



Forteviot, Perthshire:
Village Project
2007/2008

Interim Summary &
Report

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Forteviot Village Project 2007/2008 Summary

Two linked research objectives are focussed in the immediate vicinity of Forteviot village. The first is to locate the Pictish royal settlement and 'palace' which documentary sources show existed in the 9th century. The discovery and excavation of this site will be important as it is the first open, undefended royal site which we know of in Scotland, marking a change in practice from the previous hill-top forts such as Dunadd, Dunollie and Edinburgh. Almost nothing is known of Forteviot in the period after the shift in royal power centre from Forteviot to Scone in the 10th century, and the second objective is gain some idea of the development of the village throughout the medieval period.

As a preliminary step, a number of test pits were dug around the village in the 2007 season. These pits, of a standard 1m square, were designed to locate any surviving medieval stratigraphy, and to quantify pottery distributions in order to gain some idea of the extent and date of the medieval village. Soundings in the vicinity of the traditional site of Haly Hill (supposed site of the palace) confirmed Alcock's findings that no trace remained of any medieval deposits, either on the hill, or below in the alluvial floodplain. Study of the alluvial history of the Water of May suggested that 18th century accounts of the palace being washed away may be confused, and that the palace site lay elsewhere, possibly under the present manse. The test pits, all so far in gardens on the north side of the village, did produce medieval pottery, including Scottish White Gritty Ware of 12/13th century date, as well as oxidised and reduced green-glazed wares of later medieval date (Fig 1). However, all this material came from buried medieval ploughsoil rather than medieval occupation deposits, indicating that the core of the medieval village lay closer to the present street line. In 2008 a few further pits were opened in the south of the village, and a larger trench in the field immediately south of the bowling green. In the areas excavated, there was little sign of surviving medieval stratigraphy, but the areas investigated were small and relatively far from the village street. Further areas remain to be investigated, but already we have a good idea of the limits of the medieval village (very similar to the present one), and an indication of where early deposits might survive. These will be mapped onto our GIS system to give guidance of possible locations for surviving evidence of the putative Pictish palace site. The medieval distribution can be compared to that of modern (19/20th-century) pottery (Fig 2) which spreads over the southern part of the village. Prehistoric pottery is confined to the fields to the south over the cropmark sites.

Study of the parish church and graveyard showed the building had a longer structural history than had been realised. Stumps of two walls (chancel?) and a possible buttress projecting from the east wall show that the rebuilding of the church in 1778 incorporated parts of an earlier building, which may have been the medieval one documented from at least 1164. The topography of the churchyard has also been investigated, showing a low mound to the south of the present building, and a series of post-medieval tombstones dating as early as 1690. All this suggests that the putative Pictish church, incorporating the Forteviot arch, may have been on roughly the same location as the present parish church, and confirms a high status focus on the south side of the village. Stray finds collected together within the manse grounds include an interesting late 18th -century sundial, an iron age bun-shaped quern, a date-stone of 1686, and a medieval ?quern, and these are being recorded and studied.

One further research project which has been identified is the sources of the sandstone used for the Pictish sculptured stones. Preliminary investigation showed that there is variety amongst the lithologies, suggesting multiple quarry sources, and an objective will be to locate these sources, but this would best be done as part of a wider study of Pictish sculptured stones in the region.



Fig 1 Density of medieval pottery in Forteviot village



Fig 2 Density of modern pottery in Forteviot village

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Details of the Archaeological Interventions in Forteviot Village 2007/2008

FV01 The Cottage NGR 305134 717509

A one metre square test pit was opened in the garden of The Cottage, Forteviot, opposite the parish church, courtesy of Mr A Macintosh. The trench was sited on the line of the pre-Improvement village buildings, to check if they had previously extended this far west. The cottage itself appears on the 1866 OS map, so must pre-date this period.

The trench revealed a modern pit (2) in the centre, with a plastic bag in the base, probably a tree hole. On the west side loose brown topsoil (1) sat directly on natural gravel. In the west half of the trench under 20cm of topsoil there was a compact clay-rich layer, full of charcoal flecks (3), 5cm thick. This was interpreted as a surface, possibly of a path. Beneath this was a darker loam (4), more compact than (1), also with charcoal flecks, 25cm thick, resting on natural gravel. All contexts produced 19th-century pottery and glass. However, two sherds of late medieval pottery were recovered, one from low in (4).

There is no indication of medieval structures in this immediate area, but there must have been some medieval occupation nearby in the village.

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FV02 No 1 back garden at NGR 305135 717557

A one metre square test pit was dug in the back garden of No 1, (Mrs Beckett). The trench was situated at the highest point, before the ground begins to fall slightly towards the present field boundary to the north. It was hoped to encounter possible pre-modern deposits to the rear of the 19th-century village gardens. The pit was 5 m north of the south boundary, 1.20 m west of the east boundary.

