



December 2022 Newsletter



Welcome to this festive edition of your PAS newsletter! This month we have a bumper issue featuring an article from Strat Halliday. We hope you have a wonderful Christmas. We look forward to seeing you all in 2023!

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1) Previous lecture: Dr James O'Driscoll, Chevaux de Frise of the Irish and British Isles (via Zoom)

On **Thursday 17 November** we welcomed [Dr James O'Driscoll](#) from [Aberdeen University](#) to speak to us about 'Chevaux de Frise in Britain and Ireland', the enigmatic setting of stones or wooden stakes placed outside the walls of ancient



Chevaux de Frise of the Irish and British Isles (courtesy of Dr James O'Driscoll)

fortifications. We hope, like us, you were captivated by James' engrossing insight in to this fascinating topic.

Members will be delighted to know that James' talk was recorded and is now available to view on the Vimeo website.

Simply click on <https://vimeo.com/775050763> and enter the password [Cademuir](#) when prompted to do so. Please note the capital 'C' in the password. We are grateful to James for granting us permission and to Neil Crawford and Stephen Scott for recording, editing and uploading the talk.



2) Next lecture: Dr John Reid, *Trimontium – the face of Roman Scotland*

Tuesday 13 December will mark the occasion of the annual joint meeting of the [Tweeddale Society](#) and the [Peeblesshire Archaeological Society](#). This year our invited guest lecturer is [Dr John Reid](#) who will be speaking on the topic of '[Trimontium - the face of Roman Scotland](#)'.

The Roman fort at Newstead, which may have been founded in AD 80 by Agricola himself, was a major forward base of the Roman army for nearly a hundred years. Our understanding of the life and times of the fort and how its inhabitants interacted with local peoples has evolved considerably over the last century.



Artist's impression of the major Roman fort complex at Trimontium. The site is located to the east of Melrose near the present-day village of Newstead and in view of the three Eildon Hills which gave it its Latin name (© Trimontium Trust)

The redevelopment of the Trimontium Museum in Melrose has given us the opportunity to reinvestigate and reframe the story first told by local solicitor James Curle following his landmark excavations between 1905 and 1910. New display and interpretation techniques coupled with modern archaeological methods bring to life a turbulent period that saw the clash of two very different cultures.

Dr Reid is a recently retired NHS Consultant with a specialist interest in cardiothoracic diseases and was a national expert in the diagnosis of pulmonary embolism. He also has a specialist interest in the activities of the Roman Army in Scotland and has been chair of the Trimontium Trust for over quarter of a century.



Venue: Eastgate Theatre, Peebles

Date & Time: Tuesday 13 December. The lecture will start at 7.30pm.

Tickets: obtainable from Eastgate Box Office (tel. 01721 725777) or online (see www.eastgatearts.com)



Dr John Reid (© Trimontium Trust)

3) A Peeblesshire Puzzle: Antiquaries, Roman Camps and LiDAR – Strat Halliday

Working with the antiquarian record poses numerous challenges and often ends in frustration. The tantalising glimpses of long-lost monuments remain lost, and as often as not their true character is as obscure as their location. Just occasionally, however, a ray of light falls on some minor detail, and the observations of an antiquary who is almost as remote to us today as the object of their interest falls neatly into place. In what follows the glimpse is of a monument in Peeblesshire and the ray of light is provided by the newly available Lidar datasets. It is left to the reader to judge whether we can now close the case on this particular lost monument.

In 1726 Alexander Gordon recorded in the *Itinerarium Septentrionale* his observations and opinions of the monuments he encountered on the road to the Roman fort at Lyne. Like so many antiquaries, his arguments often seem to us confused, but the observations that underpin them nevertheless contain kernels of truth about monuments that were considerably better preserved in his day than they are now, some 300 years later. Nor was he a novice, having gained an entrée into antiquarian circles under the wing of Sir John Clerk of Penicuik (Macdonald 1934, 75-7). Thus, he was well versed in the writings of other antiquaries, which with his own fieldwork had given him a working classification in which Roman camps were ‘always square, not round’. This basic distinction is what then shaped the introductory paragraph to Chapter XIII, entitled ‘*Of other Roman Encampments and Stations in Scotland ...*’:



‘About 17 Miles from *Edinburgh* in the County of Twedale, near a Village called *Romana*, upon the Water of Lyne, are to be seen the Vestiges of two square *Roman* Encampments; one of these is about a Mile North-west from *Romana*, near the Dwelling House of Mr *Christy* of *Newhall*, and consists only of a single Ditch and Rampart, in Form of a *Parallelogram*; its dimensions and Area are much the same with *Ardoch* Fort in *Strathallan*; but this is in places so flat and level, that I have not thought it necessary to exhibit its Draught.’ (Gordon 1726, 114).

