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SERFing in the Scottish heartlands: artefacts and the research strategy

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SUMMARY

This paper describes the first phase (2006–11) of the SERF (Strathearn Environs & Royal Forteviot) project and outlines the research strategy developed by a team of prehistorians and medievalists. Particular attention is given to our approaches to material culture and its role in providing a context for field monuments. Previously known archaeological and historical evidence has been utilised to frame the research programme, which has engaged university archaeologists from Glasgow and Aberdeen, public sector archaeologists from Historic Scotland, the RCAHMS and Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust. The fieldwork was undertaken as part of a field school which provides training to university students and volunteers.

KEYWORDS: Forteviot, Strathearn, Neolithic Ritual, Bronze Age burial, Pictish Royal centre

LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARTEFACTS

Landscape approaches dominate archaeological discourse across the globe; site-based archaeology is not only unfashionable, but in some circles, it is discredited and unfindable. Even projects which are for all intents and purposes site-based, as for instance at Çatal Höyük, have an associated landscape survey project to provide a regional context and meet the landscape agenda of government (Hodder 2006). Less cynically, landscape approaches, of which there are as many methodologies and strategies as there are archaeologists, have triumphed because there is a deep belief that until modern times most people had such intimate links with their environment that only by seeking to understand those relationships does the project become credible, and more importantly, do justice to people of the past. And yet, we need the artefacts: the finds provide chronologies and inform us about specific past activities. How can this tension be resolved? It would be too ambitious to

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attempt to resolve this for all of archaeology, but the *Context and Collaboration* workshop provided an opportunity to reflect on how we in the SERF (Strathern Environs & Royal Forteviot) team are coping with the tension between landscape and artefact which may prove helpful for other archaeological research initiatives in Scotland and beyond. In the intervening time between the oral presentation of this paper (2008) and the final preparation of the written version (2010), significant new artefacts have come to light which provide a better basis for discussing these issues.

At its most general the research agenda for the SERF project is to explore social and political developments at the heart of Scotland over the long durée, from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages. Forteviot has been identified as the focal point for the study because of the remarkable conjunction of prehistoric ritual monuments alongside the site of a Pictish palace and later medieval royal estate. Its position in the east midlands of Scotland makes it representative of the landscape and environment at the very centre of the medieval kingdom and therefore its settlement history and economic structures might be expected to shed light on the overall development of the kingdom.

WHY FORTEVIOT?

Forteviot (Fig 1) is arguably the birthplace of the medieval kingdom of Scotland; as a result the social processes and political events which shaped the country are all well represented here, making it the ideal location to chart the archaeological development of a nation.

For a country as proud of its independent origins and resistance to external conquest as Scotland, its debt to its indigenous prehistoric past is remarkably poorly investigated. In part this is because few sites have long sequences of occupation and those that are long-lived are either in the periphery, for instance the Udal, North Uist (Crawford and Switsur 1977) or Pool, Sanday (Hunter *et al.* 2008), and have little to say about the processes in the heartlands or they have seen heavy usage and are archaeologically compromised or inaccessible, as are the early deposits at Edinburgh (Driscoll and Yeoman 1997) or Stirling castles.

Historical and archaeological discourse tends to focus on the cultural shifts, social transformations, political breaks and religious reformations at the expense of the continuities and inheritances. This study seeks to redress the balance, by focusing on an area with a dense concentration of archaeological sites covering a long time span coupled with an historical significance, which would allow the observations made here to be linked into the wider national narrative.

Forteviot was selected because previous studies had identified its remarkable archaeological landscape and its historical significance (Driscoll 1987; Alcock and Alcock 1992). Nick Aitchison (2006) has usefully drawn together what was known about Forteviot from historical and archaeological sources prior to the start of the SERF project. SERF seeks to explore the early prehistoric origins of the Pictish royal centre at Forteviot and to document the district's subsequent social and political evolution. The study area is approximately equivalent to the three modern (post 1891) parishes of Forteviot, Dunning and Forgandenny, but its parochial history is more complex. Forteviot and Forgandenny formerly were intertwined