The section revealed no features, but 1.20metres of topsoil over natural gravel. Two broad divisions were encountered. The upper part (1) consisted of dark brown garden topsoil, full of 19th and 20th -century pottery. This was interpreted as the night soil of the 19th -century cottages, and was c. 50 cm thick. Below this the soil was lighter (2), with a distinct concentration of charcoal in the upper part. In the lower part, occasional gravel pebbles occurred, increasing in frequency towards the base, where there was a fairly sudden transition to the natural gravel. This context was about 70cm thick. This layer contained only medieval pottery, and was interpreted as the ploughsoil of the fields north of the medieval village. The later 19th -century deposits had protected the earlier ploughsoil from degradation by the more recent ploughing regimes seen, for example, in the FN trench. The medieval pottery included Scottish White Gritty ware, medieval greywares and redwares, indicating a range of dates between the 12th and 16th centuries.

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FV03 Haly Hill at NGR 305015 717576

The scarp at the edge of the eroding putative site of Haly Hill was cleaned back to check the stratigraphy. A deep deposit of silty brown loam was exposed, with only a single find of 19th -century pottery in the upper 35cm. The total depth of the topsoil was 140 cm, with the lowest 25 cm being more compact and silty with some pebbles. There were no charcoal flecks, or any other indication of anthropogenic origin. These deposits were presumably alluvial silts belonging to the Late or Post-glacial river terraces, preserved by their location outside the arable areas. Slight traces of laminar structure could be seen in the lower part of the section, showing that these deposits were undisturbed by agriculture or rooting. There was no indication of the presence of a 'Hill' of natural or anthropogenic origin. The section agrees with that produced by Alcock's nearby trench FT 300 (Alcock & Alcock 1992, illus 8).

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FV04 The workshop at 305248 717497

Trenching for utilities revealed a shallow deposit of topsoil c 25 cm over natural gravel. No features or finds.

FV05 Forteviot churchyard

Stray finds in graveyard. Includes two coins near SE blocked doorway.

FV06 The Smiddy at 305210 717494

Trenching for utilities revealed c 60 cms of topsoil over natural gravel.

A large millstone lies behind the building - its origins are unknown.

FV07 Lacy's cottage at 305106 717572

Another 1 metre square test pit in the back garden of the cottage. Mrs Lacy dowsed a large wall (2m wide running NS, then EW to corner of plantation at FV03) which she suggested was the Pictish palace.

The trench revealed the same sequence as FV02. Garden topsoil (1), 20cms, with very sparse 19/20th -century pottery and glass. Underneath was lighter brown loam with abundant cinders (2), 40 cm thick. This contained sparse medieval pottery around 40cm depth, including green-glazed white gritty ware and Scottish White Gritty ware. Below this was undisturbed silt, light brown and rather stickier than in FV02. This was 70cm thick, reaching natural gravel at a depth of 1.30m.

Ewan Campbell & Meggen Gondek 15/08/07

FV08 Old Schoolhouse at 305261 717552

In 2007 an auger hole was dug here. In 2008 a test pit was opened in the same area of the vegetable garden. The garden topsoil (1) was c. 28cm thick, and full of modern pot and clay pipe. Below this (2) c 35cm of mid brown loose silty soil with few stones and charcoal flecks, also with modern pottery. There was a possible shallow cut (3) c 25 cm wide, 6 cm deep, in the natural gravel in the northern part of the trench. The fill (4) was stickier light brown clayey silt with large flecks of charcoal and possible burnt bone (sample). There was no medieval pottery in the trench.

The owner in 2007 had just sold the house to Derek Roff. Believed the core of building was in existence in 1800, but there are earlier records. Altered in 1835 (presumably the protruding extension in baronial style). Then converted to School in 1887 with addition of East wing. Note: there was a school here in the village at least by the late 18th century (*Old Statistical Account*, 1797, 122), and probably much earlier.

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FV09 No 2 Forteviot at 305139 717579

Another 1 metre test pit, in the back garden of No 2 (Mr Alex Healey & Magda). The pit was at the north end of the garden.

The same sequence as in FV02 was found. Garden topsoil with a little 19/20th - century pottery (1), 40cm thick. This lay over lighter brown silty loam (2), 50cm thick. This layer has sparse cinders towards the top. Sparse medieval pottery around 70cm down, including a good rim of white gritty ware of 13/14th-century date. Natural gravel at 90cm depth.

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FV10 Finds in Manse garden (Greylag House). At 305220 717378

The present manse was built in 1825/6. The previous manse was first built around 1699 (there being no manse at this time), and repaired in 1816. The 'offices' were rebuilt entirely in 1816 and the present outbuildings presumably date to this period. See documentary history for full details.

South of the manse is a rough unmortared garden wall made of irregular ashlar blocks and a variety of stone artefacts.

These include a small bun-shaped quern, which is of the Fintry type with a projecting handle lobe, and possibly dating to the 1st/2nd centuries AD (MacKie 2002). This variant of the normal bun-shaped iron age quern has a distribution in the Central Valley and Argyll. This find is the only certain iron age artefact from the Forteviot area, and suggests there was occupation on the terraces as well as in the hillforts in the upland areas.