The other, ‘about 2 or 3 Miles to the South-eastward of *Romana*’, is of course the Antonine fort at Lyne. A later doyen of Roman studies, Sir George Macdonald, was fairly uncompromising in his assessment of *Itinerarium Septentrionale*: ‘The drawings it contains are unreliable and the map poor. But the full, if not always accurate, descriptions give the book a certain value, and we cannot afford to neglect it.’ (1934, 76).¹ This is only too clear in relation to Gordon’s placing of Lyne and his directions from the ‘Village called ‘*Romana*’. Unfortunately, there is no documented village of *Romana*, rather it is a name associated with an estate (Buchan and Paton 1927, 4-5; 6-7; 10-28). The towns and houses in the neighbourhood are elaborated in the near contemporary description of the county prepared by Alexander Pennecuik, which lists from north-east to south-west ‘an Herds house called Blair-Bog [now The Whim],



Figure 1 Extract from William Edgar’s Map of Peeblesshire surveyed in 1741. (© National Library of Scotland)

¹ The commentary on the map is an enlargement of the text of the first edition (Macdonald 1911, 88).



and then *Romanno*, *Grange Over* and *Nether*, ...*Burns-Mill*, ...*Coldcoat* [now *Macbiehill*], ...*Plewland*, ...*Noble-house*, ...*Bogend*, ...*Halmire* ... Then follows *Romanno Deans*, *Romanno Mill* and the old House of *Romano*' (1715, 13-14). These are all places that can be identified and placed on *A new and correct map of the Shire of Peebles or Tweeddale* surveyed by William Edgar in 1741 (Fig. 1). Even allowing for the changes that had evidently taken place by the middle of the 18th century, William Roy's depiction of 1747-55, which adds *Romanno Mains* to the tally, reveals no places of any moment. All lay within the parish of *Newlands*, but again there is little evidence to suggest that the parish church was then the focus for a settlement that might pass muster as a village. Taking *Romanno House* as his reference point, the distance to *Lyne* is some 5 miles as the crow flies, or 5½ by road. If he meant *Newlands Kirk*, it shaves about a mile, but if it was *Romanno Grange* then it adds 3 miles. And of course, if '*Romana*' cannot be placed in relation to *Lyne*, then there is no way of even guessing where his '*Encampment*' a mile to the north-west lay.

If any of his readers thought to consult his map before attempting a visit, they would have been sorely disappointed, if not entirely lost. The map fully lives up to Macdonald's critique and is so poor that it defies interpolation into the framework of any of the later 18th-century maps, let alone the topography recorded in detail since the mid-19th century by the Ordnance Survey (OS). A mile north-west from *Romanno House* would have taken them not much further than *Paulswell* and *Spittalhaugh*, and there is certainly no house named *Newhall* in this quarter. If on the other hand it was *Romanno Grange*, the arc of their search might have taken them to *Whitfield*, to which *Newhall House* in *Midlothian* lies rather closer at hand, just beyond the county boundary some 2 miles to the north. This was a house that Gordon must have known quite well through his connection with Sir John Clerk, but '*Christy*' – the list of subscribers supplies the Christian name John – is not a name associated with it. *Newhall* had been acquired in 1647 by Alexander Pennecuik, but his son, also Alexander, preferred to live in *Romanno* and in 1703 *Newhall* was sold to David Forbes. Forbes' son, John, would help Alexander Pennecuik prepare his description of *Peeblesshire* (1715; 1815, v; 17-18).

