image left ([Canmore ID: 379521](#)) lies downhill from the Harperleas farmstead and its survival can probably be attributed to the fact that it lies on a low knoll surrounded by boggy hollows. Of course, it should have been no surprise to have found traces of prehistoric activity at a location so close to the Lomond Hills, where there is not only a multiperiod hillfort (East Lomond) but also a series of hut circles likely to be of Bronze Age or Iron Age date.



A view from the NW of a previously unrecorded cairn at Harperleas ([Canmore ID: 379520](#)). Image copyright: JR Sherriff.

Evidence of earlier prehistoric activity on Bishop Hill is scarce and is so far limited to a single cairn (see image above) which measures about 11m in diameter by 1.3m in height. Other than some surface scarring caused by the recent planting of trees across it, the mound appears undisturbed.



View from W of the range at Wetherlairs farmsteading, now largely reduced to footings. 1m photographic scale in 200mm divisions. Image copyright: JR Sherriff.

In the mid- to late-19th century Bishop Hill was farmed from a single farmsteading, West Feal (now converted to holiday accommodation), located low down on the E flank of the hill. Previously, there was another fully working farmsteading (Wetherlairs), but by the 1860s, according to the OS Name Book (Fife and Kinross No.90, p.11) it had been reduced to a cottage housing a shepherd. This provides a useful clue about the limekilns at Wetherlairs. The 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map depicts a single limekiln to the S of the range whereas the 2nd edition map shows two, side-by-side – implying that one was constructed after the survey for the earlier map. However, if Wetherlairs was occupied only by a shepherd it seems highly unlikely that there would have been an active limekiln there. Perhaps the best explanation is that the surveyors of the 1st edition map recorded the location of only the better-preserved kiln, effectively ignoring the presence of the other.

Perth Charterhouse Project

Readers will be interested to learn about the recent progress of the Perth Charterhouse Project, the principal aim of which is to investigate the possibility that remains survive to be found of the Carthusian priory (Charterhouse) that was founded by King James I in 1429. The priory contained Royal tombs but when the Reformation arrived about 130 years later the priory buildings were robbed of their stone and the exact location of the priory church especially has never been established. What little evidence there is seems to suggest that the priory lay SW of the burgh, immediately outside the medieval town walls. This is where a recent survey has concentrated. Too lately received for your editor to give readers an advanced notice of it, the ground penetrating radar survey was scheduled to take place over the grounds of twenty-five properties and be undertaken by a geophysics team from AOC Archaeology Ltd. The survey (10-17 Sept) will have been completed by the time readers see this copy, but we can all look forward in anticipation of the results. In the meantime readers can keep pace with the Charterhouse Project by referring to its [website](#).

Pictish Arts Society 2024 Annual Conference

This year's PAS conference will be held online from 1:30pm on Sat 5 Oct 2024 to 5:30pm on Sun 6 Oct 2024. Tickets (£12-£15) are available from the [ticketsource](#) website, where further details of the conference can be found. The conference will be hosted on Zoom - all conference attendees will receive the zoom link by email.

Day 1. Speakers

[Daniel McLean - Problem Solved? An introduction to the Picts.](#)

[Hugh Levey - The Historiography of Pictish Symbols: The Analysis and Interpretation of Pictish Symbols through Time.](#)

[Dr Victoria Whitworth - How to read a Pictish cross Slab.](#)

[Prof Gordon Noble - Latest updates from Northern Picts Project.](#)

Day 2. Speakers

[Allen Fraser - Did Fimbulwinter eradicate Shetland's Picts?](#)

[Dr Juliette Mitchell - The Landscapes of Barrow and Cairn Cemeteries and Symbol Stones in Early Medieval Scotland.](#)

[Prof Jane Geddes - What is David iconography doing in Pictland?](#)

[Jordyn Patrick - Art: Colouring Pictish sculpture](#)

