Johnson's map of fort and town, 1710 (NLS)

It was the town, which did not survive the siege, which provided the richest archaeological deposits. Small trenches were used to target geophysical anomalies and resulted the in the recovery of important forensic evidence which included fragments of 18th century wine bottles, many of which had been distorted through exposure to fire, and a rich assemblage of 16th and 17th century pottery. More evidence for the burning of the buildings took the form of heavy charcoal deposits and lumps of burnt daub from the mud and turf walls.

Some of the many finds from the excavation
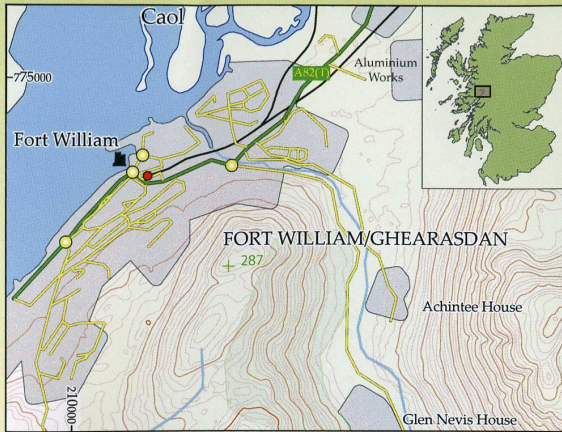
Some of the artefacts, including the wine bottles, provided evidence for extensive trading links. During the 18th century wool was exported to Liverpool and fish to Bilbao in Spain and Ostend in the Low Countries, while imports included wines and spirits, timber, tar and mercantile goods.

Cover images:
c. 1740-1750 drawing of Fort William and Maryburgh (West Highland Museum, Fort William)
The original gate to the fort now at Craigs Cemetery (it can be seen the drawing above it)
Map of the Fort William area by Timothy Pont from 1583.

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SIEGE OF FORT WILLIAM 1746
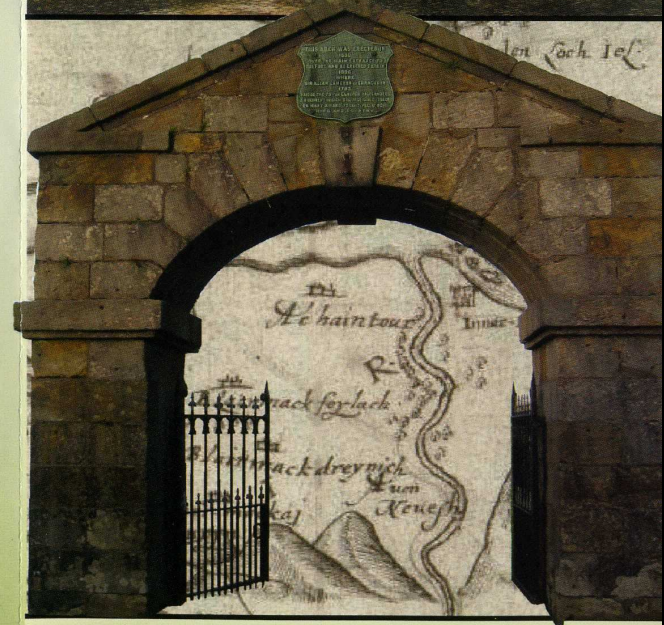
A COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

THE SIEGE OF FORT WILLIAM, 1746
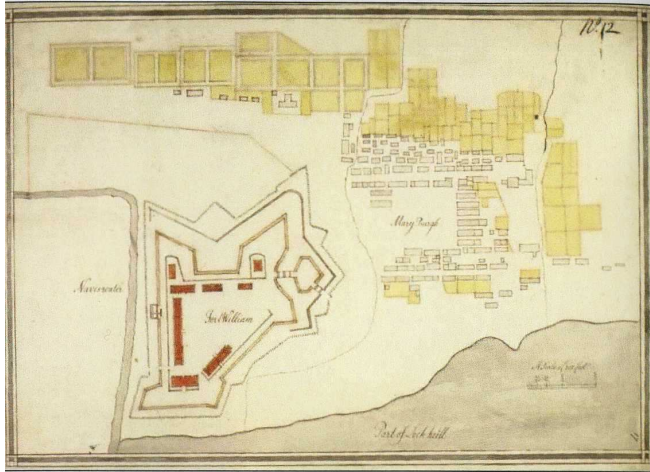
Wade's map of fort and town, 1736 (NLS)

The fort which gives the town of Fort William its name was first built in 1654 by General Monk on the orders of Oliver Cromwell, who at the time was trying to subdue the troublesome Highlands in the aftermath of the civil wars. The earth and timber fortification was garrisoned until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, when on the army's departure it was slighted so it couldn't be used by others.

The peace that followed was shattered in 1689 with the first Jacobite rising, during which the fort was rebuilt. There was a deliberate policy of attracting settlement close to the fort for trading purposes. In keeping with the times the fort was named Fort William after the King and the town Maryburgh after the Queen.

The fort was strengthened again in the 1720s following further Jacobite risings, and became the western outpost of a string of three forts along the Great Glen. The fort was besieged by the Jacobites in early 1746 when artillery batteries were placed on the high ground overlooking the walls, some of them armed with cannon captured from the other forts.

To deny the Jacobite's cover and to open a clear field of fire, the fort's governor gave the order for the town to be levelled, and so it was put to the torch. Despite heavy bombardment the Jacobites failed in their attempt to take the fort, which was supported by two armed naval sloops anchored close by.

The siege was lifted in early April, when, after a successful assault by a party from the fort against one of the gun batteries, the Jacobite force was ordered to return to Inverness. On 16 April the Jacobite forces of Bonnie Prince Charlie faced the Hanoverian army under the Duke of Cumberland on Culloden Moor. Jacobite defeat marked an end to the fort's primary importance.

By the 1750s the destroyed town had been rebuilt but not all of it on the site it had previously occupied. This time it was further away from the fort and although the town has expanded over the years, and the fort largely demolished, the Parade and part of the area of the early town still exists as an open space, occupied by war memorials, park benches and a putting green.

Excavation trench on the Parade

In September 2007, an archaeological project involving the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at Glasgow University and local volunteers revisited the events of 1746 by excavating the fort and the Parade. Unfortunately, the surviving portion of the fort was used as a railway yard in the 19th and 20th centuries and so any trace of interior structures appears to have been removed.

Excavation trenches on the Parade

1745	July 23 1745	Sept 21 1745	Nov 1 1745	Dec 4/6 1745	Dec 18 1745	Dec 20 1745	1746	Jan 17 1746	Mar 27-Apr 3 1746	April 16 1746
	Prince Charles arrives in Scotland	Battle of Prestonpans	Jacobite march to London begins	Arrival at/departure from Derby	Skirmish at Clifton	Return to Scotland		Battle of Falkirk	Siege of Fort William	Battle of Culloden