Although we cannot place '*John Christy of Newhall*' at *Newhall House* in *Midlothian*, in 1705 a lawyer by the name of James Christie (1675-1749) bought another *Newhall*, near *Gifford* in what is now *East Lothian*, though his association with the house seems to have been short-lived and in 1714 he sold it to William, Lord Hay and Master John Hay (Rock 2012). Nevertheless, Rev Charles Rogers, tracing the



genealogy of the family, styled him James Christie of Newhall, Haddingtonshire (Rogers 1878, 11). Christie was a friend of Sir John Clerk of Pennicuik, though their surviving correspondence seems to have been more concerned with fishing than any antiquarian matters (Rock 2012). James Christie had two sons and three daughters, of whom the second son was named John, but, born some time after 1706 (d. 1789), he would seem to have been a little young to be the man in question. This Newhall House (Canmore id: 212358) has since been demolished, but the connections between it and a friend of Clerk on the one hand, and between Clerk and Gordon on the other, perhaps provides a thread in the latter's attribution of Newhall in Midlothian to Christy. By a curious coincidence a square earthwork appears on the Armstrongs' *Map of the three Lothians* (Armstrong and Armstrong 1773) nearby Newhall in East Lothian, lying just north of Longyester (c. NT 5553 6581), about 2½ miles east-south-east. No earthwork is known to the modern record at the position the map indicates.

Gordon, however, appears to have visited the square encampment that he is referring too, or at least that seems to be the implication of his brief description: 'but this is in places so flat and level, that I have not thought it necessary to exhibit its Draught' (1726, 114). Accordingly, whatever it was that led him to the spot, the possibility that he mistakenly substituted a location in Peeblesshire for one in East Lothian is remote indeed, though conceivably he was looking for the wrong square encampment in relation to the wrong Newhall in the wrong county. Possibly during his sojourn in Penicuik House he rode out asking locally after antiquities, but otherwise we can only guess that a local correspondent was involved in the discovery. At any rate, it seems unlikely that without assistance he should have chanced upon an already ploughed-down earthwork on his way to Lyne. The most likely local sources would have been Alexander Pennecuik or John Forbes, but Pennecuik had died in 1722 and it certainly does not appear in his description of Peeblesshire. This may not mean he was entirely ignorant of the earthwork, but his text tends to display a keener interest in the flora than ancient monuments. He makes only passing reference to Lyne fort – 'the remains of a large and formal Camp near half a Mile in Circuit, Strongly Fenced with dry and dowble [*sic*] Ditches especially on the hight above the Water' – and does not even attribute it to the Romans (Pennecuik 1715, 19).

In effect, the location of Gordon's second encampment was lost even as it was found. Nevertheless, some 50 years later Mostyn Armstrong seems to have had no



doubt where Gordon meant. Drawing up *A companion to the map of Peebles, or Tweeddale*, he wrote: 'there yet are faint vestiges of an encampment a little north of upper Whitefield, which Gordon calls a "*Roman Camp...*".' and cites the rest of Gordon's description (Armstrong 1775b, 59). That he chose not to depict it on the map (1775a) is probably an indication of how faint those vestiges were. So how did Armstrong resolve this location? And why should we accept that whatever he saw was one and the same as Gordon's encampment? This latter question seems to have guided the more recent survey of Peeblesshire conducted by the Royal Commission, whose investigators preferred to think that if Gordon's encampment was truly Roman, then it was more likely to have been somewhere along the line of the Roman road running along the eastern flank of the Pentlands (RCAHMS 1967, 33). Their instincts have been proved right in the sense that aerial photography since has located a fortlet at a crossing of the Lyne Water on Tocherknowe (Canmore id:72048), and marching camps at North Slipperfield (Canmore id: 144753) and Stonypath (Canmore id: 50251) near West Linton, and Spittal Farm (Canmore id: 50170) north-east of Carlops, this last to the north-west of Newhall and tentatively identified as the site of Gordon's discovery (Maxwell & Wilson 1987, 32-3). Not all the Roman marching camps, however, are on the line of the road, and in 1992 cropmarks revealed the northern angle and the adjoining sides of a camp at Kaimhouse Lodge (Canmore id: 81991). Occupying a terrace on the opposite side of the Lyne Water to Spittalhaugh, and according to Roy's depiction under extensive cultivation in the mid-18th century, this would surely make a better candidate than Spittal, albeit that Newhall lies over 4 miles to the north.