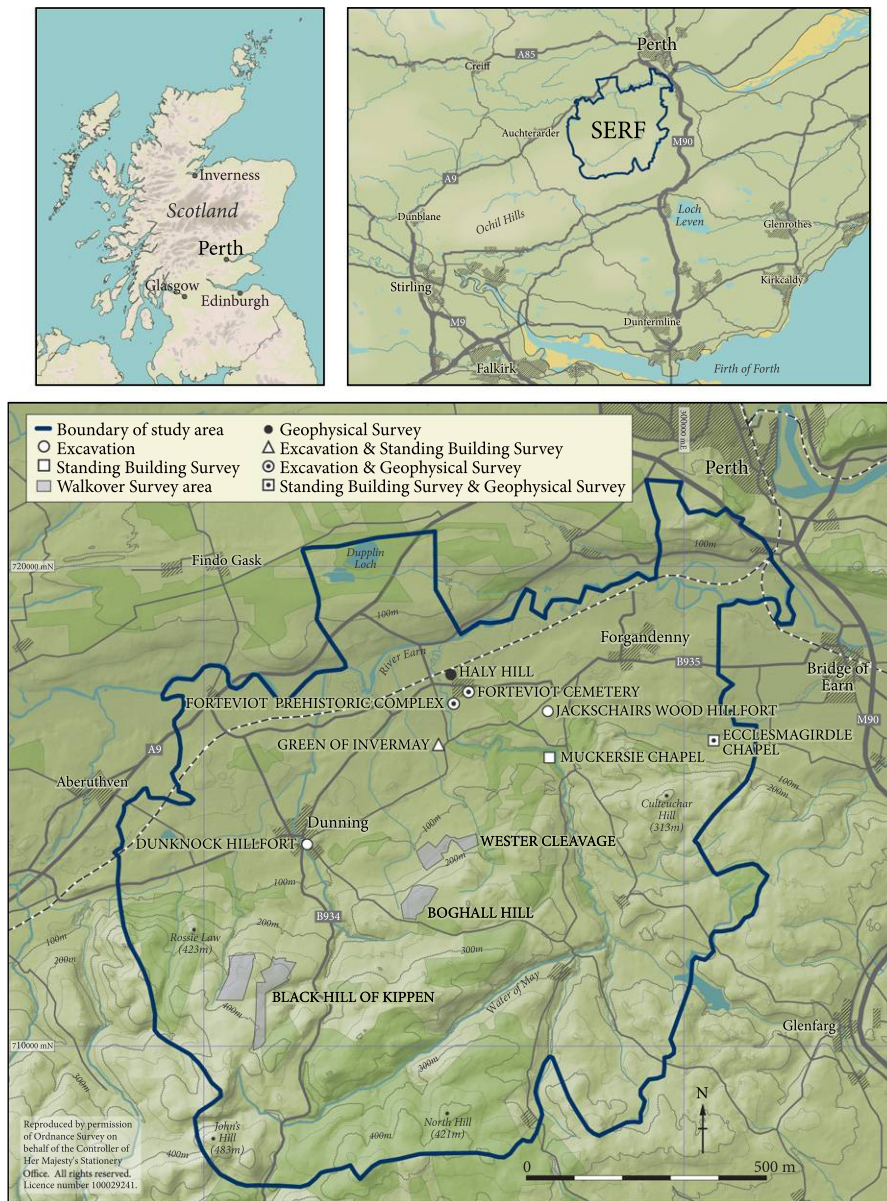


Fig 1 The SERF study area is centred on the modern parish Forteviot, and its neighbours to the east (Forgandenny) and west (Dunning), which create a block running from the Ochils watershed north to the River Earn and in places across the river (artwork by Ingrid Shearer)

and two small parishes of Muckersie and Exmagirdle have been lost, although their churches survive (Fig 2). From a landscape archaeology perspective the value of these parishes is twofold: firstly, they are relatively stable entities, which arguably were taking shape at the time when Pictish kings occupied Forteviot; secondly, they

