

PAS Newsletter

Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

February 2026

Remembering Tam Ward - PAS donates Tam's collected works to Peebles Museum

Scotland's Top Archaeological Discoveries of 2025 - James Garry reviews

Moments in Time and Imperial Power - Strat Halliday explores fortified towns here and in France

Treasure Trove from Peeblesshire and Beyond - George Prew-Stell and Antony Lee report

2025-26 Lecture Programme

■ **The February Lecture is by Strat Halliday on "Hillforts, Settlements and Ancient Geography" - details on page 16**

Welcome

Colin McLean, Newsletter Editor

The festive break is always an opportunity for some extra reading, and I was fortunate to receive as gifts (I had a birthday too) no less than four volumes of Nigel Tranter's "The Fortified House in Scotland". First published in Edinburgh by Oliver & Boyd in the 1960s, a second revised edition was issued by James Thin/ The Mercat Press in 1986.

They represent a remarkable achievement by one man, who not only visited each location, researched and wrote the text, but also added his own sketch of each building. Tranter modestly acknowledges in the preface to a first edition that his "...pen-and-ink sketches lay no claim to artistry, but perhaps will amplify the text, and give some impression of the essential sturdy character of the fortalices described."

It is of course true that his volumes have been somewhat superseded by later works, such as the monumental fifteen volumes of the "Buildings of Scotland", which have a wider remit covering all historic buildings, and not just tower houses. Tranter had written earlier on

buildings in his 1935 book "The Fortalices and Early Mansions of Scotland 1400-1650", so the subject was by no means new to him, but this later series (there are five volumes in total) is still invaluable and authoritative.

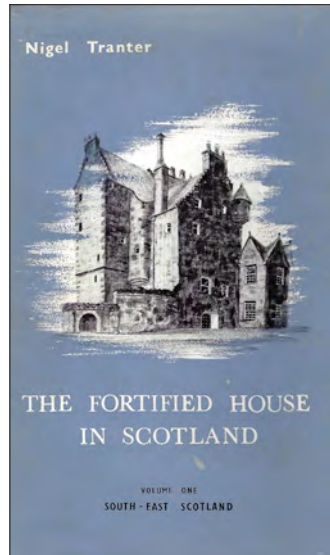
Local interest is covered in Volume 1 - South East Scotland, and in the first edition Peeblesshire alone includes Kilbucho Place, Barns Tower, Winkston, Neidpath Castle and Traquair House. He didn't include many "ruins", which may explain the absence of, for example, Drochil.

Tranter's style can on occasion be colourful, but is usually relatively straight and objective: "Here [to Traquair], came Montrose, after the Battle of Philiphaugh but was refused entry. Here also came Prince Charles Edward in 1745, and though he failed to win the Earl's active support, the famed gates were reputedly locked behind him never to be re-opened until a Stuart regained the throne."

If he has his own cause to support, it is regret over the sheer number of tower houses that have been neglected or 'dingit down'. One of the reasons he cites for his writing the series is that by raising the profile of this particularly Scottish building type, it may be better cared for by this and future generations. That is a cause we would surely all raise our glasses to.

I for one am very happy indeed to have Tranter's books occupying a space on my bookshelves. Long out of print, they are to be found in second hand shops or from [AbeBooks](#).

It's *your* Newsletter and you too could contribute by writing a piece and/or sending in photographs of somewhere interesting you have visited or have been reading about. ■



TRAQUIR HOUSE, SKETCHED BY NIGEL TRANTER

The Society Remembers Tam Ward

Colin McLean

At a ceremony in Peebles Museum on Thursday January 22nd, Trevor Cowie, the Chair of Peeblesshire Archaeological Society (PAS), presented the Museum's Curator with a set of six volumes of the works of Tam Ward. Tam Ward was a founder of PAS and other groups, and an active archaeologist in the Peebles and Biggar areas. Tam's work was widely recognised and he was awarded the MBE in 2001, citing his services to archaeology in Lanarkshire. Many will remember and have been influenced by his drive and enthusiasm.

and energy to bear on Tweeddale when he delivered a very successful series of talks in Peebles and West Linton. It was the groundswell of local interest that these generated which was to result in the formation of PAS.

After his death, as a lasting memorial and tribute to Tam's great many contributions to local archaeology, Biggar Archaeology Group arranged for the printing of his unpublished archaeological reports, with funding from a wide number of organisations and private individuals. Beautifully produced in 2025 by Ian MacLeod of Elmbank Print, Peebles, the six works provide a mine of information covering the wide range of projects carried out by Tam in both Clydesdale and Peeblesshire. The books form a limited edition and are not available for sale; however, in view of Tam's



CHRIS SAWERS (PEEBLES MUSEUM), PERS DIXON & TREVOR COWIE (PAS), SALLY MCCALLUM (PEEBLES MUSEUM), JIM NESS & DAVID DRURY (BIGGAR ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP)

Trevor Cowie said on behalf of the Society: "By depositing these volumes in the Museum, we are marking the archaeological achievements of Tam Ward, who was a pioneer of archaeology in Clydesdale and Peeblesshire."

Accepting the gift, Peebles Museum Curator Chris Sawers said: "What fantastic publications these are; full of brilliant detail representing a wealth of knowledge, and a wonderful record of Tam and other people's work."