In 1967, however, the Royal Commission investigators not only rejected Armstrong's assertion that Gordon's encampment lay north of Upper Whitfield, but they seem to have been sceptical of the existence of any work of antiquity there. For though the introduction to *Peeblesshire* notes 'Slight traces of this work are said to have been visible in 1775, but they have disappeared since that date' (RCAHMS 1967, 33), there is no entry in the body of the *Inventory*. But here is the twist in the tale. The Lidar data that now covers this area very clearly shows the presence of a rectilinear earthwork (Figs 2-3) about 200m NW of where Upper Whitfield stood in the 18th and 19th centuries – it is now occupied by a house named Cleaves. The principal feature of this earthwork is a low and much spread bank at NT 17205 53339, set on the crest of the slope and flanked on the north-east by a linear hollow about 10m broad. This hollow can be traced in a gentle arc south-eastwards from the edge of an old quarry-pit. To the casual observer on the ground, this might be no more than an extension



of the quarrying activity, but after a distance of 65m the hollow peters out and the bank turns sharply south-west to drop down the slope. Barely perceptible on the ground, it is clearly visible in Lidar visualisations, extending under the stone dyke that now marks the top of the heavily improved field below and apparently continuing for

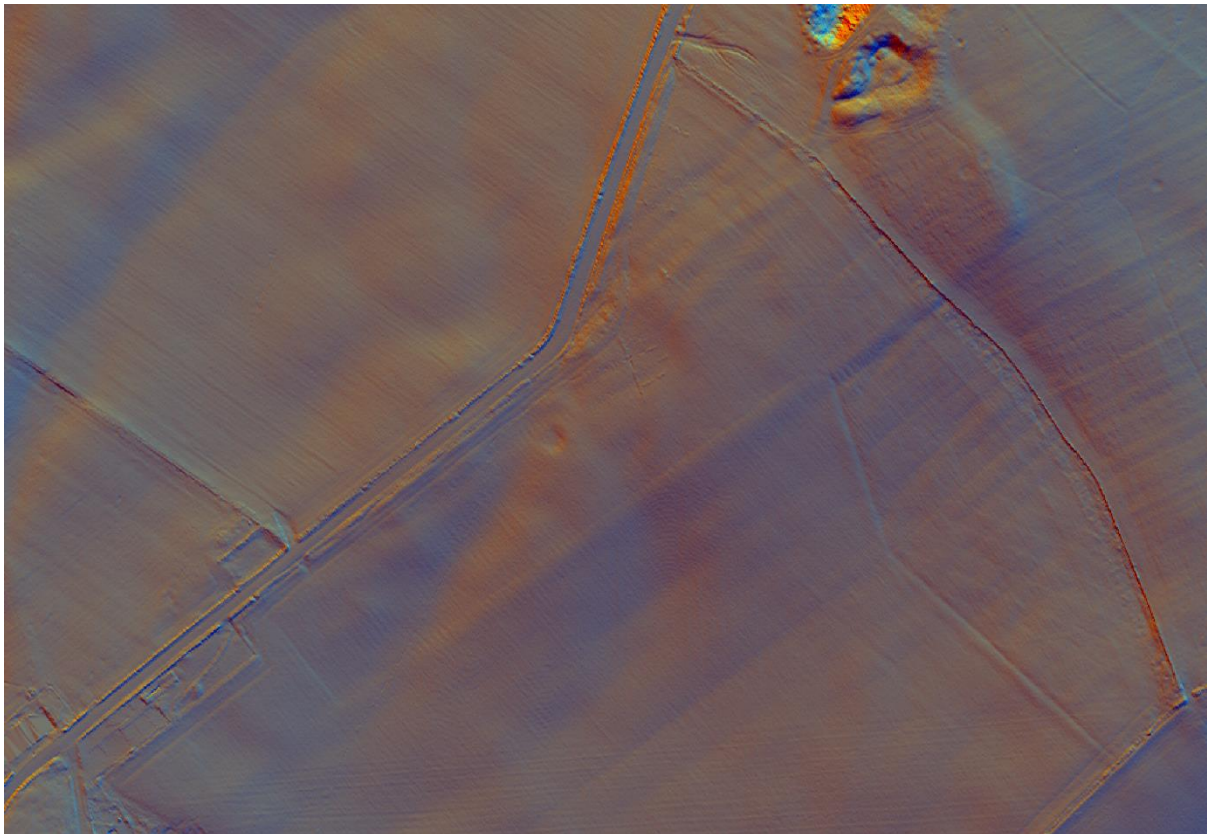


Figure 2 Multihillshade Lidar visualisation. (Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0)

