

EDINBURGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SOCIETY

News

Issue 173 – May 2009



Society Lectures

There are no lectures now until the autumn, when we recommence with:

Wednesday 14 October 2009

“Cramond Excavations 2008” by Martin Cook, Project Officer,
AOC Archaeology

Penicuik

We are now wrapping up this project, and this unfortunately involves backfilling the excavated areas by hand, as there is no machine now available to assist. We will issue the usual e-mail alert for volunteer labour when a further date has been arranged.

Cramond_(from Dave Jones)

In an attempt to link information derived from some of our previous surveys with anomalous results from watching brief digs in the area which showed features not on the alignment of the fort, we made three further surveys in April. The team removed a large amount of dead wood, ivy and weeds from the survey areas, to make access possible.

On 9 April, with permission from Eric Jamieson, we surveyed a 20m x 20m square, across the Tower drive to the west of the Roman ditch pond. The print-out shows no clear continuation of the pond ditch, and the suggestion made by Nick Holmes, that it makes a T-junction onto another ditch, could well be correct. The ground to the west of this square is so overgrown that no survey in that direction was possible.

On 20 April, two squares were surveyed to the south west of the kennels, adjacent to Trench C of the Society's 1992 excavations, while Peter Morris made four associated linear array measurements. Val Dean's drawing and description of Trench C shows “three broad, shallow depressions” crossing the trench, which she thought might have been Roman but unfinished. The linear array surveys west and east of Trench C showed sections that are plausible Roman ditches, but the area survey was far from clear. If the Romans had backfilled using alternate cartloads of wall demolition material and midden, it could account for discrete high and low resistance areas and the lack of any linear feature. Similarly the area survey to the south east of the kennels shows no very clear features although the linear array survey made N-S on the east side of this square shows two V sections not unlike Roman ditches. The more northerly of these, if it came through from the east, was on a line which might have resulted in its being missed in our measured square on the Tower drive. The other could relate to a N-S high resistance line on the area survey that might just be collinear with a Roman ditch, found on the east side of the church hall in two watching brief excavations by Headland Archaeology, but extrapolating over that distance is distinctly risky.

Gormyre Hill, West Lothian

Those good friends of the Society, John and Rosie Wells of Armadale, using their kite camera, have identified previously unrecorded archaeological features on Gormyre Hill, near Torphichen. These photographs showing the features have been taken, with permission, from Rosie's excellent website www.armadale.org.uk, where you can see other views of the site.

