



Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

December 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to the festive edition of your PAS newsletter! This month we have another bumper issue. We hope you have a wonderful Christmas & New Year!

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Previous lecture: Dr Coralie Mills – *The South East Scotland Oak Dendrochronology Project*, St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre



The South East Scotland Oak Dendrochronology Project. Slide courtesy Dr Coralie Mills

On **Thursday 16 November** we welcomed **Dr Coralie Mills** to the St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre in Peebles to talk about '[The South East Scotland Oak Dendrochronology Project](#)'.

At one of our best attended meetings this session, Dr Coralie Mills literally helped us to see 'the wood from the trees' in an excellent talk about her work as a dendrochronologist and recent research in SE Scotland.

Paying tribute to her mentor and friend, Professor Mike Baillie, late Professor Emeritus of Paleoecology at Queen's University, Belfast, who had pioneered Scottish

dendro-dating in the 1980s and had died just a few days previously, she started by explaining some of the principles and methods behind dendrochronology – ‘*simple in concept; complex in execution*’ – and how they find applications in climatology, ecology and geosciences as well as in archaeology. The latter is focused on ring width measurements of a tree’s annual growth rings and, through the painstaking comparison of measurements from hundreds of historic wood samples, regional reference chronologies have been developed.

Dendro-dating in Scotland over the past 30 years, principally led by Coralie and her colleague Dr Anne Crone, has been based largely on oak and pine. Interestingly, selecting suitable historic timbers as candidates for sampling depends not on the size of the timber – bigger is not always better - but on the number of rings, at least 50 are needed, and the condition of any surviving sapwood on the outer edge of the sample. If the latter is intact, it is possible remarkably to identify a precise felling year and to relate that date to the construction of historic buildings.

Native Scottish oak was the main building timber up until around 1450. However, after that date,



Dr Coralie Mills at the St Joseph’s Neighbourhood Centre. Image courtesy Richard Welander

imported timber became more and more predominant – oak from the 15th century onwards and pine, from the 16th century. The earliest dendro-dated *in situ* native oak timbers in Scotland are found in Darnaway Castle, Moray and dated from AD 969 through to 1387. In a sparkling array of historic sites across Scotland, Coralie gave us example after example of the extraordinary insights that dendrochronology has revealed. Following on from the 16th century imported Baltic oak of the Stirling Heads and the Perth Panels to the switch over to Scandinavian pine in the 16th - 18th century at Lambs House, Leith and the Queen’s Bedchamber in Stirling Castle Palace, Coralie described her work at St Mary’s Church, Haddington and in Edinburgh, notably at St Giles Cathedral, where the oak timber of the bell tower interior date from the 1450s and came from NE Scotland, probably the Royal Forest of Darnaway.

Saving the best to last, Coralie turned finally to SE Scotland and to the Scottish

Borders – ‘*Four Castle and a Bridge*’. Teasing us by leaving consideration of Neidpath Castle to last, she outlined her findings from excavated timbers from Bunkle Castle and Fast Castle. A waterlogged oak timber post from the former excavation near Duns in 2019 was revealed to have most likely come from Germany and was felled around 1600 but possible reused later. Similarly, timbers from Fast Castle (near Eyemouth on the Berwickshire coast) were dated 1517-1533 and came from Southern Norway. The roof timbers of Traquair House were also of Scandinavian origin, from Denmark, and of 16th century date but subsequently reused. The headline-grabbing discovery by Ancrum and District Heritage Society (ADHS) in 2018 of the remains of a medieval bridge across the River Teviot enabled Coralie to



Dr Coralie Mills

examine and date the recovered native oak timbers to the mid-14th century. Turning at last to her fourth and final castle – our own Neidpath Castle – it became clear why she had left it to last! In a charming final twist to her story, Coralie revealed that she and her husband married in Neidpath and little did she know that 20 years later, beneath the floor where she and Gordon had stood, she would find local native oak timber beams still in

the exact position they were laid down between 1317-1414!

