

Can You Dig It - Archaeology across the Galloway Glens in 2019

Thomas Rees, Consultant Archaeologist



[1] Welcome, my name is Thomas Rees and this evening I'm going, hopefully, to give you a summary of the first 12 months of the Can You Dig It project in the Galloway Glens.

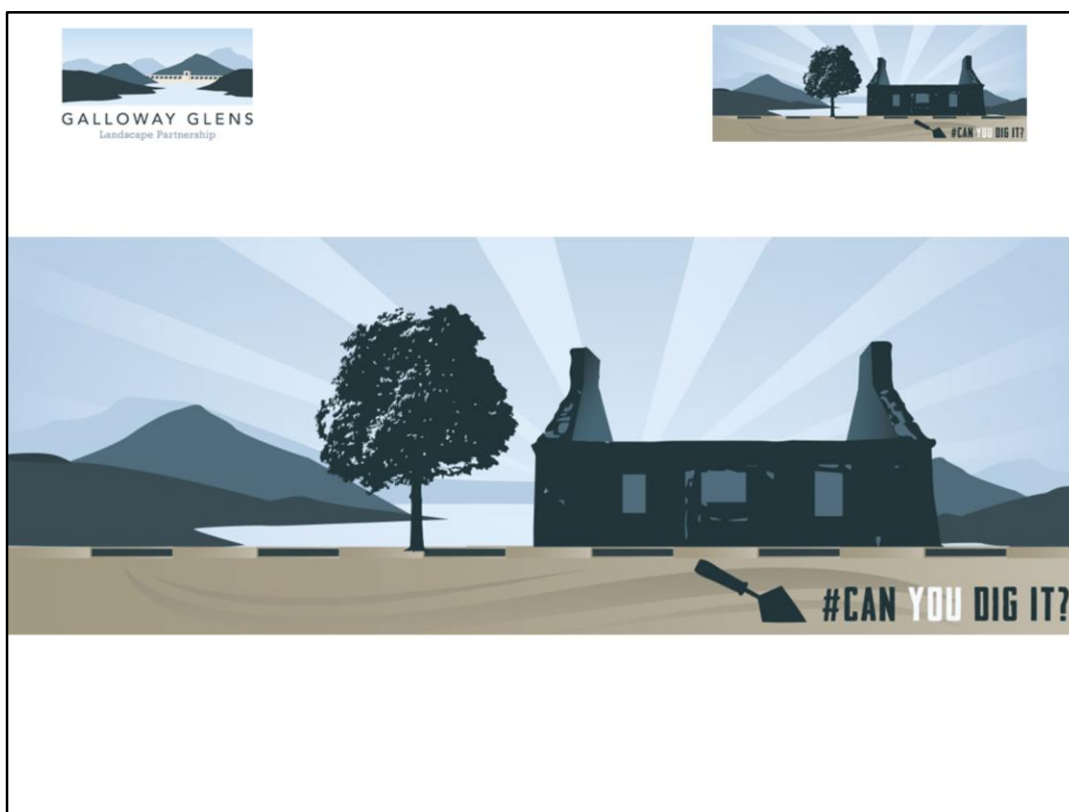


[2] The discoveries and works I'm going to dash through this evening are all part of the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership – Landscape Partnerships are a National Lottery Heritage Fund initiative, with the partnerships seeking to deliver public benefit focused on Access, Natural Heritage and Cultural Heritage.



- 'From Source to Sea' – follows the route of the Ken and Dee rivers.
- Stage 1 approval 2015, Stage 2 approval 2017
- Funded by the Heritage Fund with £2.7million, matched funding will increase the total to more than £5million over 2018 – 2023.
- Some 35 projects over 4 years.
- All projects are aimed at connecting people with their heritage and supporting sustainable rural communities
- Key themes for the Galloway Glens include:
 - Understanding
 - Accessibility
 - Natural Landscapes
 - Education

[3] Each partnership is defined as a geographic area – in our case the amazing Ken and Dee rivers from source to sea. Galloway Glens is supporting at least 35 projects over 4 years within this landscape covering a series of key themes.