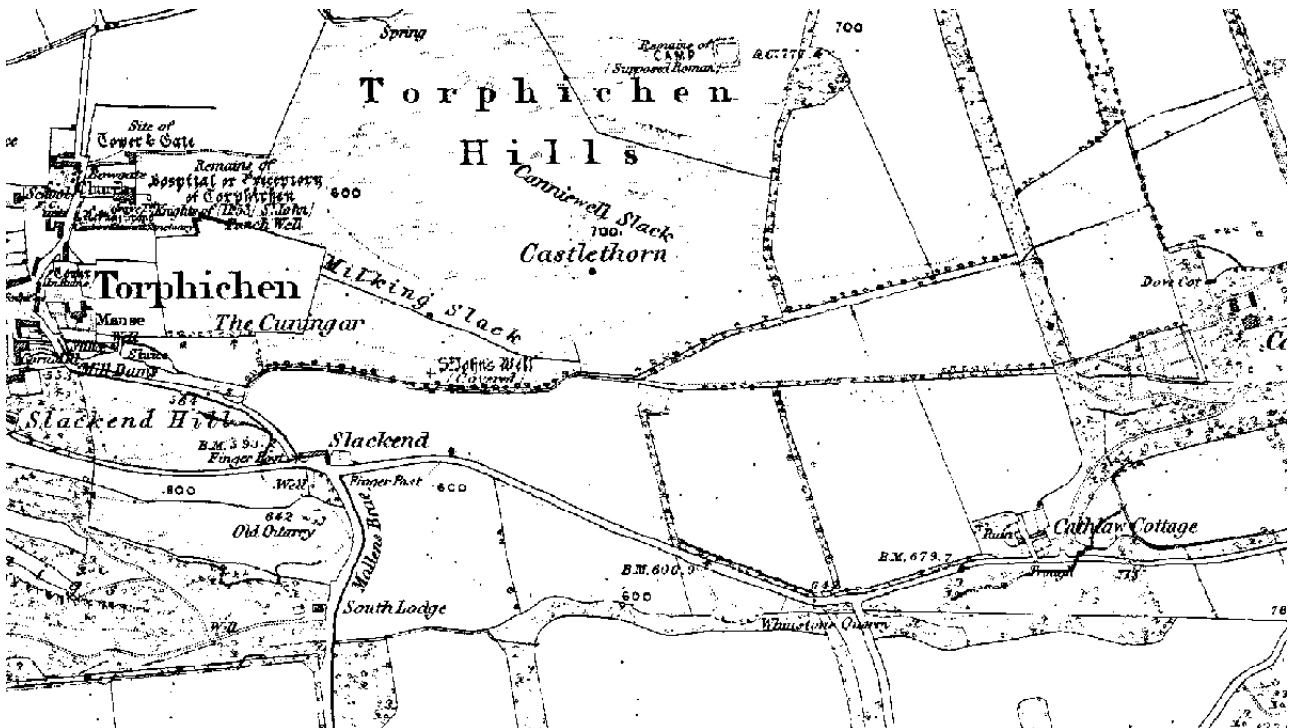


under snow February 2009



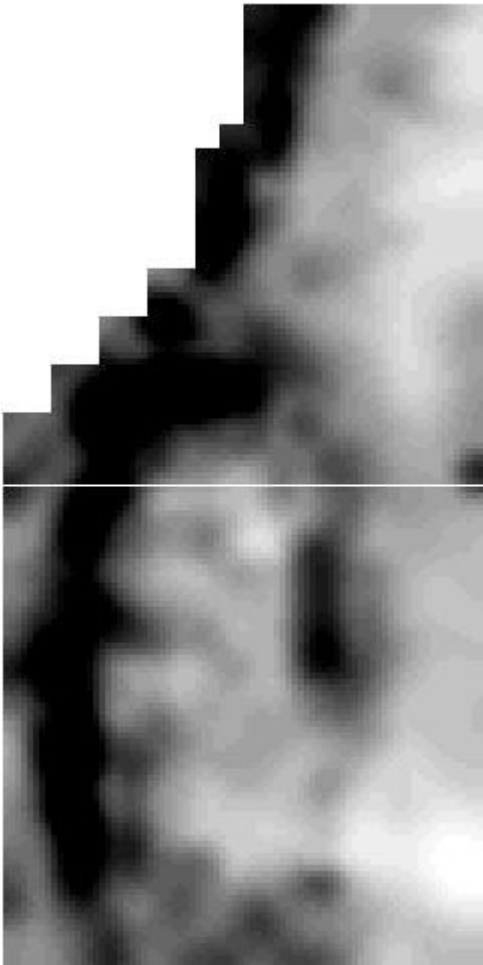
south west corner

Intriguingly, the OS First Edition 1856 reproduced below shows a feature described as "Remains of Camp Supposed Roman" in this approximate area.



John and Rosie have invited the Society to carry out further investigations, and plans are afoot to carry out a geophysical survey at the end of June. The usual alert for volunteers will be issued in due course

Ground Resistance Survey at Camilty and Castle Greg (from Ian Hawkins)

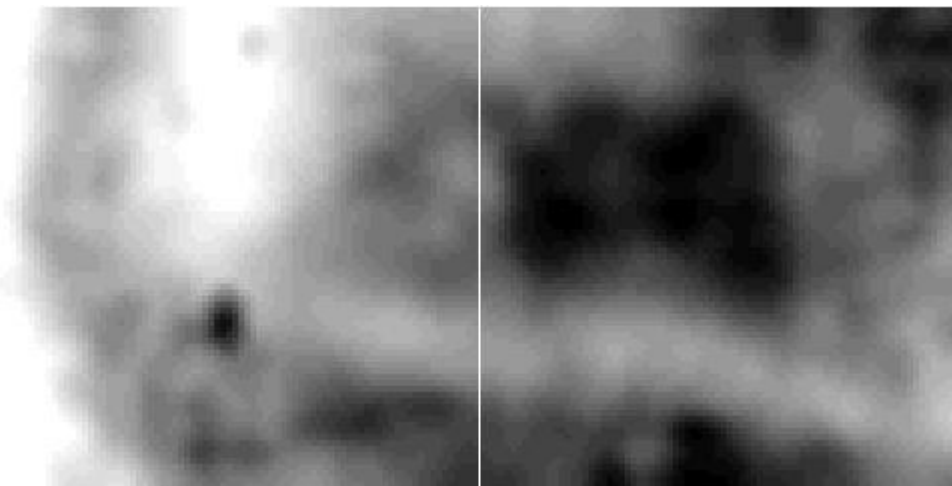


Camilty geophysics survey
printout

Jill Strobridge received a request from the Forestry Commission to investigate a site next to their car park on the A70 at Camilty Forest. The site was described as a "figure of eight" enclosure. Six Society members went out to the site on Monday 19 May in rather changeable weather (it changed from wet to very wet). The site consists of earthworks of an enclosure and flat but soggy field on the edge of a steep slope down to the Crosswood burn. One and a bit survey grids were completed and the results do show some kind of enclosure with possible stone foundations or walls, fairly prominent to the West and less so to the East. The enclosure did have the appearance of a figure of eight - a sub-figure of eight enclosure?