Summing up, the SESOD project has successfully flagged up a significant dearth of suitable historic timbers for dendro-dating in this region. Coralie’s ongoing research in SE Scotland has highlighted that the sparse survival of native oak medieval timber structures is probably the result of prolonged periods of border warfare and historic grazing pressure across the region. Every historic timber that does survive is important in building regional chronologies and the search goes on!

At the end of the evening, chatting over tea and biscuits, a (nameless!) member said to me, “That was great! She managed to make dendrochronology sound interesting!”. Texting her to say thank you, I passed on the comment; her reaction, “Mission accomplished”! Very much so I would say!

Richard Welander

**Next lecture: Prof Gordon Noble – *Discovering the Northern Picts*,
Eastgate Theatre Auditorium (with the Tweeddale Society)**

On **Tuesday 12 December** it's another Eastgate sell out and time for our annual joint meeting with the Tweeddale Society - we're all in for a great pre-Christmas treat!

The Halkett Hendrie Memorial lecturer this year is **Professor Gordon Noble** from the **Department of Archaeology** at the **University of Aberdeen**. In a career that so far has ranged from the Mesolithic to the Medieval, Gordon's research is currently focused on the



*Reconstruction of the largest known Pictish fort at Burghead on the Moray coast.
Image courtesy Gordon Noble*

transition from the late Roman Iron Age into the Early Medieval period in Scotland (300–900 AD). More specifically, his award-winning work is shedding new light on the Picts, those unique, enigmatic folk, who were 'The Scourge of Rome and Rulers of the North', as Gordon describes them in the title of his latest book. They may have left us no written records but what an extraordinary artistic legacy we've inherited from them in the form of Pictish symbol stones, many more of which Gordon has recently discovered during his fieldwork. In his lecture '[Discovering the Northern Picts](#)',



Prof Gordon Noble. Image courtesy Northern Picts, Facebook

Gordon will talk about an early royal centre at Rhynie, a 16-hectare settlement at Tap o' Noth with over 800 house platforms, the massive Pictish fort at Burghead and we gather there'll be mention of the Southern Picts and our own Eildon Hills here in the Borders!

Gordon has a substantial social media following (@northernpicts) and a couple of months ago, in a novel and innovative public engagement initiative, he launched a new on-line shop NPixts featuring a clothing range based on designs inspired by Pictish art. At the launch Gordon tweeted '*A different way to get the wonderful imagery of Pictish and early*

medieval art out into the communities and countryside of Scotland and across the wider world! We hope these designs will inspire you to explore further the context of early medieval Scotland that provided their ultimate inspiration and will attract new audiences and generations to find out more about the past.'

Laudable aims! Here's hoping!

Further information about the talk can be found on the Tweeddale Society website at https://tweeddale-society.org.uk/20231212_northern-picts/.

There are just a handful of seats left for Prof Gordon Noble's talk so, if you still hope to attend, you need to get in touch with the Eastgate Theatre's ticket office straightaway! These few remaining tickets have been specially reserved for PAS members by the Tweeddale Society so when you call (**01721 725 777**) make sure you mention that you're a PAS member. After Monday (4 December) any remaining tickets will be offered to non-PAS members on the Eastgate's waiting list.

Venue: Eastgate Theatre Main Auditorium, Peebles

Date: Tuesday 12 December

Time: 7.30pm

Report on Edinburgh, Lothian & Borders Archaeology Conference

The first talk at this year's **Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Archaeology Conference** at Queen Margaret University on **Saturday 18 November** covered excavations at Dunsapie Fort, part of the Holyrood Archaeological Project, by Jamie Humble of AOC, followed by an account of the multi-period West Craigs excavations near Edinburgh Gateway by Cristina Hills of CFA and AOC excavations of an Iron Age palisade.