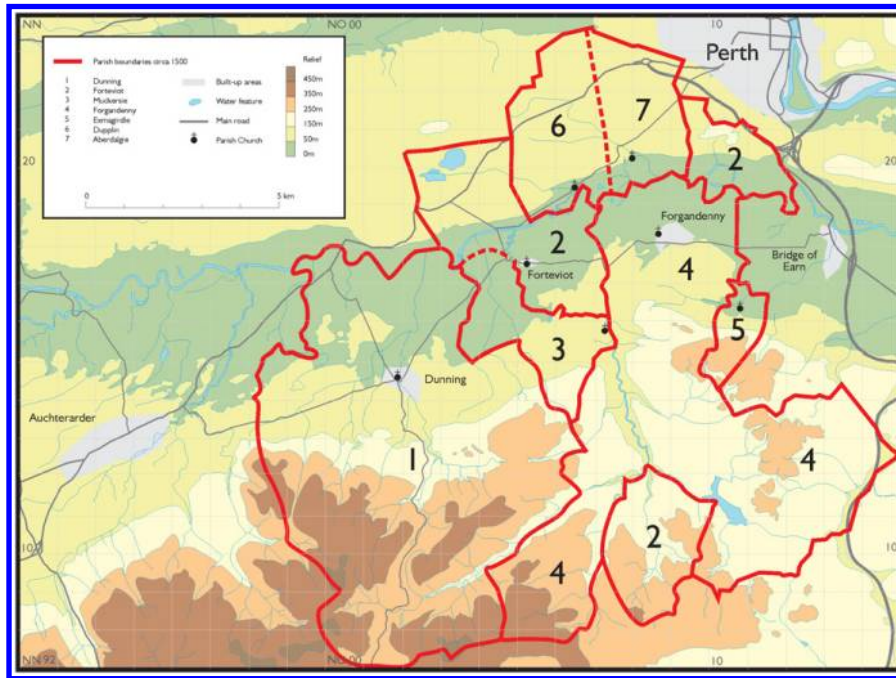


Fig 2 The complexity of the institutional and social changes which have taken place in historic times are reflected in the fragmented parochial divisions of the late Middle Ages (artwork by Lorraine McEwan)

define a broad transect sweeping down from the uncultivated pastures of the Ochils across the fertile terraces of the Earn river valley. In between the windy hilltops and the heavily cultivated alluvium is a hilly zone where archaeological sites are found – including hillforts, burial monuments and agricultural remains – which have escaped damage from modern cultivation. The configuration of Dunning parish, apparently the most stable of these parishes, suggests that these upland and lowland zones formed a single economic and social unit from the twelfth century AD if not earlier, and more importantly that they should be studied as a unit.

The archaeological significance of the Forteviot area was revealed through the cropmark complex which spreads across the fields to the south of Forteviot village (Fig 3). This is one of the most extensive complexes of prehistoric ritual monuments in Scotland and must have served as a Mecca for people in eastern Scotland from the Neolithic onwards. These cropmarks were first recorded in 1973, reconnaissance over the past thirty years has revealed a range of Neolithic monuments, including a palisaded enclosure c 250 m in diameter, several hengiform enclosures and additional pitted features (St Joseph 1978). Already the fieldwork has established that one of the most significant cropmark complexes in Scotland is gradually being diminished by agricultural impacts; furthermore with over 40 further arable fields containing cropmark sites within 3 km of Forteviot, the threat to this greater resource needs to be quantified. This is a cultural heritage issue which the project will contribute to.