We then proceeded round the corner to the Flavian fortlet at Castle Greg where we laid out and surveyed two grids over part of the inner south ditch and rampart and part of the interior on very wet mossy and cut up ground. The rampart showed as a low resistance, the ditch even lower and there was a rectangular high resistance anomaly just to the north of the rampart, possibly field ovens or a road surface.

We are returning to the site on Tuesdays 16 and 23 June to survey the remaining seven grids to complete the plan of the fortlet. Members wishing to help should meet at the Camilty car park on the A70 at 11.00 a.m.



Castle Greg geophysics survey printout

Sunderland Farm Cottages, Nr Selkirk

We have been invited by the Borders Council Archaeologist to carry out a geophysical survey on the putative site of a mediaeval village. Dates will be announced in due course.

Pentlands SRP project (from Jill Strobridge)

As a footnote to the item in the last newsletter, we have also recorded smaller sites such as Kirkton Cottage and traced the movements of families between Craigentarrie, Kirkton and Capelaw, another ruined farmhouse high up on Capelaw Hill. A small site on Fala Knowe is next on our survey list, weather permitting. This site is perhaps recorded as Fallaws in the 1841 census and the occupant, John Jackson, may have been in residence at Kirkton Cottage in 1871.



Kirkton Cottage porch

Other small sites such as the ruins of a cot house on the Logan Burn called Hare Hill House in the OS Namebook and further south down the Pentland range Saltersyke, Friarton and Back Spittal have either been surveyed or hopefully will be soon and early 18th century estate records are also being looked in detail at to give us a broader historical framework in which to set all these sites.

Scottish Community Archaeology Conference – Proceedings Booklet

Several Society members attended the Scottish Community Archaeology Conference at Queen Margaret University, Musselburgh, on 16 and 17 May. This was a well-supported event with a wealth of interesting presentations. A colour booklet in A5 format is to be produced, with two-page entries for each of the presentations. It is anticipated to be available in September/October 2009 with a retail price between £3 and £5.

Excavation opportunities

Excavation opportunities in Scotland and throughout the UK are listed at www.ilovethepast.com/digs and in *Current Archaeology* issue 230 (May 2009).

Excavate at Scotland's oldest site

Society members are invited to participate in the excavations being carried out throughout the summer by Biggar Archaeology Group at Howburn Farm near Elsrickle. The project is lithic retrieval from plough soil which will be hand trowelled. Material already recovered from this site has been dated to the Upper Palaeolithic, approximately 14,000 years ago, the earliest evidence of human occupation in Scotland. The work is a community project being done entirely by volunteers at weekends and evenings. More information at www.biggararchaeology.org.uk. If interested contact Biggar Museums on 01899 221050 or email the Group at info@biggararchaeology.org.uk with details of availability

Black Spout Homestead Excavations

There are volunteer excavation opportunities at Black Spout Wood, near Pitlochry, where an Iron Age homestead is being excavated. No previous excavation experience needed – training will be provided. The 2009 excavation season will be the last and runs from 1 – 20 June 2009. Minimum commitment – five days. Free, but booking essential. Transport can be arranged from Perth to the site. For further information contact Steven Timoney 01738 477089 stimoney@pkc.gov.uk

Arthur's O'on (from Dave Jones)

Val Dean's contribution in Newsletter 172 prompted the recollection that in summer 2002, the Society received an e-mail from a gentleman in the USA asking for our participation in a search for the stones of Arthur's O'on, and to join in a project to rebuild it. His belief was that the O'on stones used to build the dam were still in situ as the dam had been infilled and the dam wall had collapsed rather than been washed away.

Geoff Bailey, on whose Falkirk patch the O'on and dam existed, was consulted concerning the possibility of this project. He commented that if the stones were still in situ, they would probably be under some feet of concrete in an old industrial complex, which would have to be excavated and properly recorded before the O'on stones might be found. The Society's committee minutes of 2 September 2002 records that "this project was unsuitable for the Society" and our American correspondent was advised accordingly. Are the O'on stones still there to be found?

Other Dates for your diary

9 June 2009 *"Dead and Sometimes Buried – dealing with the dead in first millenium Scotland and beyond"* One day seminar by First Millenium Studies Group, Edinburgh University Department of Archaeology. E-mail Rod McCullagh mccufost@btinternet.com if you'd like to attend

Scotland is not blessed with a rich burial record for later prehistory. Yet in recent years this picture has changed through individual spectacular finds, the impact of developer-funded archaeology, and routine dating of unaccompanied burials. It is also clear that human remains were treated in many interesting ways unrelated to burial. For the later first millennium AD, burials become much more common, but these too pose problems – how far does this relate to the spread of Christian religious practices? This year's seminar will consider what we know about the treatment of the dead, put it in context and see what it tells us.