After coffee there was a report on a pre-forestry excavation of two Middle Bronze Age platform settlements at Lee Burn Head. One was single phase structure, but the other had multiple phases which were dated by C14. Poppleburn near Ednam, a different kind of site set in farmland outside Ednam village, included medieval settlement features with 12th-13th century C14 dates as well as truncated early medieval post-hole structures. Environmental data for the former included oats, wheat, hulled barley, rye and Scottish White Gritty Ware (SWGW) pottery dominated the pottery assemblage. Rural Anglian era evidence was the fruitful discovery at Burdiehouse on the south side of Edinburgh in advance of housing. Finds included a corn kiln of 11th-12th centuries and caryopses of barley, wheat, oats and rye. A presentation by Helen Spenser outlined the launch of the SESARF regional research framework covering up to the Early Medieval period.

After lunch and reviewing the display, I connected TillVAS with Edinburgh Archaeological Society to get a resistivity survey of their potential chapel site at Halterburn.

In the afternoon John Reid engaged us in a description of his geophysical work at Trimontium, followed by Addyman Archaeology on excavation in the grounds of



The Late Bronze Age hoard found in 1864 at Horsehope Craig in the Manor Valley, Peeblesshire. Image courtesy Trevor Cowie

Cramond Regis that included a ditch with SWGW pottery as well as two stone carved lions dumped there after they were no longer wanted. Bruce Glendinning made a brave attempt to make excavations at Preston Tower interesting but found nothing of interest having been limited by scheduling and interventions limited to narrow places where services had to go. The new stairs to the first floor entrance are being prepared for public access, now conservation was completed. Tea was a relief.

The last five short talks afterwards went on too long and over time. Rail depot images jostled with skulls from a multiple human burial from a former chapel of St Baldred's at Auldham, East Lothian, and pier works archaeology at Cockenzie. So our very own

Trevor Cowie's talk on the Horsehope Hoard enlivened things with superb landscape imagery of the hilltop location of the site where it was found marked by a cairn of sorts, while Trevor went on to divulge that the Peebles Hoard had little crossover with that from Horsehope.

Piers Dixon

Report on Dr Rebecca Jones's *Roman Camps in Scotland* talk

On **Tuesday 21 November** the Peebles Civic Society welcomed **Dr Rebecca Jones** to the Eastgate Theatre to speak about '[Roman Camps in Scotland](#)'. Rebecca is widely published and an acknowledged authority on the archaeology of Roman camps. Her 2012 book *Roman Camps in Britain* won Current Archaeology magazine's Book of the Year award in 2013. Rebecca, former Head of Archaeology and World Heritage at Historic Environment Scotland, is now Director of Alumni Relations for the University of Edinburgh and a visiting Professor at Heriot-Watt University.