[4] Can You Dig It is one of these 35 projects - our community archaeology project – and I'm going to discuss the work that has been undertaken by local volunteers over the past year and the discoveries they have helped to make about our past. To deliver this programme Galloway Glens secured match funding from Historic Environment Scotland. We have also received great assistance from landowners like the Forestry & Land Scotland, National Trust for Scotland and the Forrest Estate. Dumfries and Galloway Council have also helped throughout.



[5] At the start of this 12 month dash we promoted the opportunities from Can You Dig It through a series of lectures – explaining that we structured activities around a series of sub projects that were seeking to investigate specific aspects of the historic occupation of our landscape.



What were the realities of rural life in Post-Medieval Galloway?

[6] Each of these subprojects was underpinned by a Research Design developed from community consultation during the development phase of Galloway Glens. We do not just launch ourselves at sites, we approach them with a structured series of questions and undertake works that – we hope – will start to answer them.



[7] One of our earliest field projects was test pitting within the outer bailey of Castledykes in Kirkcudbright.

The first documentary mention of the castle at Kirkcudbright was in 1288, when John Comyn, sheriff of Wigtown, was noted as being the guardian of 'the castle and lands which belonged to the King'. The castle came to prominence during the first phase of the Wars of Independence, Edward I evidently intended Kirkcudbright as a supply port when his fleet lay off the Dee estuary in 1300 with the castle held by the English.



[8] From this aerial image you can see the core of the castle – this is a protected Scheduled Monument. The defences of the outer bailey had disappeared but previous investigators presumed they would have been built on a stockade principle and, if so, that no trace of them would remain.

This is the area we sought to investigate over two days of test pitting. Previous work nearby had failed to find any significant material – so we were hoping to discover whether there was archaeological information surviving outwith the central earthworks.



[9] It is important to appreciate that these test pits are very limited in size – and hence so is the volume of sediment tested. They are very much a taster of what may be present in the Outer Bailey and there is the potential that very localised activities can be missed by such an array. Our volunteers excavated the test pits using hand tools and then sieved the contents to recover artefacts.



[10] The dominant material recovered were later 19th and early 20th century ceramics including brown-glazed red earthenwares, glazed white earthenwares (mostly plain, but with some blue-and-white transfer-printed sherds present), stonewares and slipwares.

Some of these modern fabrics derived from wheel-thrown brown-glazed coarseware jars whose manufacture spans much of the 18th and early to mid-19th centuries – so we have clear evidence of the discard or dumping of relatively recent domestic material, which may reflect disposal of night soil from the burgh on neighbouring agricultural fields.



[11] From our ten small test pits we also recovered 20 sherds of medieval ceramic. All of the sherds were of small size and often heavily abraded, which meant that form and decoration were absent, making a comparison with other assemblages difficult. However, on the basis of fabric alone, it was clear that the material recovered was consistent with those from the earlier excavations within the main castle.