20 June 2009 *Hadrian's Wall Archaeology Forum*, The Queen's Hall, Hexham, Northumberland. David Breeze, Andrew Birley, Tony Wilmott et al. £15 per person. Further information info@durham.gov.uk

7 Sept. 2009 *Recording the Past*, British Museum. Conference on dealing with portable antiquities found by members of the public. £15 per person. Further information ccostin@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

Perthshire Archaeology Month

June 2009 is the seventh Perthshire Archaeology Month, organised by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust, with an extensive programme of events, walks and tours, lectures and presentations, and displays and exhibitions across the county throughout the month. Online information can be found at www.pkht.org.uk or www.perthshire.co.uk/archaeology

Scottish Archaeology Month

September 2009 will again be Scottish Archaeology Month. Society members will be involved will be in activities at Cramond and a proposed ranger guided walk to the Scotland's Rural Past site at Green Knap, Craigluscar, Dunfermline. More details in the next Newsletter.

Book Reviews

The New Edinburgh History of Scotland (Edinburgh University Press): Volume 1) From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795 by James E Fraser; Volume 2) From Pictland to Alba: 789 to 1070 by Alex Woolf (from Brian Tait)

These are the first two volumes of a ten volume history of Scotland being published by Edinburgh University Press. As Scotland prior to 1000AD or so is not well covered I approached them with a great deal of anticipation.

While both books are obviously well and thoroughly researched they have, for me, a fatal flaw. To quote Volume 2: "Names which were current in Gaelic are represented in the standard Middle Irish forms of the age". Nearly all sources of Scottish history in the periods covered were written in Middle Irish, with some in British, Cumbric, Welsh, Old English and Old Norse. The combination of all these 'old' written languages for the names of people and places left me totally confused. One example (there could be hundreds) – "They had linked together the Cenél nGabráil and Cenél Comgaill kindreds – the Corcu Réti – naming them as descendants of a certain Domangart Réti, 'Domangart of Kintyre' as one chronicle calls him". I'm sorry but to me this is total gibberish and, a lot of the time, I ended up knowing what was happening and when, but not knowing who was doing it and where.

For some reason it was decided to have the academics who wrote these two volumes write for academics – not for the interested, non-academic, non-Gaelic speaking people like me. This is a great pity because it is people a bit like me who, they should recognise, are their market.

Both authors tend to follow tangents and I felt the books were longer than they should have been while we went into a lot of Irish, Northumbrian and other parts of English history while using 'old language' place names. If you are familiar with the 'old languages' and can read and understand them you will enjoy (and understand) these two volumes. If, like me, you prefer to see Angus instead of Óengus etc etc you will end up being very frustrated.

Local History on the Ground by Tom Welsh (from Dave Jones)

I must admit to not having read this book which was noticed in Newsletter 172, but I have read many articles that Tom Welsh has written for *Independent Archaeology*, the newsletter of the Council for Independent Archaeology. He is generally not well disposed towards professional archaeologists, with phrases such as "Professional archaeology appears to operate increasingly like a belief system rather than a science and a secretive one at that". For example in his article on Pltcarwick buildings which he attributes to the 11th to 16th centuries he criticises Downes, Wickham-Jones and Lelong for their "early mediaeval" 7th century dates although these are supported by C14 measurements. He has twice written on tidal heights in the Firth of Forth. The first article related to a large Roman harbour in the Falkirk area. The second specifically stated that high tide in Roman times was 8.5 metres higher than at present. To this latter, I responded that it would have put the Antonine/Severan bathhouse at Cramond under water twice a day. On these grounds I would not endorse the purchase of this book by the Society.

Tools (from Ian Hawkins)

I have used the new Toolstation Depot at Seafield. There are a number of archaeology-related items including Marshaltown trowels, line levels, measuring tapes, leaf trowels and mattocks etc at very good prices and I can recommend them as a useful source of archaeological tools and supplies as well as general hardware.

Deadline for Issue 174

Members are invited to send contributions for the next issue of the Newsletter, due on 31 July. The editor would be grateful if contributors would forward submissions by 24 July 2009.

Outstanding subscriptions

Members who have not paid their 2009 subscriptions will have received, or will shortly receive, notice of cessation of membership in terms of the Rules of the Society, and accordingly, unless they reinstate their membership, which they are of course welcome to do, this will be the last Newsletter they will receive.

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(Views and opinions expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Society, its Committee and Members, or the Editor).