In 2022 the Scottish archaeological community was saddened to hear of the death of one of its most colourful characters - Tam Ward MBE. First and foremost, Tam's name will forever be associated with Clydesdale, where he was the doyen of the Biggar Archaeology Group. Building up a loyal band of members, he undertook a wide range of survey and excavation projects in Lanarkshire - all the while promoting and inspiring an interest in archaeology to young and old alike. However, his activities extended across the old county boundary, for he was also the founding father of the Peeblesshire Archaeological Society (PAS). In the mid-1990s, Tam brought his local knowledge and infectious enthusiasm

close connections with the society, PAS was delighted to accept Biggar Archaeology Group's offer of a set, which is now deposited with Peebles Library. There the volumes will be accessible not just to PAS members but to anyone interested in researching Tweeddale's past in years to come.

Jim Ness, of Biggar Archaeology Group, said: "When Tam Ward died, he left behind a fantastic legacy of archaeological finds and research. We felt that this was a fitting tribute to him, because, despite having published some 92 reports online, none of them were published in print. This was a way of achieving both a memorial for Tam and getting his work out there for the wider public."

Note: the various reports brought together in the set of printed volumes are freely available as pdf files from the Biggar Archaeology Group website: <https://biggararchaeology.org.uk/> ■

Photographs (except of Tam Ward) by Colin McLean.
Versions of this article appeared in the local press.

TAMWARD MBE, AT A BIGGAR ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP EVENT 📷 BAG



THE SIX VOLUMES OF TAM WARD'S REPORTS



Scotland's Top Archaeological Discoveries of 2025: How Science is Rewriting Our Past

James Garry

Archaeology is often imagined as a slow and painstaking discipline, built around excavation, careful recording and cautious interpretation. Yet a series of Scottish discoveries highlighted in 2025 demonstrates how profoundly the field has been reshaped by modern science. Increasingly, archaeology operates not only in trenches and archives, but in laboratories, through chemical analysis, geophysics and digital modelling.

Many of the year's most significant findings are brought together through Dig It!, the public archaeology initiative coordinated by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. As the society's director, Simon Gilmour, has noted, the programme brings together professional research, community excavation and scientific analysis to show how new evidence and new techniques are transforming what we know about the past.

These discoveries span the breadth of Scotland, from the crannog islands of the Outer Hebrides to the borderlands near Horndean, underscoring the country's rich, layered archaeological heritage. Across projects spanning more than five millennia of human history, a consistent pattern emerges: it is not simply what has been found that matters, but how those finds are being analysed.

Rethinking Neolithic life on the water

This shift is particularly clear in recent work on Neolithic crannogs (artificial islands built in lochs) in the Outer Hebrides. Sites such as Eilean Dòmhnuaill on

North Uist were long assumed to date largely to the Iron Age. New dating evidence, however, places their construction much earlier, between around 4100 and 2500 BC.



CRANNOG ON LOCH LEATHAN © PATRICK MACKIE, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Key to this reinterpretation has been lipid residue analysis, a technique that identifies ancient fats absorbed into pottery during use. Analysis of vessels recovered from crannog sites has produced striking results. Rather than the dairy-based residues typical of everyday Neolithic settlements elsewhere in Britain, the pots show evidence of substantial meat and fish processing.

These chemical signatures suggest that the crannogs were not domestic spaces, but places of periodic gathering. The extraordinary consistency of pottery styles over many centuries reinforces this interpretation, pointing to long-lived traditions and shared symbolic practices. Without laboratory analysis, these patterns of social behaviour would remain largely invisible.

Heat, water and Bronze Age engineering

The growing importance of environmental and materials science is also evident in Bronze Age research in Shetland. At Gletness, near Nesting, excavation has revealed a well-preserved burnt mound alongside what appears to be a rare corbelled underground well.



EILEAN DOMHNUILL CRANNOG © JAMES GARRY



Burnt mounds (accumulations of fire-cracked stone associated with water heating) are common across Britain and Ireland, but their precise function remains debated. What sets Gletness apart is the survival of associated structural features and waterlogged deposits. Scientific analysis of sediments from the well has the potential to reveal pollen, plant remains or artefacts that shed light on how heat and water were managed in a challenging, largely treeless environment.

This work also highlights how volunteer-led archaeology, when supported by professional frameworks and laboratory analysis, is now producing findings of national and international importance.

Forensic approaches to Roman warfare

Scientific techniques have also helped resolve long-standing historical debates. At Burnswark Hillfort in

Dumfries and Galloway, archaeologists have revisited the question of whether the site was besieged by Roman forces in the mid-2nd century AD, or merely used for military training.

Geophysical survey has revealed dense internal settlement, indicating that the fort was heavily occupied at the time of Roman activity. In parallel, detailed spatial analysis of lead sling bullets recovered from around the site shows concentrations and trajectories consistent with a coordinated assault focused on the fort's entrances.

This form of battlefield archaeology draws on methods more commonly associated with forensic science and military engineering. Combined with digital modelling, it allows researchers to reconstruct events that were previously a matter of inference rather than evidence.





THE FORTROSE ELFSHOT AMULET GROAM HOUSE MUSEUM

Recovering medieval rural landscapes

The same interdisciplinary approach is reshaping understanding of later periods. Near Horndean in the Scottish Borders, the Uncovering the Tweed project has investigated a deserted medieval settlement dating to around 800 years ago. Excavation and analysis of human remains, ceramics and environmental evidence are contributing to a much fuller picture of rural life in the medieval Lowlands.

In regions where large-scale development-led archaeology is relatively rare, such projects demonstrate how targeted investigation and scientific analysis can recover fragile histories that might otherwise be lost.