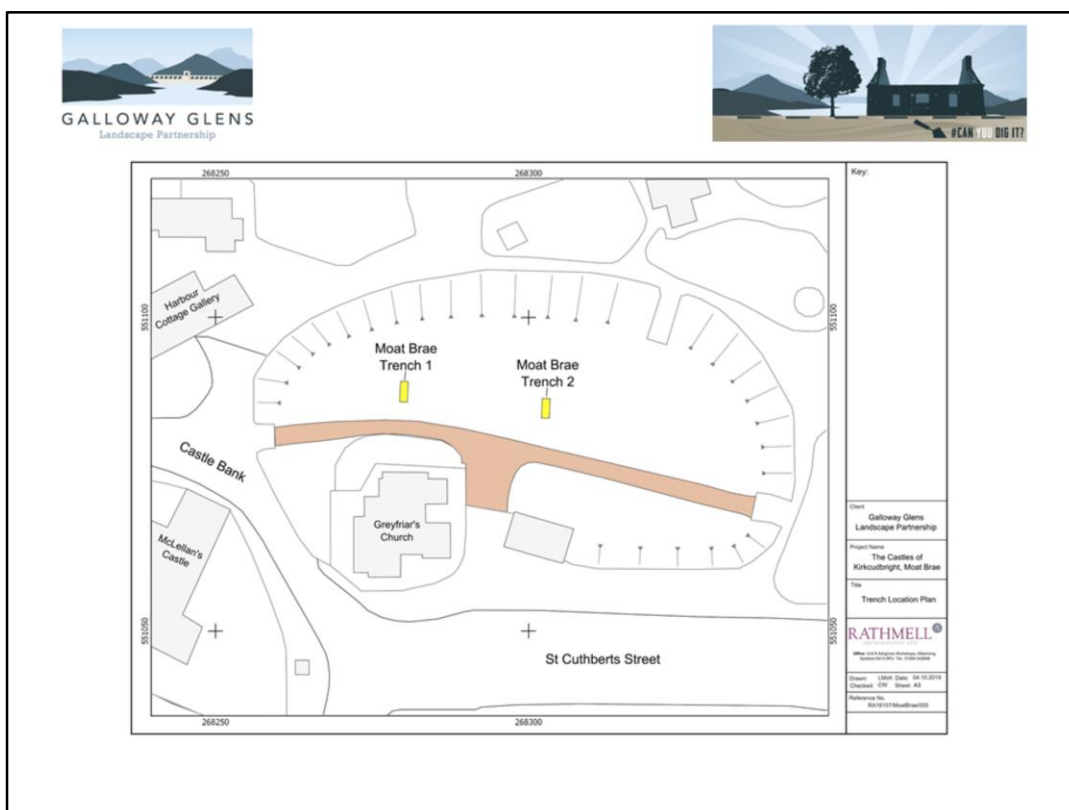
Roughly half of the medieval assemblage comprised a soft, pinkish-red fabric, sandy in texture with quartz and mica inclusions. This pottery has been interpreted as a local ware. Pottery from this same ware has been recovered from other medieval sites in Dumfries and Galloway, including Caerlaverock Old Castle in the east and Whithorn in the west. Outwith Scotland, this same 'local' ware has been found in Carlisle.

This local ware is thought to have first been used in the early to mid-13th century – finding this material in the Outer Bailey suggests that the use of the Castledykes site may stretch back towards the 1220s rather than the 1280s attested by documentary sources. We have also shown that there is medieval material surviving within the outer bailey that may be able to enrich our understanding of the use of this area.



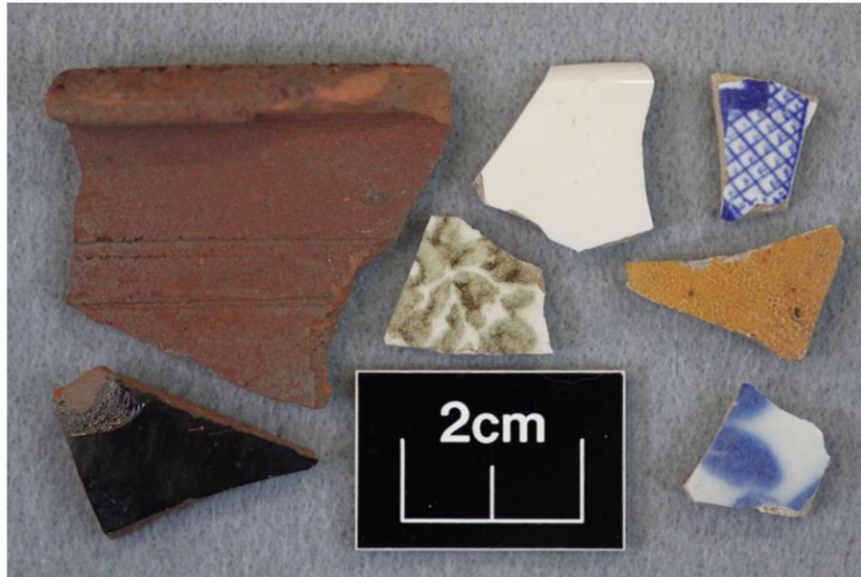
[12] Kirkcudbright has more than one castle - tradition holds that Fergus, Lord of Galloway, had a timber castle on Moat Brae in the 12th century – before the use of the Castledykes site - certainly the Lords of Galloway sustained a powerful naval presence in the Irish Sea and the Dee offers the best natural harbor on the Solway coast, supporting this narrative for an early castle.

The burgh itself is only first attested to in 1330 but there is a presumption that even if the burgh dated from around this time, there may well have been pre-burgh settlement.



[13] Over three days we sought to test the Moat Brae mound around Greyfriars to consider whether we could find any hint of 12th century activity that could be associated with the Lords of Galloway, or the growth of the burgh from the 14th century onwards including the 15th century friary.