an overall distance of at least 380m. Running roughly parallel to this bank, is a second on the north-west, its line roughly springing from where the hollow on the north-east meets the edge of the quarry. It disappears about 185m to the south-west at the edge of the public road, which at this point takes up its general line. Again, it is barely perceptible on the ground. Where they cross beneath the stone dyke, the two banks lie about 70m apart. To the south-west of the dyke both are subsumed into faint traces of rig-and-furrow, also dropping down the slope but on a slightly different axis. The relationship between the ploughed-down banks and the rig is



impossible to determine on the ground, but the fact that they are visible at all must owe something to the existence of a plantation here from the mid-19th century until at least 1957. Named Stanishknowe Plantation on OS maps, it described an L-shape with its open side facing south. The stone dyke formed the upper boundary of its north-eastern arm, and the road the outer boundary of its north-western arm, but the opposing side of the latter adopted the line of the earlier bank. Fortunately, however, the plantation boundary within the improved field can be picked out on the Lidar visualisations as a narrow straight ditch, and this seems to have been cut into the rear of the bank, in the process perhaps giving the impression that this side

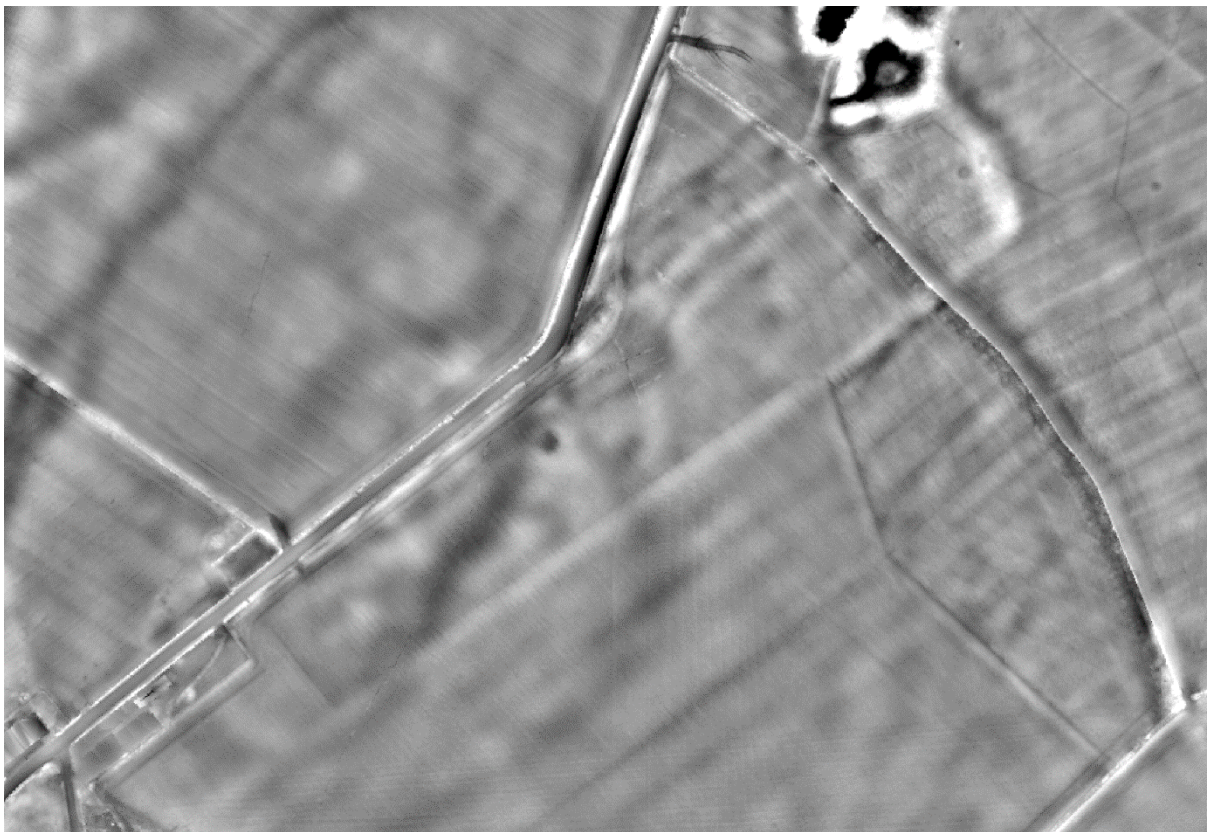


Figure 3 Local Relief Model Lidar visualisation. (Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0)

of the earlier enclosure is much straighter than it really is. This narrow ditch can also be detected as a vegetation mark on vertical aerial photographs and satellite images taken in several different years. To sum up, there is good reason to believe that there is a rectilinear enclosure at Upper Whitfield measuring at least 380m in length by 70m in breadth within a low bank with an external ditch.