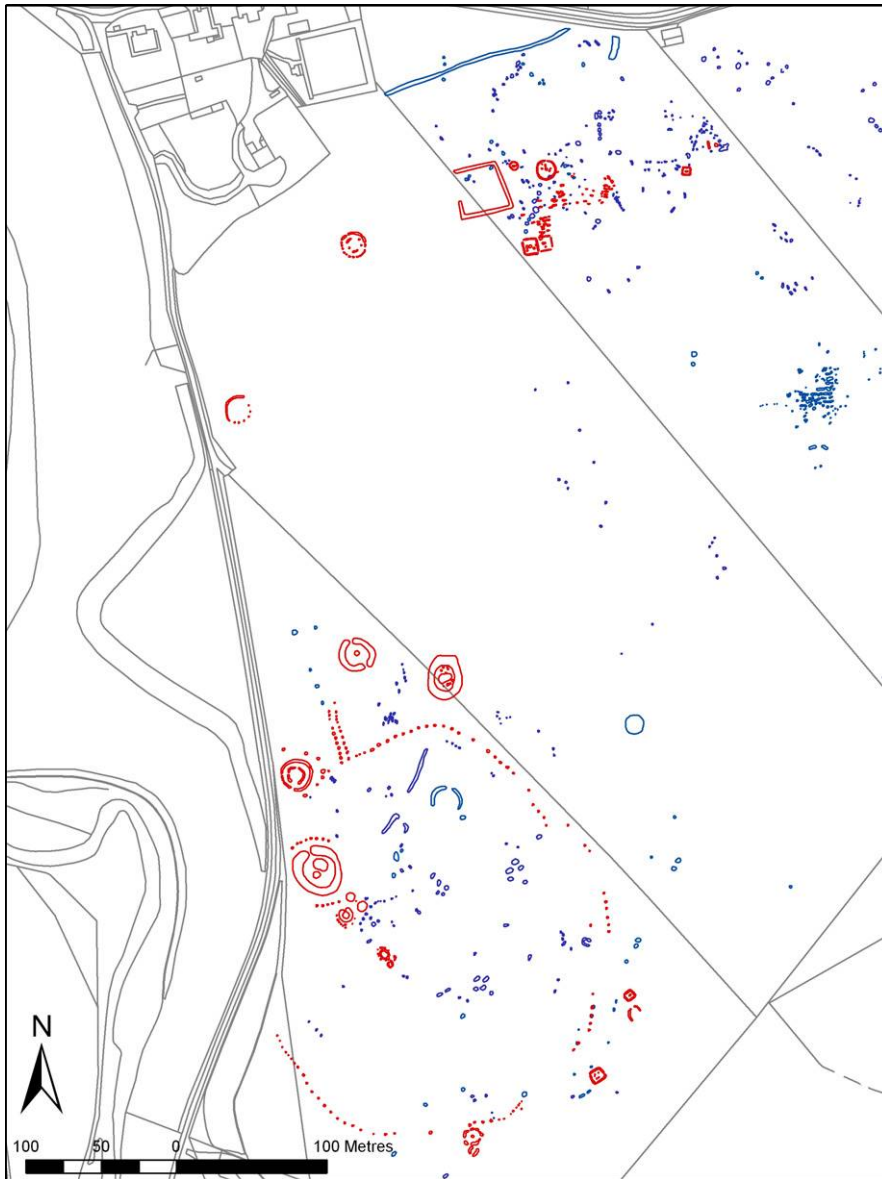


Fig 3 Forteviot cropmark complex as transcribed by RCAHMS (© Crown copyright: RCAHMS)

From a nation building, as opposed to eroding, perspective, what is of particular interest are the cropmarks of Pictish burials adjacent to, and overlapping with, the early prehistoric monuments. This relationship suggests that there was an awareness and interest in the prehistoric monuments during the era when Forteviot was a Pictish power centre: the death of King Cinead mac Alpin (Kenneth mac Alpin) was recorded '*in palacium Fothiurtaicht*', 'the palace of Forteviot' in

AD 858 by the Chronicle of the Kings of Alba (Alcock and Alcock 1992, 221–2; Woolf 2007, 88–94). This royal significance is reflected in the exceptional sculptural evidence, including the Forteviot arch and the Dupplin Cross (Alcock and Alcock 1992; Hall 2011, 222–27). During the later Middle Ages, as royal attention drifted towards Perth and Scone, Dunning emerged as an important regional centre for the earls of Strathearn, a status marked by one of Scotland's finest Romanesque parish church towers.

THE SERF RESEARCH AGENDA

The study area has been selected because of a conjunction of historical evidence and archaeological material, which makes it unique in Scotland. The great archaeological potential of the study area is reflected in the density of recorded archaeological sites many of which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Two sets of interlocking research objectives define the initial phase of SERF. One set focuses on the development of Forteviot from its prehistoric origins through the Middle Ages. Forteviot, now a sleepy hamlet, is an enigma: apart from the Pictish sculpture there are no concrete traces from its Pictish heyday, while its period as a prehistoric pre-eminence is even less evident, except from the air when conditions allow the monuments to appear through differential crop growth. We arrived with a belief that any understanding of the development of Forteviot as a Pictish Royal centre demanded that we examine the influence the prehistoric monuments exerted upon the Picts. The first stage of this was to establish that there was a genuine archaeological relationship, because sceptics would argue that this correspondence is no more than coincidence occasioned by the desirability of this fertile land.

The second set of goals is to provide a context for Forteviot by examining the immediate landscape to illuminate the settlement history and economic systems that sustained Forteviot through the ages. By expanding out from our focus at Forteviot we hope to construct a narrative for prehistoric and historic Strathearn, which will illuminate the developments of the monumental centre. In so doing we hope to characterise the typical archaeological components of east central Scotland, many of which, such as hillforts and medieval rural settlement, are poorly understood (Dunwell and Ralston 2008).