The intensification of use of the surrounding area in the 18th and 19th centuries was also expected to be evident, especially the ship building yard that overlay the eastern half. So we set out two trenches, Trench 1 to test the ground that appears to lie open since the 16th century and Trench 2 to examine the area that became a ship building yard.



[14] While we didn't identify any structures, we did recover nearly 400 sherds of modern pottery or ceramic from the trenches, many of the sherds were extremely small. More than half comprised sherds of plain, glazed white earthenware with no decoration evident. Occurring in much more modest quantities were sherds derived from transfer-printed table wares and tin-glazed plain white earthenwares. Small quantities of sherds from brown-glazed white earthenware and brown-glazed red earthenware vessels (mostly teapots) were also present.

The dominant wares and colourways present are typical of the period spanning c.1820 to 1860, and while this does not necessarily imply that they were deposited or even manufactured during this narrow time frame, it is interesting to note that pottery types typical of the first few decades and the last few decades of the 19th century were much more poorly represented.



[15] Within the assemblage were a 17 fragments from clay tobacco pipes, comprising ten stem fragments and seven bowl fragments. All appeared to derive from the short-stemmed 'cutty' types that were popular throughout much of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

One of the bowl fragments derived from a pipe with a decorative bowl which resembled a stave-built barrel, while six of the ten stem fragments retained evidence of stamps or maker's marks. Two were adjoining: these comprised adjacent fragments of stem from trench 1, with the maker's stamp 'W White' on one side, and the place of manufacture 'Glasgow' on the other.

A further bowl fragment bears the fragmentary legend 'BE(I)' and 'CUT' stamped within an oval or circular cartouche featuring a central design of superimposed lozenges. It is not possible to establish the identity of this pipe with confidence, but it could possibly represent a 'Belgium' type cutty, a form which is named (but not illustrated) in a Christie's catalogue dated to c. 1900s.



[16] Two buttons were recovered, one of which was a small circular button, stamped with the legend 'R McConchie Kirkcudbright' around its circumference. The centre was depressed, with four perforations for attachment to the host garment. The name, 'R. McConchie,' is cited in 1878 as one of the tailors gathered as part of the Incorporated Trades at the firing of the 'Siller Gun,' and it is possible that the button formed part of a garment manufactured by McConchie at around this time.



[17] By far the most intriguing part of the collection were nine slate pencils, recovered from both trenches and occurring mainly in topsoil and made ground. The pencils may well derive from the use of the former church as a school during the 18th century.



[18] A small group of 11 medieval sherds and one sherd of post-medieval reduced ware present (originating in the period spanning the 15th-early 17th centuries).

Of the medieval sherds, six were sherds of gritty wares, similar either to red or white gritty fabrics that spanned the mid- to late 12th to early 14th centuries. The balance of the medieval ceramics comprised sherds of local green-glazed wares which span a date range from the mid-13th century to the late 14th century. The preponderance of unglazed sherds, probably derived from cooking pots, might suggest an origin earlier in the sequence, as cooking pots tend to fall out of use during the 14th century as metal vessels become more widely available.

We have not found a castle – the Moat Brae is clearly now a more distinct landscape feature than it was in the past – but from within the lowest deposits in Trench 1 we have recovered pottery from the range of mid -12th to 13th century ... suggesting activity at this location earlier than the documented 1330 presence of the burgh.



[19] Our largest excavation was on the Threave estate at Little Wood Hill where we stripped a portion of the summit of the hill to undertake an open area excavation with the help and assistance of the National Trust for Scotland.



[20] Little Wood Hill is the site of a most enigmatic feature, as sub-circular D shaped enclosure on the western half of the summit of the hill. This ditch is visible as a cropmark, a darker line formed by the differential ripening of the overlying crop. This site was tested by small trenches in 2014 by NTS when they identified the line of the ditch and, with a radiocarbon date from charcoal recovered from the ditch, dating its use to within the last century BC and the 1st century AD.



[21] The hilltop is an amazing location with views across the Dee, Threave Castle and up river towards Glenlochar. This is a very notable location that stands out in the landscape.



[22] To save the backs of our volunteer archaeologists, given that this has been an arable field, we machined off the ploughsoil to open up a large area covering roughly a quarter of the enclosure.