A large ashlar block of yellow sandstone is inscribed with the date 1682, presumably representing the building date of a substantial stone building. This cannot be from the old demolished manse, which was not in existence at this time. It may date from an alteration to the parish church, but the only recorded ones were in 1623, 1688 and 1718. It remains a puzzle.

An 18th -century sundial stands on an oval-section sandstone pillar. The pillar is from some other source. The sundial is dated 1767 on one face and has an illegible monogram on the opposite face. It is a very late example of a type which was very popular in Scotland in the 17th century (Somerville 1987). The latest dates for other examples are in the early 18th century, and are usually more elaborate (eg the Invermay house example). It was a multiple dial type, with at least three dials giving different times. The oval-sectioned pillar was presumably originally from the medieval parish church, perhaps from a monument?

There is also an octagonal basin with a spout, possibly a medieval ?font, or ?quern.

Ewan Campbell 08/07

FV11 Trial trench No 3 garden (Mr Craig Moffat) at 305148 717567

A 1 metre square test pit. 50cm of dark topsoil (001), overlying 41 cm of mid brown silty loam (002), over natural gravel. Mixed modern finds in 001, none in 002. Feature, a cut, in south part of trench from c 40cm, includes line of ash. Probably a modern feature.

Meggen Gondek 08/07

FV12 Haly Hill floodplain trial trench at 305009 717551

A test pit in the site of the meander channel, supposedly which washed away Haly Hill in the 18th century. Following augering which appeared to show no channel deposits, a test pit was dug. Topsoil (1) of 33cm overlay 10 cm of sticky clay/silt (2), which lay directly on gravel. This gravel was not like the normal post-glacial gravel, but grey and sandy with larger stones. Reputedly this is the site of the old bowling green (1901 OS map, but not here on 1865 map).

Meggen Gondek 08/07

FV13 Trial trench garden no 10 (Lisa McCann) at 305210 717582

1 metre square test pit. 30cm dark garden topsoil (001), over c 80cm of loose sticky silt with many medium angular cobbles (15-20mm) (002), over natural gravel. At base there was a shallow (4cm) linear cut in the natural (004) about 40cm wide, filled with dark brown sandy silt, looser and with fewer inclusions than 002.

Meggen Gondek 08/07

FV14 Trial trench garden no 9 (Colin MacFarlane) at 305202 717570

1 meter square test pit. About 40cm of dark brown garden topsoil (001), over dark brown silty soil with pockets of light brown clay, some charcoal (002). Green glaze pot at 001/002 boundary, white gritty ware at 70cm depth in 002. Over natural gravel, contact uneven. Unlike others, this trench lies within the old garden boundaries.

Meggen Gondek 08/07

FV15 Area excavation south of present bowling green at 305262 717427

Trench c. 15 x 5 m was opened by machine. Topsoil removed, subsoil cleaned by hand. Depth of dark modern ploughsoil (1) variable, 30-40cm, over lower yellowish silty layer (2) down to 80cm. One piece of medieval red gritty ware in this layer (SF 1) at 65cm below surface. No features were visible in the cleaned natural other than a vague linear feature in the north end of the trench which proved illusory on cleaning. At W side of trench no stratigraphy visible. This is possibly due to the presence of a track which runs through here on 1866 map, accessing the southern fields from the village. It may also be due to tree rooting, from the trees in the Manse garden, which are abundant here. The depth of subsoil in this part of the field is interesting, compared to that within most the field where the Neolithic and Pictish

monuments were investigated. There, this lower layer of 40-50 cm of subsoil is almost entirely missing, presumably due to modern plough action.

FV16 Manse garden trial pit at 305175 717350

1 m. square test pit. Topsoil (1) of 15 cm over (2), lighter reddish brown loam with scattered stones. Homogenous down to 50-60 cm where natural gravel (3) occurs. No signs of occupation. Context 2 is interpreted as woodland soil – differs from silty loam seen in Northern area of the village and FV15, and is presumably due to rooting action of Manse woods. Very few finds, all modern.

FV17 Village Hall trial pit at 305193 717464

1 m square trial pit near S boundary of village Hall football pitch. Under the turf was a levelling layer (1) consisting of cinders, tile & slate rammed onto large cobbles and boulders. 30-40cms thick. This levelling layer had large quantities of early 20th-century pottery, glass, iron. This overlay brown loam (2), with much charcoal at top, clean lower down. A little 19th-century pottery at top. Bottom at 50-60 cm onto natural (3) gravel. This sequence was interpreted as levelling of terrace for football pitch, removing medieval topsoil and features, at some point after the construction of the village Hall in the 1920s. The paddock to S. has much higher ground surface, so has not been terraced and may retain medieval deposits.

References

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- Somerville, A 1987 The ancient sundials of Scotland, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 117, 233-64