Already a number of interpretative themes are emerging. The variety of cropmarks in the fields surrounding Forteviot is exceptional in morphological terms, so we will be able to refine our grasp of the fundamental characteristics of these monuments – chronology, form and function – though the programme of excavations and scientific dating supported by Historic Scotland. The variable survival of the archaeological structures begs questions about the impact of plough erosion, because in some cases preservation appears to be surprisingly good, while elsewhere the sites have been nearly erased by the plough. Having established that deliberate and conscious relationships were established at the prehistoric monuments by later generations, we will seek to understand the nature of the relationships, particularly between the prehistoric monuments and the later Early Historic activity. We are hoping to understand the relationship between Pictish Forteviot and more recent developments so as to locate clear traces of the royal

complex. Understanding the organisation and layout of the Pictish palace site may prove one of the largest challenges.

Moving from the practical to the conceptual, there are another series of interpretative realms which present themselves. Forteviot provides an opportunity to examine the interplay between domestic spaces, ritual arenas and political centres over several millennia in a refined and highly articulated landscape. The most obvious of these conceptual spheres is the spiritual: there is strong evidence for a sequence of sacred landscapes which culminated with the ecclesiastical one that is still with us, albeit in a highly degraded form. Certainly there survives a rich legacy of medieval churches and cemeteries, the potential of which is scarcely appreciated, but sadly many of the most accomplished monuments, the Pictish sculptures, are without precise context, and the majority of lesser religious places, such as holy wells and chapels, are known only from texts, if at all.

Domestic space with its quotidian infrastructure of enclosures and fields provides a balancing counterpoint to the sacred landscapes for even pilgrims need to eat. The social and economic systems which underpinned the religious institutions are represented by both cropmarks of settlements in the arable zone and in the higher elevations by dwellings, hillforts and field systems which survive as upstanding monuments. This provides rich evidence from which a settlement history can be constructed, but it needs to be mapped and, in the majority of instances, provided with a chronology before a narrative can be attempted.

If there is a single overarching theme unifying this archaeological project, then it would be the forming of Scottish national identity. The conscious reuse of the ancient prehistoric burials and monuments by the early kings of southern Pictland gives the entire region an enhanced political quality. This self-conscious drawing upon the past is a well-documented feature of royal sites in Ireland (Newman 1997; FitzPatrick 2004) and prefigures the later development at Scone (Welander *et al.* 2003; Driscoll 2004). Here we have a chance to do something exceptional. We can chart how this mystical system of sacred ancestral validation evolved and was then replaced by a system of royal officials with tax-raising powers, known as thanes (Grant 1993). Elsewhere in the British Isles this stage of development was badly disrupted by the Normans. Only in the north was the Celtic trajectory allowed to run its course.

METHODOLOGIES BASED ON COLLABORATION

Presented in such a general and sweeping manner, the SERF research agenda can appear grandiose or overambitious. We feel that the exceptional quality of the evidence justifies the interpretative expectations placed upon it; however if this were to be pursued by a small team it would not be achievable. In these first few years we have sought to provide the basic foundations needed to sustain investigations over the length of time necessary to resolve these questions. Given the range of problems identified and the need to enhance the basic evidence, ten years seems like a minimum time-scale. Such long-term projects are unfindable by conventional means as a single project, so it has been divided into stages. The initial stage (2006–11), supported in the first instance by a British Academy grants, including a post-doctoral fellowship for Gordon Noble, allowed us to mount a

series of excavations and surveys each year. This work has focused on the village of Forteviot, although survey and small scale excavation of hillforts has been undertaken across the study area.

The overall programme is designed to consist of a series of interconnected, but self-contained, studies. It is our intension to gradually expand the project spatially and methodologically by carefully adding participating scholars. By good fortune one of our team, Gordon Noble, was hired by the University of Aberdeen, thus allowing us to expand the pool of academic participants and students. By adopting this collaboration as a long-term strategy we hope to transcend the limitations of period and site-oriented approaches to produce an understanding of a landscape exploited and re-worked over a period of several millennia. We also hope to challenge the orthodoxy of short funding strategies promoted by the research councils.