[23] Within this open area we identified the line of the ditch and started to excavate slots across the ditch to understand its form, and the terminals of the ditch at the entrance into the site. The terminals, being next to the access into the enclosure, are the most likely to contain artefacts discarded or lost during the use of the enclosure.



[24] And to maximize our chances of finding artefacts, we undertook a lot of sieving of the ditch fills – not always in the best weather!



[25] This low level aerial image may help you better recognise the entranceway and the run of the bounding ditches. Though we found a couple of small pits within the interior, we did not find evidence for clear structures. Indeed the pits lie tight to, or slightly under, where the upcast sediment from the ditch would have formed the interior banks.



[26] Given that we know the enclosure was active in the 1st century BC or AD from the work of the NTS, it was a surprise to us that nearly all the artefacts recovered were a modest assemblage of stuck flint. These small blades and flakes are more typical of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age, thousands of years prior to the date we have for the enclosure. This suggests that Little Wood Hill had long been a desirable location next to the Dee - with this artefacts surviving in the topsoil as residual material.



[27] We also recovered evidence of later use, with metal detecting enabling us to safely recover an un-fired musketball from one of the ditch fills. Typically these are dated from the 16th to 18th century ... which has not helped with understanding what the enclosure was created for, but does hint that the enclosure may have been a focus for later activity while their form could still have been found as earthworks on the hilltop – perhaps even during 1640 when the covenanters besieged the royalist garrison of Threave Castle who surrendered on the orders of Charles I.



[28] But for all this work showing much earlier and later use of the hill we have struggled to explain our Iron Age bank and ditch enclosure. We remain asking the question, why did the Iron Age communities form this defensible site on the summit of Little Wood Hill?



[29] Our activities over the year have not been limited to excavations, small or large. We have also been running a series of workshops to develop the archaeological skills of our volunteers – in this case we undertook practical surveying skills at Kelton Kirk in Mid Kelton.



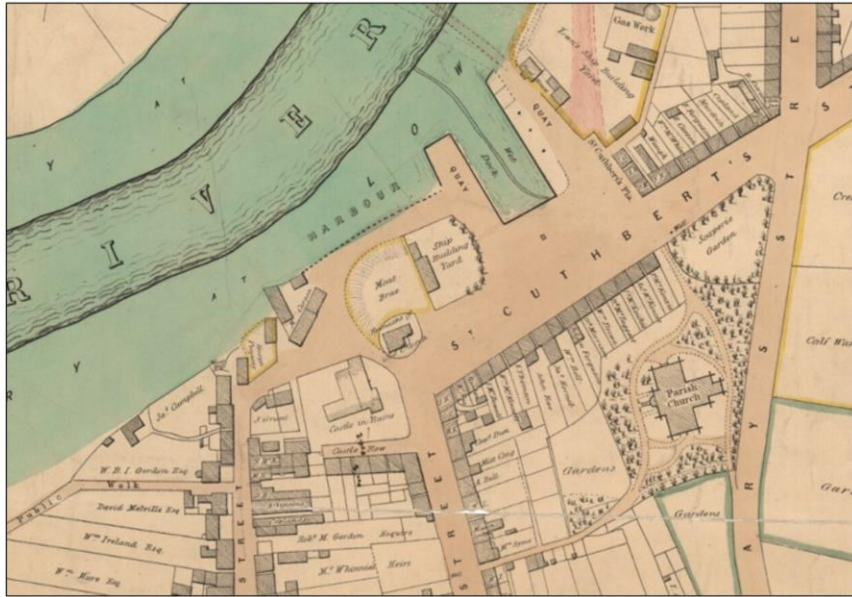
[30] Workshops have also been run on finds recognition and interpretation.



[31] As all the fieldwork is undertaken by volunteers of all ages and abilities supported by professional archaeologists - our workshops provide skills so participants generate more of the information gathered by the project



[32] Workshops have also covered web-based archive research to discover more about our historic landscapes



[33] There are amazing resources readily available online such as this town plan of Kirkcudbright from the 1840s showing Moat Brae – split in half between open ground behind Greyfriars and the ship building yard



[34] Or first edition Ordnance Survey mapping from the 1850s ... in this case giving us the layout of the farmstead at Upper Gairloch, a farming settlement on the Raiders Road. You can see the still active farm from the mid 19th century as well as many ruins and abandoned field systems surrounding it.