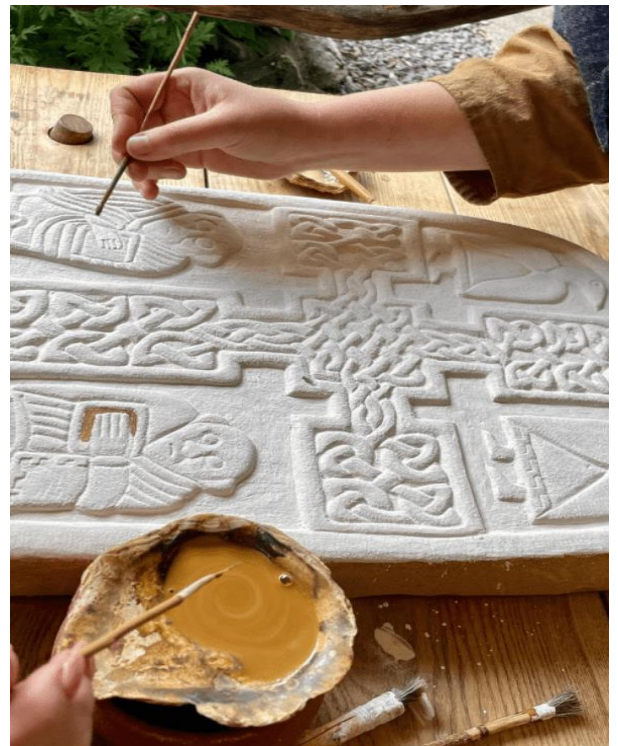


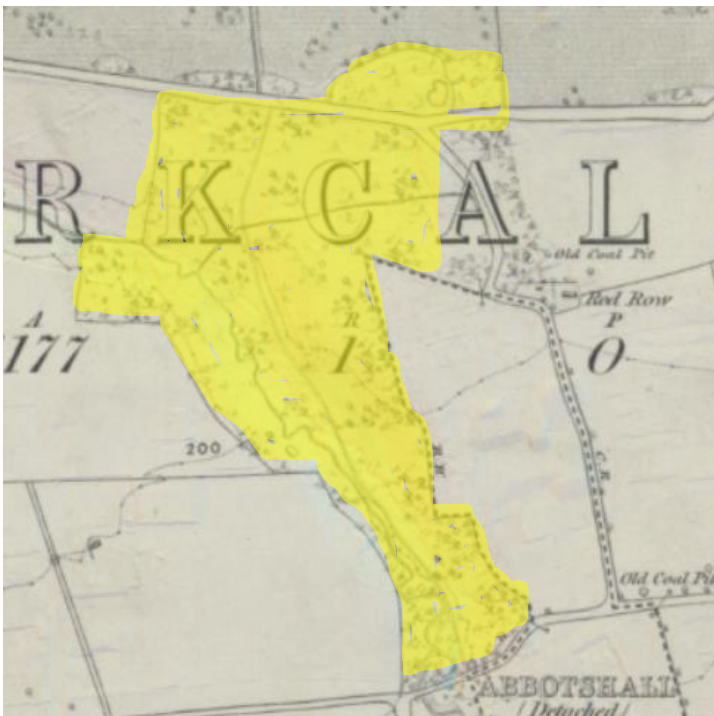
Image reproduced courtesy of the Pictish Arts Society

Mining remains in Kirkcaldy

Your editor had five hours to kill in Kirkcaldy recently and a stroll around the north side of the town threw up a surprising discovery in the form of mining remains that probably date back into the 18th or early 19th century. The remains lie in Middle Den, a wooded gully of the Den Burn that is situated immediately W of the Smeaton housing estate, and comprise at least twenty pits, most probably bell-pits. They measure up to 11m in diameter and vary in depth up to about 2m. Most are characterised by a relatively small amount of upcast. The 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Fife 1856, Sheet 32) depicts none of these remains but it does show an 'Old Coal pit' at Red Row, immediately to the E of the den.



A view of one of several coal pits in woodland on the north side of Kirkcaldy. (image copyright: JR Sherriff)



The current Canmore record ([ID: 274538](#)) includes two of the pits which were misidentified as enclosures in 2005. The image to the left shows the area of surviving coal mining remains at Middle Den set against a background of the 1st edition OS 6-inch map.

Given the significant role that coal mining played in Fife's industrial past and the widespread removal of redundant remains, it is important that potentially early mining remains are both recognized and recorded. Middle Den is currently used as an area of community access therefore the pits and spoil-tips are probably under no immediate threat.