Historic Scotland, who quickly joined in supporting the project, have provided financial support, practical advice and professional guidance, making them our most significant collaborator. Their funds have sustained the fieldwork and underwritten the extensive radiocarbon dating programme and the unexpected conservation needs. While the Forteviot cropmarks are unique they are also represent a type of cultural resource which is notoriously difficult to manage and represent a real concern since they are characteristic of large swathes of the east midlands. In exchange for Historic Scotland's generous support for the fieldwork and for a large number of radiocarbon dates we hope to bring clarity to the chronological morass of cropmark typologies and functional uncertainty relating to later prehistoric fortifications. We also hope to contribute to the debate about the value of cropmarks through our construction of the Forteviot narrative and at a more detailed level through our assessment of the nature and impact of cultivation on buried cropmark archaeology.

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland are the leading exponents of aerial archaeology in Scotland, so we are delighted that they have provided new transcriptions and analysis of the cropmarks in the study area. This provides a reliable base upon which to build our GIS using the detailed information from excavation and geophysical survey. They have also supported the project by fieldwork of their own – surveying the large and complex remains on the summit of Castle Law, Forgandenny.

By happy coincidence, about the time we began to think about the buried archaeology of Forteviot, Mark Hall (Perth Museum and Art Gallery) and Ian Scott (formerly of the RCAHMS) embarked on a study of Forteviot's sculpture (Hall 2011). This study examines the various fragments in detail for the first time in over a century. In addition to documenting the monuments in detail, these artefacts provide the evidence used to reconstruct an important ecclesiastical landscape, a point we will consider below in more detail.

Each season we mount several digs simultaneously – at least two sites at Forteviot as well as a hillfort, as well as standing building surveys and walk-over survey in the uplands. It would not be possible to sustain this level of effort without a considerable level of volunteer support. This has been co-ordinated through the efforts of the Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust. Contacts they provided have allowed us to forge strong local links and to attract more volunteers year on year.

They also underwrote a popular account of the first three seasons which appeared in 2010 (SERF Project Team 2010). Volunteer digging is not the only measure of public engagement; many people know SERF best through site tours, public lectures and popular publications, but all of these have been actively promoted through the Trust.

At the start of this project, *sustainability* was a key buzz word in governmental, institutional and environmental spheres, so it seemed sensible to embrace the ethos. SERF has sought to generate a significant level of income so that our sponsors will feel they have not provided a disproportionate level of support and so that they get value for money. An important aspect to the ecology of Scottish archaeology is the provision of training for students, aspiring professionals and dedicated amateurs. SERF is built around a field school, which originated to train Glasgow undergraduates, but has been expanded to include postgraduates and Aberdeen undergraduates. A mechanism has now been established to extend that training more widely to visiting students and others keen to learn more about the archaeological techniques employed. It is intended that developing the teaching will generate income to sustain the project in the long term. Time will tell.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS POSED BY ARTEFACTS AND MONUMENTS

As the preceding discussion makes plain, SERF was conceived of in landscape terms. Artefacts did not figure prominently in the research design for the project, although on reflection the presence of enough artefacts in the right places was influential. The core of the study stretches over 25 ha if one includes the village of Forteviot and the sprawling, multi-focus cropmarks to the south of the village. Our interest in a long time span explains why we did not adopt a site-based approach. The difficulty of defining ‘sites’ within such a multi-period landscape is evident in the aerial photography. Which features merit being described as sites? Where are lines to be drawn? From the conservation perspective it is possible to sidestep these questions by designating large areas around the cropmarks as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. However, our interest in establishing sequences, associations and narratives requires that we define episodes of construction and reuse.

Forteviot’s most iconic artefacts, the Pictish sculpture, occupies an odd existential place in cultural resource management. Since they are movable (with difficulty) – being movable, they can be considered as artefacts, but not having been intended to be mobile, they are better thought of as monuments (see Jones and Ralston and Foster, this volume). But we have found that we have treated them as both. In what follows are a series of comments relating to how we have utilised the artefactual evidence: it does not constitute a theory or approach, but by the end of the project we may have developed some ideas which allow us to link these categories of material culture and extract their ideological value. At the moment our approach can only be described as pragmatic and consists of three stages -

- collection/recording
 - analysis/reporting
 - deposition/display
- all of which we would hope to refine.