Belief, illness and material culture

Not all discoveries of 2025 relate to settlement or subsistence. One of the most intriguing finds was a small silver amulet from the Black Isle, identified through the Treasure Trove process. Known historically as an “elfshot”, such objects were believed to protect against illness thought to be caused by supernatural forces.

While the belief itself lies outside scientific explanation, the artefact can be studied through metallurgical analysis, wear patterns and archaeological context. These approaches allow researchers to situate supernatural belief within everyday practices of health and protection, offering insight into how past societies understood risk, illness and causation.

Why this matters now

Taken together, these discoveries show how

archaeology has become an increasingly interdisciplinary science. Chemistry, geophysics, environmental analysis and digital modelling are no longer supplementary tools; they are central to interpretation.

This shift is particularly significant at a time when climate change and development pressures are exposing and threatening archaeological sites at an unprecedented rate. The ability to extract detailed information quickly and, where possible, non-invasively is reshaping what can be known, recorded and preserved.

The Scottish discoveries highlighted in 2025 demonstrate that some of the most transformative advances in archaeology may not come from new excavations alone, but from new ways of reading the evidence already in the ground.

As Dr Simon Gilmour, Director of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, reflected: “This year’s top discoveries collated by our Dig It! project bring to light human stories from Scotland’s past across five millennia; from cuisine and conflict to past beliefs and worldviews. I am particularly pleased to see how the public have played a part in many of these discoveries, whether by volunteering at an excavation or reporting their metal detecting finds to the Treasure Trove Unit. This is just a window into the range of exciting work that took place this year.”

It is this combination (scientific rigour meeting public participation) that marks a new chapter in how Scotland’s past is being uncovered, understood and shared. ■

Treasure Trove from Peeblesshire and Beyond

George Prew-Stell & Antony Lee

Welcome to the new year Treasure Trove update for 2025! The Treasure Trove Unit records many thousands of finds from across Scotland every year, and, with the rich archaeological heritage of Peeblesshire and surrounding areas of the Scottish Borders and Lothians, fascinating finds local to readers of this newsletter are never far from our desks. In this update, we highlight some of the most interesting of these, from a Bronze Age hoard, Roman Iron Age chariot and weapon fittings, to a Medieval heraldic pendant.

Bronze Age Assemblage, Howgate (TT33/24)

The earliest objects in this update are an assemblage of three tools from the Early Bronze Age, c.1700-1500BCE, the Arreton period (with thanks to Dr Matthew Knight for identifying the objects). The assemblage includes two flanged axeheads and one spearhead (broken into two parts in modern times), all in copper alloy. One of the axeheads, pictured, features visible decoration in the form of incised radiating lines with patches of hatching at alternating points between, bordered by a column of herringbone pattern at each flaring edge.



BRONZE AGE ASSEMBLAGE, HOWGATE

These artefacts were found together in a field near Howgate, not near any known Bronze Age sites, and the metal detectorist who found them duly got in touch with the Unit and helped with an emergency excavation. This confirmed that there were no other artefacts associated with this assemblage, or any reconstructable context for their deposition.

What was identified, however, was a clear comparison with the Lochwinnoch Hoard, a hoard of two Arreton-



BRONZE AGE ASSEMBLAGE, HOWGATE

period axeheads and one dagger found together in Renfrewshire (Scott 1953). Here, the items were considered as potentially representing the effects of a single fighter, deposited together perhaps as a gift or votive. Did our Howgate assemblage have a similar history? However they ended up in the ground, they are beautiful examples of their type, and they have found a new home at National Museums Scotland.

Roman Iron Age chariot linch pin, Stobo (TT277/22)

Our next find is a copper alloy and iron linch pin dating to between c.100BC and AD100. One vase-shaped terminal survives at the end of the iron shank, but a further terminal at the opposite end is sadly lost. Linch pins were an essential technology in attaching the moving wheels to the static axles of wheeled vehicles. Though often firmly associated with Iron Age chariots, 'chariot' is an evocative term. We must be careful in immediately imagining dramatic images of woad-



ROMAN LINCH PIN, STOBO

painted British warriors swooping across the landscape in their war chariots, such as famously described by Caesar. A range of other wheeled vehicles of varying sizes and functions also required similar technological solutions and were likely to be far more common sights trundling along local roads and tracks.

The findspot of the linch pin is significant. It was located amongst the complex of forts and camps around the confluence of the Lyne Water and the River Tweed. Although the linch pin cannot be sufficiently closely

dated to connect it to any particular military installation or phase of activity, it can be seen to overlap with 1st Century AD activity at the forts. However, whether it represents native activity in the area prior to the arrival of Rome or interactions during the life of the forts must remain speculative. It may even be the case that it represents the use of wheeled vehicles by the Roman army.

Linch pins are known from across England, though with notable concentrations in Yorkshire. Closer to home, examples are known from Newstead and Cockburnspath in the Scottish Borders, and at Traprain law in East Lothian.

Roman Iron Age sword hilt guard, Ednam (TT207/23)

Our third find sees us staying in the Roman Iron Age, and is a cast copper alloy sword hilt guard dating to the late 1st Century AD. The guard would have formed part of a suite of handle fittings for a sword and sat at the top of the blade, below the handle itself. The guard is decorated with moulded trumpet and foliate decoration which would have flared downwards towards the blade when in use.