But how ancient is this feature, which might be no more than an earlier incarnation



of the plantation that it is so intimately bound up with by the mid-19th century? To answer this we need to backtrack into Armstrong and his world, for there can be little doubt that these are the 'faint vestiges of an encampment' that he recorded. But what led him to the site? It can hardly have been Gordon's map, for as a cartographer himself this would have been a source of despair. Perhaps more likely is that he came by the information locally during his 'so laborious a peregrination' (1775b, vii) across the county. We certainly know by his own hand that he was collecting information – 'during my survey, I made some enquiries, not necessary to a geographical delineation' (1775b, viii) – and it was this that led him to publish a *Companion* to his map. Unless he was the victim of a practical joke, this earthwork must have been a feature that people living nearby knew was not part of their contemporary landscape and nor a redundant enclosure constructed in living memory. This was an enclosure for which they had no explanation, thus defining their templates of modern, old and ancient. But implicit in his record is that it was probably already ploughed-down, and while we may not be able to determine the relationship between the enclosure and the rig, we can reasonably guess which is the later. In its turn, this would imply a temporal separation between earthwork and plantation enclosure. In any case, Armstrong's other observation that Upper Whitfield 'is now very capable of improvement' (1775b, 59) suggests that there were no enclosures and plantations here at that time. But if it is unlikely to be a post-medieval plantation or fold, and certainly not a Roman camp, what monuments share this relatively long and narrow morphology? The only other monuments like this that we currently know of are Neolithic, the so-called cursus monuments. In this respect the slightly skewed angles between the terminal and the sides are familiar from several of the examples recorded as cropmarks, the closest the rather larger monument at Westfield near Inveresk (Canmore id: 53692). Westfield is known only as a cropmark (Fig. 4), but at its north-east terminal the ditch appears rather broader than those of the adjacent sides, and it is placed in a slightly elevated position. These are both features seen at Whitfield, where, despite the general degradation of the earthworks, the terminal seems to have been rather larger in stature than the sides, and from the slope below the terminal would not only have formed the skyline, but appeared to crown the summit of a hill. Most of the known cursus monuments in Scotland are set on level ground, but that is hardly a defining characteristic, as the example discovered recently in neighbouring Lanarkshire at Melbourne crossroads shows, crossing the watershed between Black Mount on one side and Broomy Law on the other (Canmore id: 73422). Coincidentally, the axis of the Whitfield monument appears to be aligned on the general bulk of Black Mount, about 7 miles



away to the south-west. The location of the south-west terminal at Whitfield is uncertain, but is probably contained in the Lidar data immediately above the modern farm.



Figure 4 Westfield, Inveresk. Cropmarks of the skewed north-east terminal of the cursus. (© HES SC 01737145)

And the codicil: did Alexander Gordon find a Neolithic cursus monument while searching for a Roman camp in the wrong county? Or did he perhaps find the temporary camp at Kaimhouse Lodge 266 years before the cropmarks finally gave away its secret? Smart money would probably be on Upper Whitfield for all the same reasons that led Armstrong to the spot – he was told about it by people who lived in the neighbourhood and knew it was not part of their working landscape. It does lie broadly north-west of Romanno Grange, and stretching a point it is near Newhall. On his map it is plainly not drawn square, but is elongated, and if we guess that he only



saw the north-east terminal, at 70m across it approaches the 90 paces across the interior of Ardoch measured from his plan (Gordon 1726, plate 6). On balance Upper Whitfield is probably one of his kernels of truth. S P Halliday

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The society would like to thank Strat for his article.



4) Opportunity to volunteer at the next Halterburn Valley field survey

Following June's field trip to the **Halterburn Valley** with the [Yetholm History Society](#) and the [Association of Certified Field Archaeologists](#) PAS members have been invited by [Dugald MacInnes](#) of ACFA to take part in the ongoing survey work at Halterburn. The next site visit is planned for Spring 2023. We will inform members once the dates are confirmed.



Dugald MacInnes and PAS members at Halterburn in June

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to seeing you soon.

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