The compelling rationale for this study, the reason why the uncorroborated historical identification of Forteviot as Cinead mac Alpin's palace has been accepted, and the justification for investigation these prehistoric cropmarks all boil down to the presence of an exceptional body of Pictish sculpture (Alcock and Alcock 2002; Hall 2011). The most exceptional is the Dupplin Cross, formerly a monument in the landscape and now an artefact on display (Ewart *et al.* 2007), but it is the quantity and the concentrated distribution of fragments of sculpture which point to the presence of a royal residence and perhaps a monastery. The distribution of monuments within the village, where formerly some pieces of sculpture were built into dwellings, reinforces the belief that modern Forteviot is more or less at the core of the Pictish site, but also reminds us that Forteviot was an agricultural production centre: one fragment was built into a building at Milton of Forteviot, where only the silted up leats indicate the site of the mill. However it was the recognition that the sacred landscape defined by the Pictish sculpture overlapped with the landscape of prehistoric ritual monuments that makes the investigation of the cropmarks a matter of national importance.

Artefact distributions are central to our ability to map and date the numerous sites within the study area, which so far have been mostly confined to material recovered through excavation. For instance, the presence of (small quantities) of medieval pottery from test-pits in village gardens and the relative paucity of such material in the fields to the south reinforce the impression created by the distribution of the Pictish sculpture—that the village has stayed put. The identification of worked stones of various dates from later prehistory to the 17th century in the Manse rockery further emphasised the continuity of occupation. Clearly some of the evidential value of artefacts depends upon the circumstances of their discovery, but loose associations have some value, as in the case of the spindle-whorl, recently found loose in Exmagirdle churchyard (Hall 2011, 144–5). Despite being a unique find from an insecure context, it nevertheless is valuable confirmation of the Early Medieval era at the site which has no visible remains that are older than the late Middle Ages. The ring-headed cross inscribed on the whorl raises interesting questions about the nature of the Early Historic community at Exmagirdle.

Shifting to a wider landscape perspective, systematic field walking is a well-established method for the non-intrusive examination of cropmark sites. Our intention is to examine transects through the arable areas including in key cropmark areas as well as blank areas. The most successful instance of fieldwalking within our study area has been at Dunknock where a socketed axe-head was picked up in 1981. This was followed by a systematic survey conducted in 1997 by local volunteers on the slopes of Dunknock (Donaldson *et al.* 2004) that produced a polished stone axe and a spread of vitrified stone, which we now recognise as a relic of the earliest phase of fortification on the hill c. 1000 BC (Poller 2009; SERF 2010). The subsequent excavations at Dunknock do raise some questions about the effectiveness of fieldwalking as a method for locating prehistoric settlement. Although both the LBA and IA phases of occupation at Dunknock produced pottery, which is not particularly distinctive or lovely, the fieldwalking programme discovered none. The fine-grained, meticulous recording of the vitrified stone distribution suggests that if pottery had been present it



Fig 4 A Roman-British fibula found in the plough zone within the medieval fortified enclosure at the Green of Invermay

would have been recovered. Elsewhere in the region there have been a number of fieldwalking projects organised by Eland Stuart, Gordon Barclay and Ruth Brown, which have generated some important finds of lithics and beads – but no prehistoric pottery. The fields south of Forteviot where the Neolithic and Bronze Age sites are known have been walked on several occasions, but no prehistoric pottery has been observed during field walking or recovered from the plough zone. Beaker and later pottery have been recovered from within features in and around the henges, but the absence of surface finds suggests that the prehistoric pottery produced in this area was too fragile to survive in the plough zone. This is not a new observation, but given the extent of excavations locally, it raises questions about the efficacy of fieldwalking in this area.

The most utilitarian use that archaeologists can put artefacts to is chronological. As mentioned, the later prehistoric pottery is not distinctive enough to provide much of a guide to dating, but its presence, coupled with the absence of other more robust types, provided an indication of the age of the hillforts before the radiocarbon dates were returned. At Dunknock, there was an expectation that the site had been occupied during the Middle Ages, but the absence of any medieval pottery, which is much harder and nearly indestructible, means that we have to reconsider where the Earl of Strathearn's thane resided, if not on the hill.

Excavated finds also indicate that there is more going on in the Forteviot landscape than might be appreciated. At the Green of Invermay, the ditched enclosure excavated in 2009 was thought to be prehistoric, but the ditch was filled with medieval pottery. This has encouraged us to interpret the site as a moated site, which served as a precursor to Invermay House. While undertaking the excavation, a second century AD Roman-British fibula brooch (Fig 4) was recovered from the



Fig 5 A barbed and tanged arrowhead recovered from the fill of one of the dug graves in the Pictish cemetery in 2007. An accidental inclusion or a deliberate deposit?

interior of the enclosure. It indicates that there was more going on in that field than was revealed in our excavations. So this fibula, coming from a loose context (plough soil), has expanded rather than reduced our horizons.