Hilt guards such as this are an indigenous British form, and many are known across northern England



and southern Scotland. The swords used north of the River Humber tend to be shorter and thinner overall than those used in the south of England, and the size of this hilt matches other northern types. Research by Fraser Hunter (2016) into Iron Age swords suggests that Scottish finds tend to be concentrated in the eastern Scottish Borders, Dumfriesshire and Perthshire.

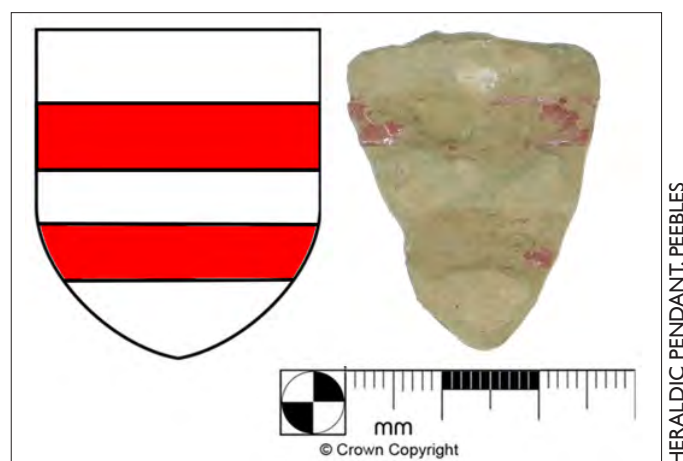
Guards are the most common parts of Iron Age swords that are found, and this suggests that they may have been deliberately dismantled prior to deposition. The findspot of this hilt guard is not immediately connected with any other known Roman Iron Age activity, but is feasibly within the broader hinterland of Ednam Hillfort and might relate to activity there. However, despite their native origins, Iron Age sword fittings are not

generally found on Iron Age sites. Perhaps surprisingly, a majority of contextualised finds actually come from Roman military sites. Do they represent native presence in the Roman army, the adoption of local artistic and weaponry styles by Roman military personnel, or even weaponry confiscated from the local population?

Heraldic Pendant, Peebles (TT276/22)

Finally, we have a heraldic harness pendant dating to the Late Medieval period, c.1200-1400CE, found just outside Peebles itself. This would have formed part of a horse's trappings, hanging from the harness under its head, neck, and chest. The pendant takes the form of a heater shield, with one face bearing visible decoration in the form of a heraldic device in enamel. The device consists of two horizontal red enamel lines on a field which, based on a small section of surviving metal, was likely silver, meaning this can probably be blazoned: 'Argent, two bars gules'.

This device probably identifies the mount with the FitzMartin, or just Martin, family. The Martins were



an England and Wales-based family of Norman descent who are known to have campaigned in Scotland on multiple occasions throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In particular, their heraldry is attested representing William Martin in the Falkirk Roll, a collection of the arms of the nobles who fought in the Battle of Falkirk on 22nd July 1298. As is often the way with heraldry, this does not necessarily mean that the pendant fell from the horse of William Martin or any direct member of the Martin family, as these pendants were used to distinguish the servants and agents of these families as well as their direct members, but it remains a wonderfully tangible and reconstructable link to Scotland's Medieval past. ■

All images © NMS

References:

Hunter, F. 2016. Iron Age swords and Roman soldiers in conquest-period Britain. *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies*, 17: 11-21.

Scott, J. 1953. A Hoard of Bronze Weapons from Gavel Moss Farm, Near Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 85: 134-138.

Dr George Prew-Stell and Antony Lee are Treasure Trove Officers in the Department of Scottish History & Archaeology at National Museums Scotland