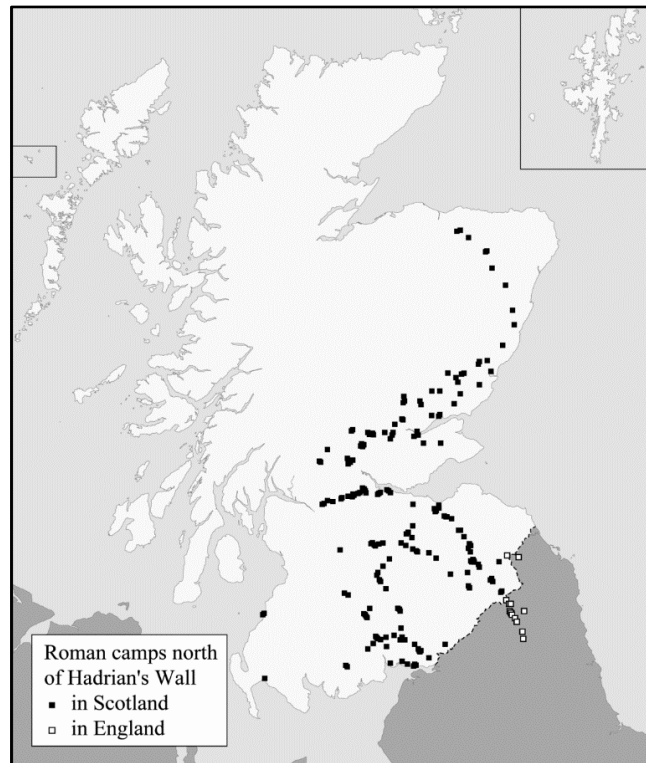
Rebecca began her fascinating lecture by categorising the different types and purposes of Roman camps. Whilst there are *construction and labour camps*, represented largely by those on the Antonine Wall and, further south, on Hadrian's Wall, *siege camps* such as Burnswark and *practice camps* that are prevalent in Wales but absent in Scotland, the focus of Dr Jones' talk was *marching and campaign camps*. Carefully located and constructed, these types of camps accommodated the headquarters, personnel, animals, baggage and sometimes camp followers of a military formation. In other words, an enclosure housing troops on manoeuvres, marching or on campaign. Much like Roman forts, marching camps were usually rectangular or square in shape with the familiar rounded corners. Quick to establish, their construction entailed soldiers digging a v-shaped perimeter ditch with earth gathered, including the upcast, being used to form inner ramparts. In contrast to forts, marching and campaign camps were occupied for relatively short periods of time, anything from a few nights up to a number of weeks. The largest camp of this kind in Europe is located just south of Lauder and close to the line of Dere Street. That's some claim to fame for the Scottish Borders! The camp's size illustrates how important southern Scotland was to the Romans. At some 170 acres the site at St Leonards would have housed tens of thousands of men and their equipment.

In Robert Melville (1723-1809) and William Roy (1726-1790) Rebecca introduced the audience to the key players behind the discovery of the remains of the Roman army in Scotland. They were inspired by Agricola, the 1st century AD Roman general and politician who was responsible for some of the Roman conquests of Scotland in the AD 70s-80s. With a copy of Tacitus' biography of Agricola under his arm Melville succeeded in identifying a number of marching camps in Strathmore. Due in part to his own military career Melville's antiquarian interests were focused on the study of ancient military exploits, structures and battlefields. A disciple of Melville, William Roy was a surveying engineer who planned the camps that had been discovered. Roy, of course, will be familiar to many – his maps of Scotland produced in the mid-1750s are still an important resource for historians and archaeologists today. Roy's work would also lead to the founding of the Ordnance Survey. To read more about Melville's antiquarian discoveries click [here](#) to access *A horseman riding by: archaeological discovery in 1754* written by Rebecca Jones and Gordon Maxwell and published in the Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal in 2008.

In modern times, aerial survey has proved to be the most effective method for discovering marching camps. The remains survive as earthworks, in the form of ramparts and ditches, and can also be identified as cropmarks which are especially visible during dry spells. The importance of aerial survey should not be

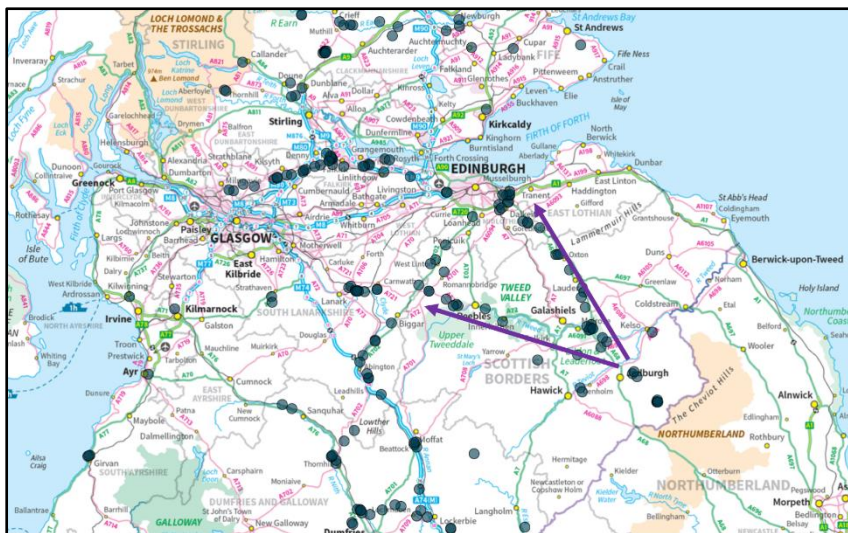
underestimated. It has been responsible for locating over 80% of the known camps in the archaeological record and continues to be one of the most productive methods today.