Tighter associations and wider ranges of artefacts of course offer more material for interpretation, the best example of which is the Pictish cemetery cropmarks towards the east of Forteviot village. This sector has been excavated on two occasions and both digs have thrown up an interesting, but small, array of material. The artefacts are of particular interest because the burials themselves are too poorly preserved to be dated directly. One of the simple dug graves, thought to date to the Early Historic era, produced a tiny barbed and tanged arrowhead (Fig 5). Was this deliberately deposited with the burial or a residual find? It may be taken as a sign that these burials were attracted to this spot because of previous use of the area. Somewhat more suggestive of a previous attraction are several sherds of Romano-British pottery and the head of a probable Roman copper alloy pin of the second or third century AD (Crummy 1983, 28) from the area of the square ditched enclosure adjacent to the cemetery, which coupled with the arrowhead, hints at a pre-Pictish ritual focus to the area (Campbell and Gondek 2009, 21). More expected have been the recent finds—clay pipe fragments and coins, which help to define the level of plough damage and perhaps when it began. For instance, the only stratified pottery from the 2007 Pictish cemetery excavation came from the upper fill of one of the Pictish barrow ditches: this sherd of glazed Scottish White Gritty ware dates to the 13th or 14th century and suggests that the ditches were still visible at this time. A badly eroded coin, possibly an early 17th century Turner, was found at the interface between the plough zone and the ‘top’ fill of a



Fig 6 Medals, like this one featuring an image of Gladstone, caught the eye of William McGonagall who mentions them in his poem 'The Great Franchise Demonstration Dundee, 20th September 1884'. This one was recovered from the top soil in the Pictish cemetery

Pictish grave suggesting that by the 17th century the cemetery had been completely forgotten and given over to agriculture. In some ways even more interesting was a Victorian medal found in the plough zone commemorating an electoral reform demonstration held in Dundee in 1884 (Fig 6), presumably lost by a ploughman who had attended the event.

From an historic perspective, the centuries leading up to the end of the first millennium were pivotal, as the time when a kingdom was constructed around the ancient ritual landscape at Forteviot. One might have hoped for more plentiful evidence of this process, but all we have are small glass objects. Two post-Roman beads have also been recovered from the cropmark area: an Anglo-Saxon type located by fieldwalking and a segmented blue bead of Viking Age date found in excavation. Most intriguing is a droplet of molten glass recovered from the roughly cobbled surface south of the cist burial (Fig 7). This surface comes late in the sequence of activity: does this hint at more intensive use of this area than for periodic festivals and assemblies, as we had supposed? It has made us speculate about the traditional identification of Haly Hill, the preferred site of the



Fig 7 Glass droplet indicates the working of glass in the area around the henge and cist burial

palace, with the bluff on the west edge of the village. Perhaps James Knox's pre-Ordnance Survey map of the area which locates Haly Hill more or less on top of the prehistoric cropmark complex, needs reconsideration (1850).

The most concrete and ideal set of artefacts are those discovered in the Early Bronze Age dagger burial in 2009. There is no question that the artefacts were deliberately deposited in the cist, because the burial had not been disturbed. The dagger and dagger-knife have been subject to a suite of analytical techniques, because the freak conditions in the cist allowed the composite handle of horn, wood, bronze and gold to be preserved along with evidence for a sheepskin sheath. There is currently a large programme of analytical work being conducted by a range of specialists, who will provide definitive accounts of the materials and allow this component of the site to be placed within its regional and national context. These objects have had to sustain a great deal of analysis because they will have to support a considerable weight of interpretative ideas.

CONCLUSION

The SERF project aims to look beyond individual sites and periods in an attempt to understand these widely separated but physically linked episodes of landscape use. This is a universal theme, but with local, national and international dimensions. The first phase of the project has addressed the research questions in a pragmatic way as a means to discovering how best to explore this landscape. Artefacts have proved to be far more valuable than we expected. In some respects, chronology is proving to be one of the least interesting things that they can tell us. They have introduced new questions about the nature, distribution and survival of sites which we did not anticipate. The next phase of the project will, to some extent, need to grapple with these new questions.

Details of the SERF project, including downloadable versions of the annual Data Structure Reports, are available on the project web site:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/serf/> (Checked 13th April 2011).

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