Moments in Time and Imperial Power

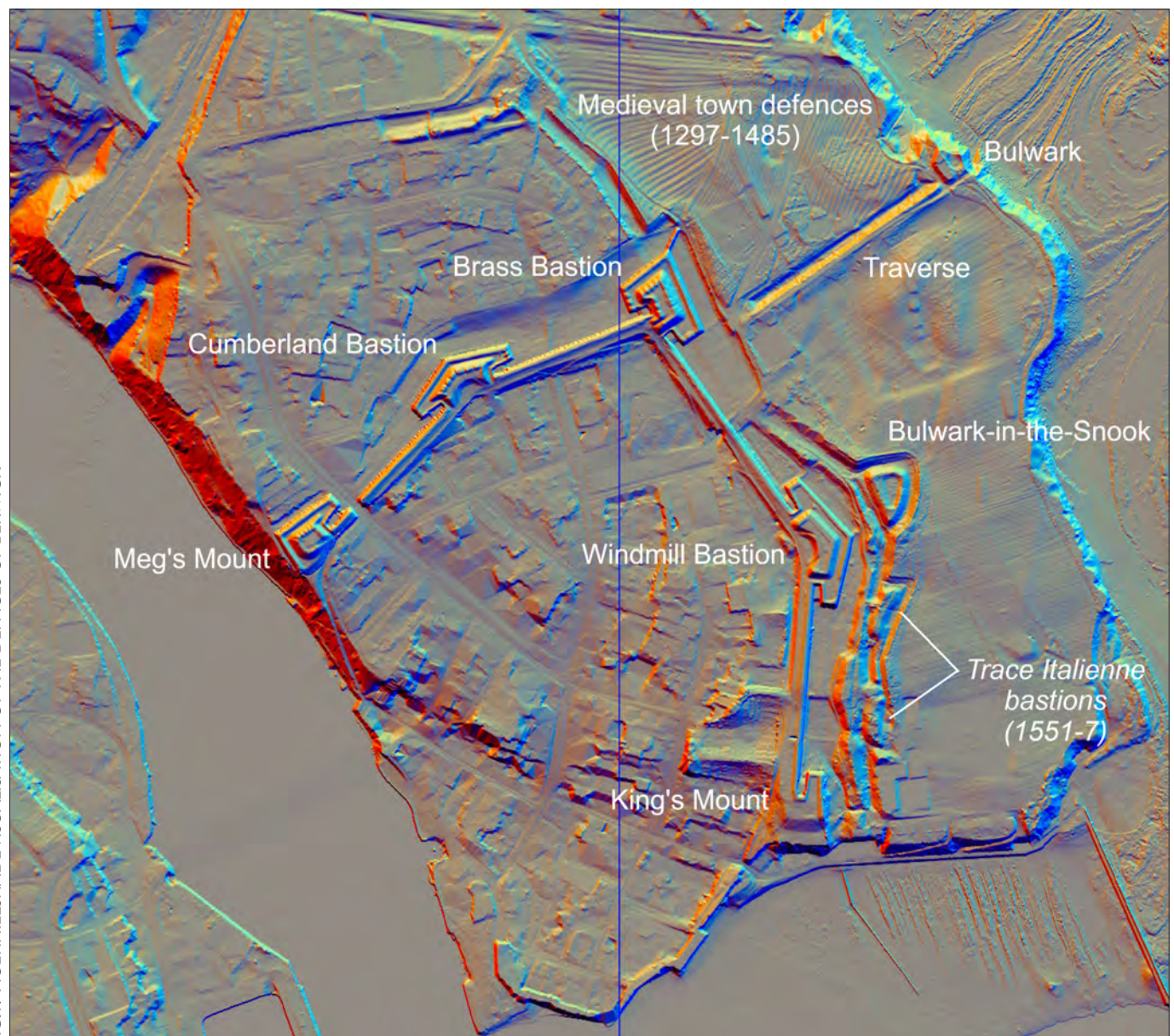
Strat Halliday

In all the years I have spent surveying in the Border counties, I have visited Berwick on numerous occasions, but until recently had never walked the massive town defences. One of the best-preserved artillery fortifications to be found anywhere in Britain, there was never quite enough time to get all the way round the walls. So last year I made the effort and spent a happy afternoon inspecting the defences, not realising that within a few months I would be standing on equally spectacular defences halfway across the globe.

In their last incarnation, initiated in 1558, Berwick's defences are truly spectacular. When you stand at the foot of the walls they tower over your head, their lines broken by massive bastions designed to project the artillery fire out across the ditches and provide enfilading fire against would be assault parties who made it to the foot of the wall. But these are only the most recent of a series of defensive schemes, elements of which can be traced out in ruined walls and earthworks, reflecting a

contested history since 1296, before irrevocably falling to English control in 1482. This is post-medieval military architecture at its finest, stepping stones in the evolution of a science, where military theory, tactics and practice across Europe developed from the 16th century hand in hand with ever more powerful artillery. The main sector where the earlier medieval defences (1297-1485) can be seen extends north-west from the Brass Bastion at the north corner of the artillery fortifications, but part of the town ditch can also be traced in front of the walls on the east, including the projecting earthwork known as Bulwark-in-the-Snook. Immediately south of the latter fragments can be seen of two bastions of a roughly square *trace Italienne* fort that overlay the medieval defences but was replaced in 1558.

While the fortifications of Berwick were designed to hold the town against the Scots, albeit in a reduced extent from the earlier defences, many other artillery forts were built purely as offensive and defensive military emplacements, such as the English civil war siegeworks around Newark, whose remains Stuart Piggott suggested probably influenced the first antiquaries in attributing a military function to any earthwork they encountered. This plays out across the Borders in the way so many of

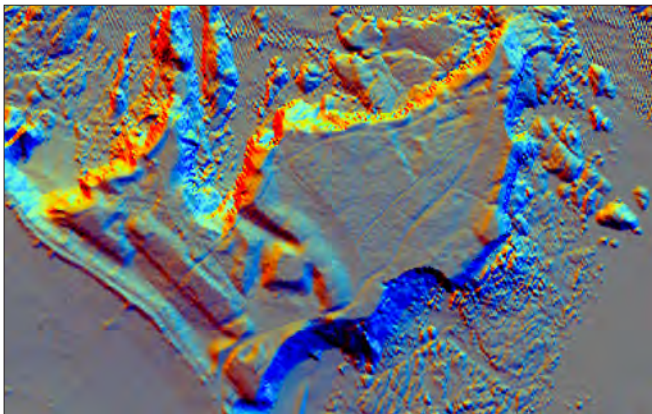


our late Iron Age settlements are annotated Fort on early Ordnance Survey maps, but we are also blessed with several fine examples of artillery fortifications, such as those at Eyemouth and Dunglass.