Rebecca explained how the form of marching and campaign camps followed a tried and tested pattern. Whilst some Roman engineers may have been confronted by challenging topography most camps were still rectangular or square in plan. Stakes had a defensive function and palisades were sometimes erected in the upcast ramparts. Gates protected the entrance to camps, invariably the weakest parts of any military installation. Positioned to avoid direct entry into a camp, extra protection could be put on a gateway, for example a *titulus* which was a detached segment of rampart. There are numerous examples of annexes but there is little evidence on their purpose. Ovens are a common internal feature and their analysis has been instrumental in understanding how long marching camps were occupied for.



Roman Camps in Scotland. Slide courtesy Dr Rebecca Jones

In the Scottish Borders lines of marching camps follow Dere Street and the Tweed Valley.



Concentration of camps following Dere Street and the Tweed Valley. Slide courtesy Dr Rebecca Jones

Valley. In Peeblesshire camps at Lyne, Eshiels and Innerleithen may very well be already known to those interested in Roman history. Following the hot, dry weather in 2018 an additional camp was revealed at Lyne, adding to the known 2nd century AD fort and marching

The Lost Manorhead Cup & Ring-Marked Boulder

*In this issue we are delighted to include an article by PAS member **Colin Bell**. Following his retirement, Colin tells us he has had more time to follow up his interest in local archaeology. Having noticed the dearth of prehistoric rock art in Peeblesshire, he was very interested to spot an entry in the Society's **Manor Valley** booklet describing the discovery of a possible cup and ring-marked stone near Manorhead. Colin then set out to find the rock and photograph it, but as the write-up of his research makes clear, the path to its re-discovery did not turn out to be a straightforward one...*

Published references and online sources consulted

Inventory of the ancient monuments of Peeblesshire (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, RCAHMS, 1967)

This 2-volume set does not identify any cup and ring-marked boulders in Manor Valley.

Peeblesshire Archaeological Society publication “The Manor Valley – an introduction to The Archaeology of the Manor Valley” published in 2000

This publication contained a reference (Gazetteer – No.3 on page 45) to a possible cup and ring-marked boulder at Manorhead at map reference NT 198 283. On page 4 of the publication there is a photograph of the late John Stoakley (1931-1997) standing beside the boulder that he had found near Manorhead. The photograph is thought to have been taken c.1995.



The description in No.3 in the gazetteer is “Just E of track to Manorhead, an angular greywacke boulder with oval groove, lozenge-shaped groove and a single cup and ring. MVRG”.

MVRG signifies that the boulder was a previously unpublished site discovered during the PAS field surveys in Manor Valley.

Canmore - the National Record of the Historic Environment

Canmore shows a single cup and ring-marked rock at Manorhead with the following

search and detailed information. The map reference given in Canmore is estimated to be about 1km away from the boulder in the PAS photograph. There are no photographs of the rock in the Canmore database. The description matches that in the PAS publication.