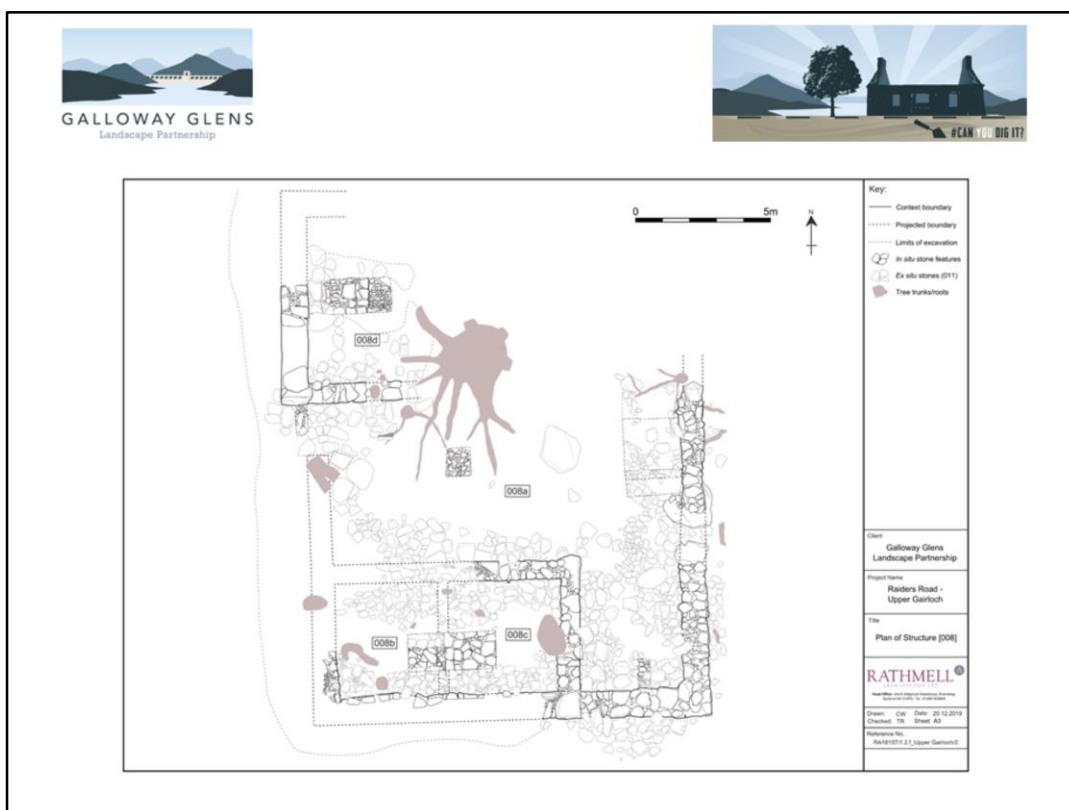
[35] Upper Gairloch was another one of our survey and excavation targets, looking at the later rural settlement of the Galloway Glens. The farmstead shown as in use in the 1850s was found ruinous and overgrown.



[36] The volunteer archaeologists cleared many of the central areas revealing the fallen walls that formed the farmstead – often built incorporating the most massive stones within the fabric of the farm.



[37] Not only did the walls remain, but targeted excavation revealed a series of flagstone, rubble and cobble surfaces and floors survived across the farmstead.



[38] Overall a plan began to emerge that showed two distinct floored rectangular structures set within a walled rectangular courtyard that was also surfaced. A very appealing small improvement courtyard farm from the early to mid 19th century.