Construction on the Eyemouth fort (Id: 60188) was initiated by the English in 1547 under the direction of Sir Richard Lee, surveyor of the king's works in the North. This was the second stage in the Rough Wooing as it was coined by Sir Walter Scott, a turbulent episode in Anglo-Scottish history that in 1544 spawned a dramatic raid on Edinburgh by a seaborne army under the command of the Earl of Hertford, which then withdrew burning and looting through the Borders. In this second stage a chain of fortresses was established by the English on the lines of communication through the Borders into eastern Scotland. Eyemouth was an important port midway between Berwick and Dunbar, a staging post from which to exercise local control and support their main stronghold at Haddington in East Lothian. Lee adapted what is known as a *trace Italienne* design, which employs star-shaped bastions to defend the ramparts. In this case his solution was a massive earthen rampart across the neck of the promontory with a single bastion projecting from its centre, as can be seen in the multihillshade LiDAR visualisation. In defensive terms it is a poor design, leaving the north-western flank dangerously exposed to fire from rocky promontories further to the west-north-west. Lee's solution was merely to turn the rampart along the north-west lip of the promontory, although the earthen rampart drawn across the promontory known as the Corn Fort (Id: 60147) perhaps indicates that it was defended by an outlying piquet. Excavations by David Caldwell and

by Thirlestane Castle (Id: 55900). The Dunglass fort appears to be a rectangular enclosure measuring some 60m by 40m overall, with an asymmetric arrangement of bastions at its corners, although according to the entry in the *East Lothian County Inventory*, in a description drawn up on 27th June 1913, probably by J. G Callander, the interior has been dug out and levelled for a bowling green. A rectangular mound piled up along its east-north-east side is presumably the upcast, which served to elevate the hexagonal gazebo built at the northern corner in 1718. The bastion here and those at the eastern and southern angles seem to have been to the same design, although considerable portions of the last two have fallen victim to erosion along the side of the Dean, but the western is an altogether more substantial structure, presumably reflecting a perceived weakness in the strength of the position. The fort would

FIG 2: EYEMOUTH



Gordon Ewart 1980-88 have shown that Lee's defences were slighted on the surrender of the fort in 1550 and have survived almost untouched since.

While Eyemouth adapted the natural strength of a cliff-girt promontory, the fort at Dunglass (Id: 58903) occupied a local eminence on the west side of Dunglass Dean, a deep ravine that was traditionally a major barrier to overland traffic from Berwick to the Lothian Plain. The Romans opted for the inland route up Lauderdale and over the Lammermuirs, or at least that is the route they chose for Dere Street, which continued to be a preferred route throughout the Middle Ages and later. Indeed, at the same time that the English constructed their chain of coastal forts northwards from Berwick they also built another at Lauder (Id: 343072) on the site now occupied

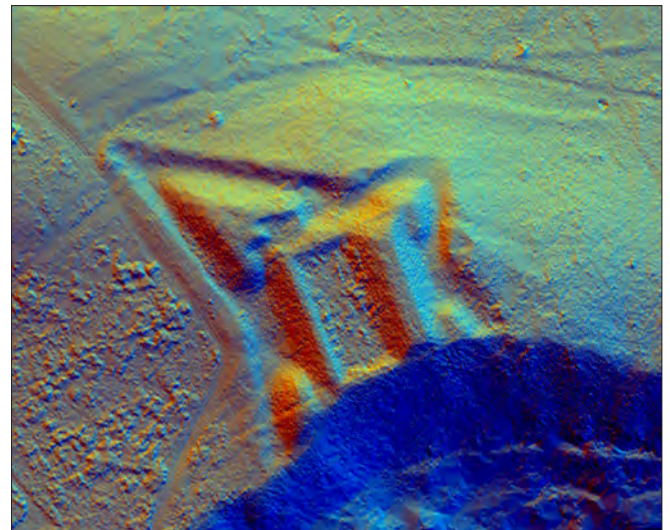


FIG 3: DUNGGLASS FORT

certainly have dominated its surroundings, occupying a key strategic and tactical position where any traffic passing this way was funnelled into a relatively narrow corridor no more than 1km wide between the fort and the sea. Guarding access to the eastern end of the Lothian Plain, no one was going to pass this way unobserved. If this was a prehistoric fort, we would also talk about its strategic position and the way it controlled the routeway, conveniently forgetting that Dunglass affords its control through the invention of gunpowder and a garrison of professional troops.

Edinburgh Castle blocked further English penetration westwards, and the young Mary Queen of Scots was kept safe, first in Stirling Castle and then Dumbarton, before taking ship to France in August 1548. Her betrothal to the Dauphin came with French guarantees of active support against their aggressive English neighbour. Thus it was that superior French resources were brought to bear, the English garrisons were abandoned and this particular episode was drawn to a close by treaties, firstly in March 1550 between England and France, and secondly in June 1551 between England and Scotland.

Having had more than 6000 men under arms in Scotland in 1549, France employed similar tactical solutions to the English, and after 1550 continued to maintain a series of garrisons. Reviewing their dispositions led in 1555 to the building of a new fort on the island of Inchkeith in the Firth of Forth opposite

Leith and in 1557 to the reoccupation of Eyemouth. The building accounts survive and are evidenced on the ground by a forework lying in front of the earlier defences, comprising a single rampart with arrow-shaped bastions at either end, the latter on the north-west dealing with the tactical weakness of Lee's scheme. The bastions, at least, seem to have been clad in stone, and though now heavily eroded at the cliff-edges on either side of the promontory can be discerned on the Lidar visualisations. Implicitly threatening Berwick, this fort was not occupied for long before its defences were dismantled in the summer of 1559 in agreement with the English.