MANORHEAD

Classification : Cup And Ring Marked Rock (Prehistoric)

Canmore Id : 130603

[Details \(opens a new window\)](#)

NGR: NT 18927 28298

Easting/Northing: 318927, 628298

Latitude/Longitude: 55° 32' 30" N 3° 17' 11" W

Event ID 776450

Category Descriptive Accounts

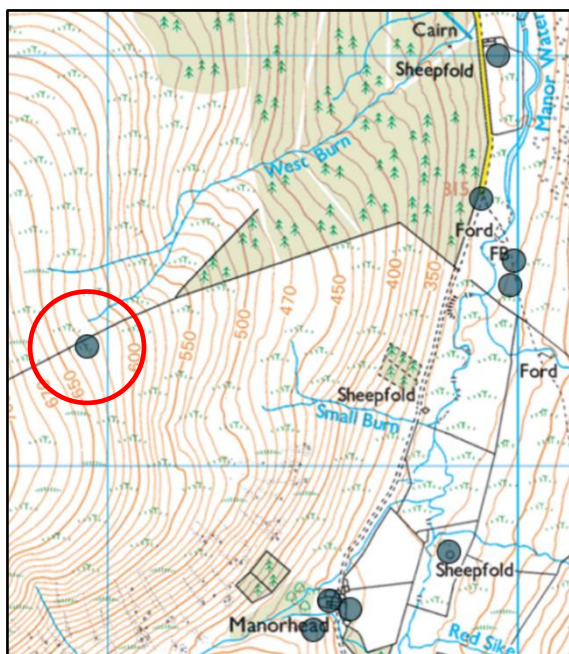
Type Archaeology Notes

Permalink <http://canmore.org.uk/event/776450>

[NT12NE 12](#) 1895 2829

NT 1895 2829 An angular boulder of greywacke has three incised designs- an oval groove, a lozenge-shaped groove and a cup and ring.

I MacLeod 1995.



Cup And Ring Marked Rock (Prehistoric)

Site Name Manorhead

Classification [Cup And Ring Marked Rock \(Prehistoric\)](#)

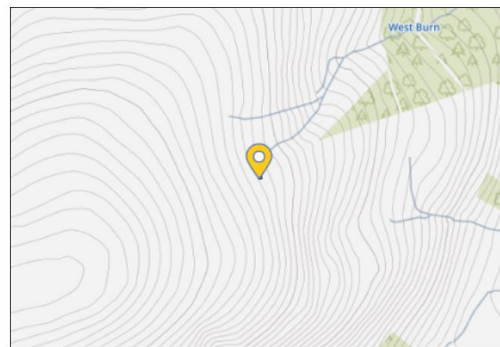
Canmore ID 130603

Site Number NT12NE 12

NGR NT 1895 2829

Datum OSGB36 - NGR

Permalink <http://canmore.org.uk/site/130603>



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With the Canmore entry having been made in 1995, it seems logical to assume that the entry was made following the discovery of the boulder during the PAS survey in c.1995. However, the map reference in Canmore does not match that in the PAS publication (i.e. NT 189 283 vs NT 198 283). It looks as though numbers have been mistakenly reversed in the eastings for the map references!

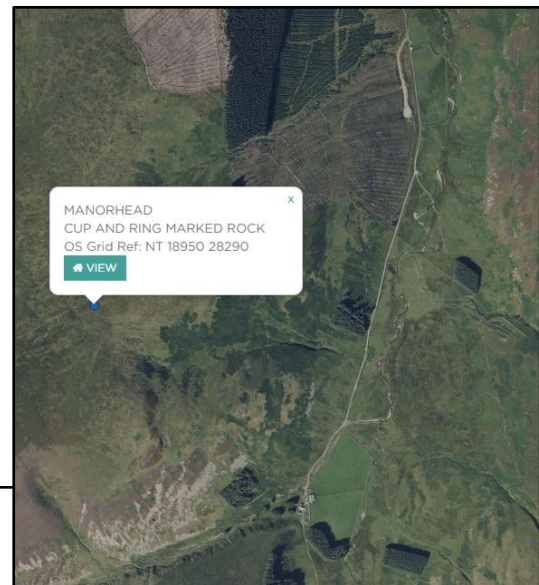
Scotland's Rock Art Project

Scotland's Rock Art Project (ScRAP) was the first major research project focusing on prehistoric rock art in Scotland. This five-

year project, which ran from January 2017 to December 2021, was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). It was hosted by Historic Environment Scotland (HES), in collaboration with Edinburgh University's School of History, Classics and Archaeology, and Glasgow School of Art's School of Simulation and Visualisation.

The project trained and supported twelve Community Teams to gather detailed information, including 3D models, on prehistoric carvings across Scotland. Over 1600 rock art panels were investigated and recorded. This information enabled us to study the rock art, and to raise local, national and international awareness of the carvings.

The Manorhead boulder is listed in the Rock Art Project database, with information taken from Canmore.



ROCK ART DATABASE

MANORHEAD

A map of the Manorhead area in Peeblesshire. It shows several rock art sites marked with blue dots and labels: 'Dollar Law', 'Broad Law 840m', 'Black Law', 'Tweedsmuir', and 'White Coomb 822m'. A legend at the top right says 'Aerial with labels'.

CANMORE ID
130603

SCRAP ID
1893

LOCATION
OS Grid Ref: NT 18950 28290

CLASSIFICATIONS

Classification	Period
CUP AND RING MARKED ROCK	PREHISTORIC

The Search for the Boulder 2023

Since there have been so few cup and ring-marked stones found in Peeblesshire, and since there were no photographs of the stone recorded in Canmore or ScRAP, I set out to try to re-discover the boulder and photograph it. The first problem was finding the site.

Initially, I climbed to the map reference given in Canmore and could find no trace of any stone near there at all. It is a wet, marshy, hillside area. I conclude that the map reference given in Canmore and ScRAP is indeed incorrect.

Looking again at the photograph from 1995, the rock (with a larger rock beside it) is

very close to the vehicle track. In the background there is a fence on the other side of the track with forest beyond. There is a telegraph pole at the right hand edge of the photo. Most importantly, it is possible to see a distinctive double shape in the scree on Langhaugh Hill in the background.



Going to the spot in 2023, some 28 years later shows some differences. The track has been re-graded in the last few years and the forested area in the background of the original photograph has been felled. However, the fence is there, the telegraph poles are still there on the right and the eroded banking on the far side is still evident (although the precise erosion shapes have changed). Again, most importantly, the double shape in the scree on the hill behind is still clear and hardly changed.

It is pretty obvious that this is very close to the spot where

the original photograph was taken.

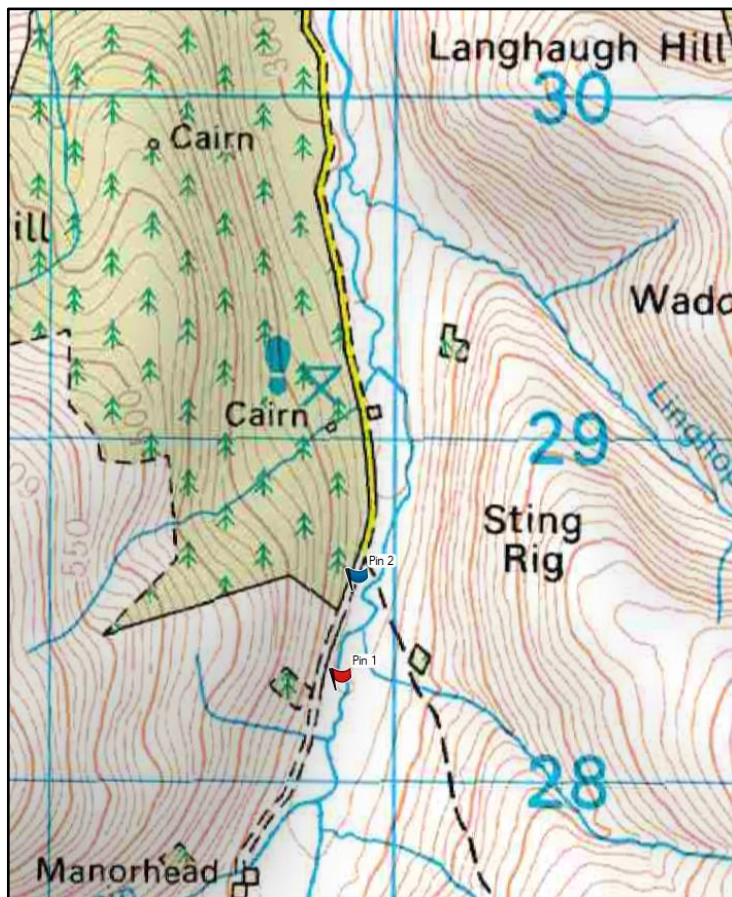
The PAS survey described the boulder as being just E of the track to Manorhead at