Now readers of this newsletter will remember that there is a difference of opinion in my household around the concept of a holiday. Normal people, I am told, go on a holiday to stop doing what they usually do and do something else, like sit on a beach. But, driving through the French countryside, what normal person's curiosity would not be aroused by a sign announcing a local tourist attraction, Fort Médoc. After all, we were looking for somewhere to have a picnic, and it was just unfortunate that the sign did not announce quite how far away this attraction was, and that a French builder had no intention of moving his lorry blocking the road for our convenience. So, with time marching and tension rising, we arrived, and *ooh la la*,

a magnificent gateway into a late 17th century fort. And not any old fort, but one that had been designated as an UNESCO World Heritage site. At many sites such designations have had a detrimental impact on their conservation, but that was certainly not the case here, as we shared the fort with three or four other families. It was designed by Sébastien Le Prestre, Marquis de Vauban (1633-1707), who was one of the most noted military engineers and theorists in Europe of his age, serving Louis XIV (1638-1715), the Sun King, for most of his career. Fort Médoc was the western anchor of a



FIG.5: LA PORTE ROYALE, FORT MEDOC

scheme to defend the estuary of the Gironde and the seaward approaches to Bordeaux, which was a key port of entry to France. Conceived in conjunction with Fort



FIG.4: FORT MEDOC

Pâté on an island midstream, and Citadelle de Blaye on the east bank, construction began in 1689. Whereas the walls of Citadelle de Blaye are intact, towering above the visitor's head like Berwick, Fort Médoc has had a more chequered history of care and maintenance, its defensive role on the river largely defunct by the late 18th century, but only decommissioned as a military establishment in 1916, and acquired by the municipality of Cussac in 1930. Although dating from over a century after Berwick and Eyemouth, the plan reveals all the same sorts of features, with thick ramparts and massive bastions behind broad wet ditches. Built on a trapezoidal plan enclosing some 2 hectares, the principal entrance, *La Porte Royale*, was on the south-west, protected by a forework. Here the surviving architecture preserves the grandeur of the original scheme, which is otherwise largely lost beneath the grass and trees.

Elsewhere Vauban designed such fortifications to create strongpoints in defence of French conquests, much as Berwick had performed in the rationalisation of the border between England and Scotland a hundred years before, but European countries also used such fortifications to project their power across the globe. Thus it was that the itinerary of a holiday in Sri Lanka took us to yet another fortification designed around these same principles, but some 6000 miles away in the tropics. Galle on the island's south coast was first fortified in 1588 by the Portugese, though the bay has a much longer history as a trading port. In the competing interests of imperial powers, the Dutch captured the fort in 1640, eventually handing it over to the British in 1796. Each modified and adapted the defences, which not only comprise a massive tiered defence across the neck of the promontory on the north, with two bastions at the angles flanking a much larger bastion in the centre, but a continuous walled circuit with smaller bastions

rising from the rocks along the shore. None of the original canons remain, but replicas reflect this history, including at least one British canon manufactured in the Caron Ironworks in 1795.

Galle, too, is a World Heritage Site, inscribed for 'an urban ensemble which illustrates the interaction of European architecture and South Asian traditions from the 16th to the 19th centuries'. And yet Galle is



FIG.6: CITADELLE DE BLAYE

also associated with violence and oppression against the Sinhalese people. Fortifications such as this are



FIG.7: THE DEFENCES AT GALLE



Image © 2025 Maxar Technologies

FIG 8: GALLE

FIG.9: REPLICAT AT GALLE OF A BRITISH CANON



undeniably military monuments that chart the territorial ambitions of imperial European powers across the globe. From the Scottish border to the furthest corners of the world these are monuments of conquest, as often coupled with the submission of native peoples rather than protection against the predation of other imperial powers. They are interesting archaeological manifestations of moments in time, but hardly expressions of local culture. ■

Sources

Site leaflets and signage coupled with Wikipedia entries provide the sources for France and Sri Lanka, while the Scottish dimension is drawn from: Michael Lynch (1991) *Scotland A New History*. London: Pimlico; David Caldwell (1981) *Guns in Scotland: The manufacture and use of guns and their influence on warfare from the fourteenth century to c.1625* (vols 1 & 2), PhD University of Edinburgh; and David Caldwell

and Gordon Ewart (1997) *Excavations at Eyemouth, Berwickshire, in a mid 16th-century trace Italienne fort*, *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 31:1, 61-119; and Berwick-upon-Tweed Castle and Ramparts <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/berwick-upon-tweed-castle-and-ramparts/history/>. Trove Id numbers are provided for the Scottish examples.

Illustrations

Fig.1 Multihillshade visualisation of the defences of Berwick, clearly revealing the core defences of the 1558 scheme with its curtain and bastions, and a traverse blocking access around the eastern flank. (Defra data provided under Open Government Licence)

Fig.2 Multihillshade visualisation of the Eyemouth fortifications, with the English defences on the right and the French defences on the left, the former with a single bastion projecting from the rampart, the latter with arrow-shaped bastions on the cliff-edges on the north-west and south-east. (Defra data provided under Open Government Licence)

Fig.3 Multihillshade visualisation of the Dunglass fort, revealing its asymmetric footprint and the eroded bastions on the lip of Dunglass Dean. (Scottish Remote Sensing data)

Fig.4 Google Earth image of Fort Médoc revealing its trapezoidal footprint, with large bastions at each corner and a forework protecting the principal entrance, La Porte Royale, on the south-west (3-2015).

Fig.5 La Porte Royale, with the sun god symbol of Louis XIV above, defended by inner and outer gates, a portcullis lowered from within the guardhouse above, and gun loops along the inner passage. (SH)

Fig.6 Google Earth image of Citadelle de Blaye

Fig.7 Looking along the lower tier of the defences on the neck towards the central Moon Bastion, with the clock tower erected in 1883 to its rear. (SH)

Fig.8 Google Earth image of Galle, Sri Lanka.