map reference NT 198 283. If one can assume that the fourth digits in the Canmore eastings and northings are correct, then we are looking for NT 1985 2829.

This map reference would put the boulder at Pin 1 on the map below. This would put it further from the track to Manorhead and closer to the river. Also, at

this point there is no fence on the other side of the road. It's also clear that there was never the extent of forestry behind - there is a small copse. Most importantly, it's not possible to get a view of the scree shape on the hill behind. So "Pin 1" is not the original spot.



The actual spot is closer to "Pin 2" on the map (left), closer to the final corner on the tarmac road and opposite the fenced forest area. This would correspond with a map reference of NT 199 285.

Having found the original spot, the boulders including the one with the cup and ring-marked rock are no longer evident. There are no big boulders on that whole stretch of road.

Either they have been buried at the edge of the re-graded track or removed to another location. It might be worth searching around nearby in case they have been moved to

a nearby resting place.

However, as it stands, Canmore and ScRAP have the wrong map references and the boulder itself can no longer be found – a pity given there are so few in Peeblesshire!

Colin Bell

Tinnis: The Burnt Fort – Dark Age Digs

Extract from the Dark Age Digs website at <https://dark-age-digs.com/tinnis-the-burnt-fort/>.

Radiocarbon dating now reveals that the earliest phase of occupation of Tinnis Fort was during the late Iron Age somewhere between AD 250 and AD 405. And it ended with part of the summit's rampart being destroyed by fire. Indeed, the immense heat caused the rubble core of the original timber-laced drystone rampart to vitrify (i.e.

melt into a glass-like substance).

Experiments have demonstrated that it takes a lot of time and a lot of wood to burn a timber-laced stone rampart to the temperature (about 1000°C) where its rubble core vitrifies.

The burning of Tinnis Fort was therefore no accident. Nor was it achieved in the heat of battle. This was a deliberate and destructive punitive conflagration after the capture of the fort.

Imagine the hilltop back then. Edged by flames under a great plume of black smoke, glowing red in the night, this was once a highly visible and ominous message to surrounding communities.



We can only conjecture who was responsible for this. This period was fairly unstable. The Roman Frontier, Hadrian's Wall, some 60 miles to the south did not hold back Roman armies from venturing north. Pictish wars were fairly regular events throughout the course of the fourth century AD.

One of these wars was the Barbarian Conspiracy of AD 367, when the Roman Scouts, the mysterious Areani, who were supposed to keep an eye out for unrest beyond the frontier, decided it would be more profitable to join the other side. They gave away Roman army strengths and positions to those willing to pay for this information. From all sides, the Picts, Scots, Attacotti, Saxons and Franks attacked simultaneously, pillaging, looting and burning almost the whole of Roman Britain. The devastation lasted for a year before the Roman Emperor sent a small army of crack troops under Count Theodosius to restore order. Was it during this turmoil when Tinnis was burnt?

Or did Tinnis Fort fall at the hands of another group of fellow Britons in southern Scotland? The forgotten victims of a forgotten conflict during a period when prominent households vied for power.

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

Andrew Jepson

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PAS Twitter: [@PeeblesArchSoc](https://twitter.com/PeeblesArchSoc)

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