Fig.9 A replica at Galle of a British canon manufactured at the Carron Ironworks. (SH)

Fig.10 Sharp as a pin; the characteristic sharp battered angle of one of the seaward bastions. (SH)

FIG.10: SEAWARD BASTION AT GALLE



February Lecture

Richard Welander

This month's speaker is one of our own. A PAS member for many years and now an independent researcher, Strat Halliday was a field investigator with



STRAT HALLIDAY

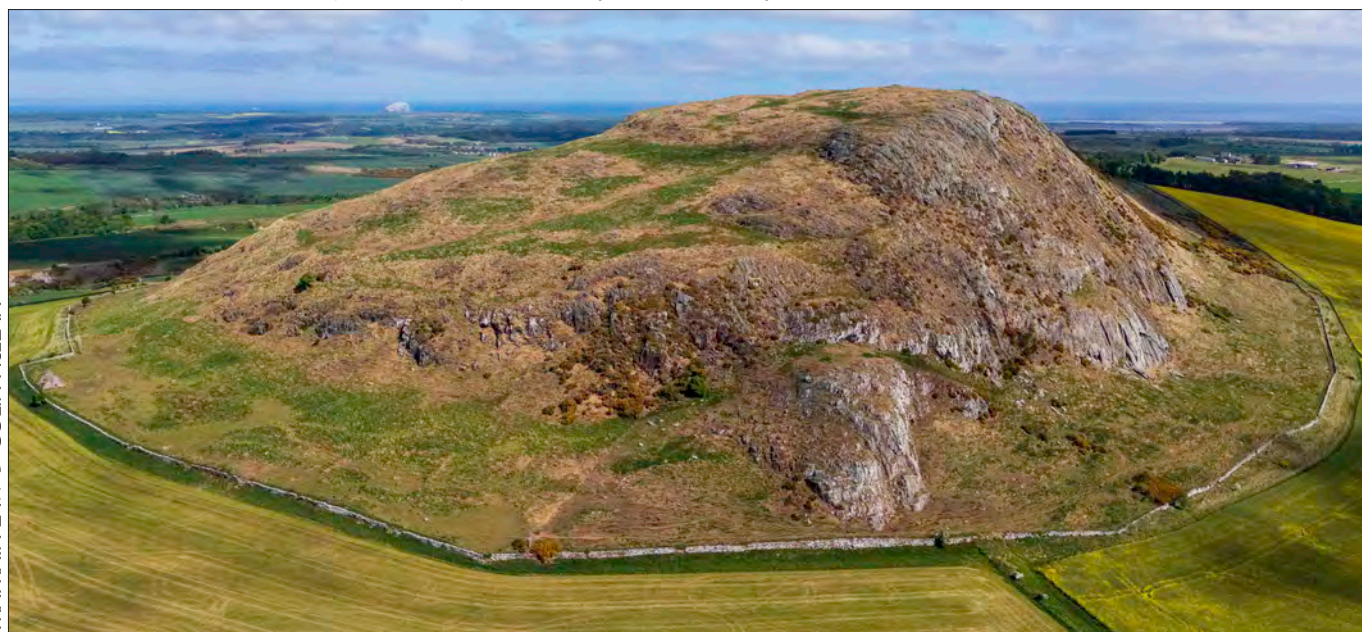
the former Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) for nearly 40

years. An internationally recognised expert on the late prehistory of Scotland, he was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland, an extraordinary online database containing the location and detailed records of over 4000 hillforts.

In his talk 'Hillforts, Settlements and Ancient Geography', Strat will explain that his interest in hillforts is not in the forts per se, but in what they can tell us more broadly about settlements in the late Roman Iron Age.

Citing the influence and 'positive gloss' that popular sources like 'What did the Romans do for us?' still have, 'where the Romans occupy the centre of the stage and the bit parts are handed out to the indigenous peoples', Strat will explore Scotland's ancient geography looking at hillfort distribution, size, topography, land use, dating and occupation and arguing that, counter to the assertion that 'history is written by the victors', the evidence now supports a very different narrative! Controversial?

Strat will be speaking at our next meeting on Thursday February 19th. As usual we'll be gathering at the St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre in Rosetta Road, Peebles and the talk will start at 7.30 pm. We hope to see you there. ■



TRAPRAIN LAW

EVENTS

PAS Lectures: Unless otherwise indicated, all lectures start at 7.30pm, and are held in St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre, Rosetta Road, Peebles.

February 19th 2026: Hillforts, Settlements & Ancient Geography – Strat Halliday

March 19th 2026: Recent Work on Lindisfarne: New Light on a Central British Monastery – Professor David Petts, University of Durham

April 16th 2026: Annual General Meeting & Members' Evening.

Other Events: The Stone of Destiny: Rethinking Medieval Kingship, Heritage and Education Perth Art Gallery March 14th 2026, 9:00am - 6:00pm. £25 (£22.50 for Historic Scotland members). Booking essential. Symposium to mark the display of the Stone of Scone in Perth Museum. Details and booking [here](#).

Join PAS

If you're not yet a member of the Society, then do join us: it costs only £25 pa (£35 for couples).

- We have monthly lectures from September until March
- We organise site visits and outings
- We run local projects and digs
- We produce this newsletter
- And we're a friendly bunch!

To join, visit our web site at www.peeblesarchsoc.org.uk and go to the Membership page.

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