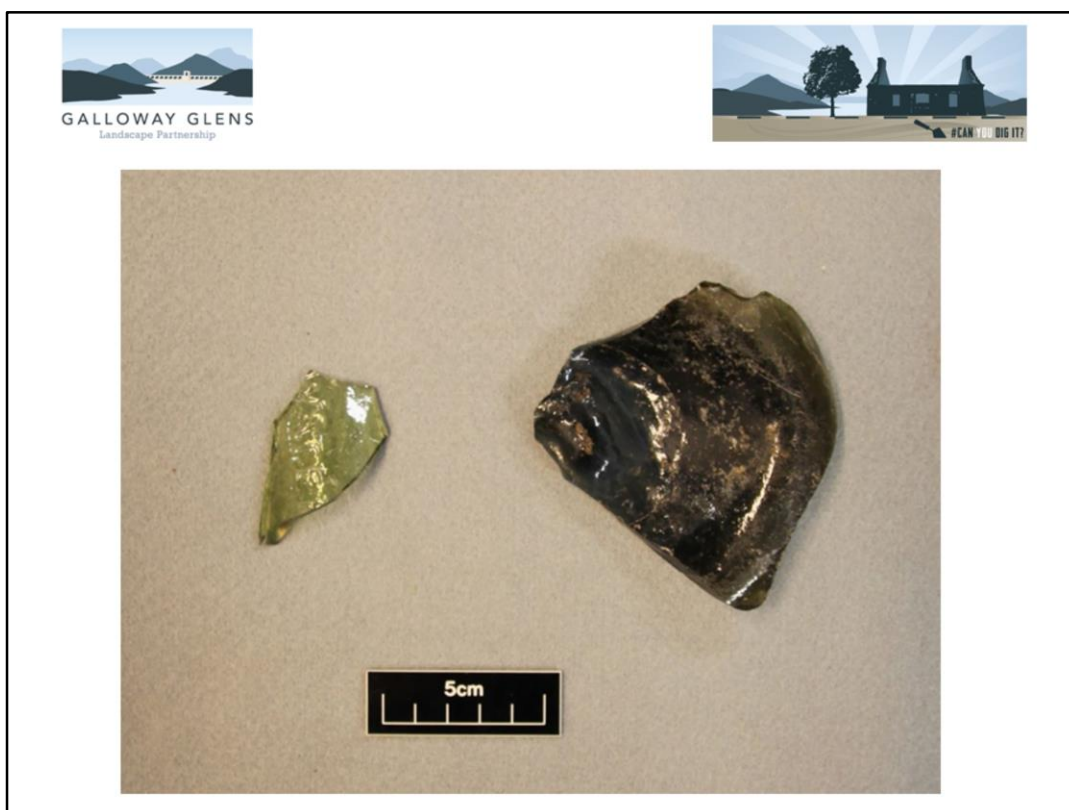
[39] A broad range of finds were recovered from the excavations, these included transfer-printed pottery in blue, black and purple colourways - these appear to be mostly wares produced from the 1840s to 1860s and represent domestic tableware.



[40] Another portion of the assemblage was a collection of sherds from 'slipware' vessels - these are more likely to come from kitchen items as opposed to those used at the table. The top left and bottom right sherds appear to be from dairy bowls, while the bottom left is from a jar, also known as a 'crock'. Cocks appear from the late 18th century, while dairy bowls appear from the 1820s; both continue in use until the early 20th century.



[41] As well as pottery we also recovered a range of metalwork – both structural and artefacts. Two quite distinctive pieces were this large iron rasp or file, and the socketed iron head of a fork. The size of the fork is quite small and flat so appears unlikely to have been used for any agricultural purpose. It is possible that it was for raking out a fire, or that these were the tools of a blacksmith or farrier?



[42] A range of glass fragments were also recovered from site. Most of these were 19th century in origin, like the fragment on the left which is from an aerated drinks bottle from later in the 19th century. In contrast, the fragment on the right is a large base fragment from an 'onion' type bottle, a squat form in use from the late 1600s until the early 1800s. These were eventually replaced by the cylindrical upright bottles which could be stacked in larger numbers for transport and storage.

This is one of our few earlier finds, joining two sherds from a pearlware teacup that date from the late 18th. As finds that are reasonably earlier than the farm buildings at Upper Gairloch they may be treasured family items brought here by the tenants – or are they the hints of an earlier iteration of this farm?



[43] We know that many of the settlements on Raiders Road have origins from well before the 19th century, this is Bleau's map of the area from 1654 which shows O. (over) Gairlarr – our Upper Gairloch. So we do have an earlier farm somewhere nearby.



[44] One of the structures shown as a ruin on the 1850s Ordnance Survey was also investigated – this proved to be a kiln barn. A single structure that combined a kiln for drying cereal grain – the circular structure in the foreground of this image – and a rectangular barn.



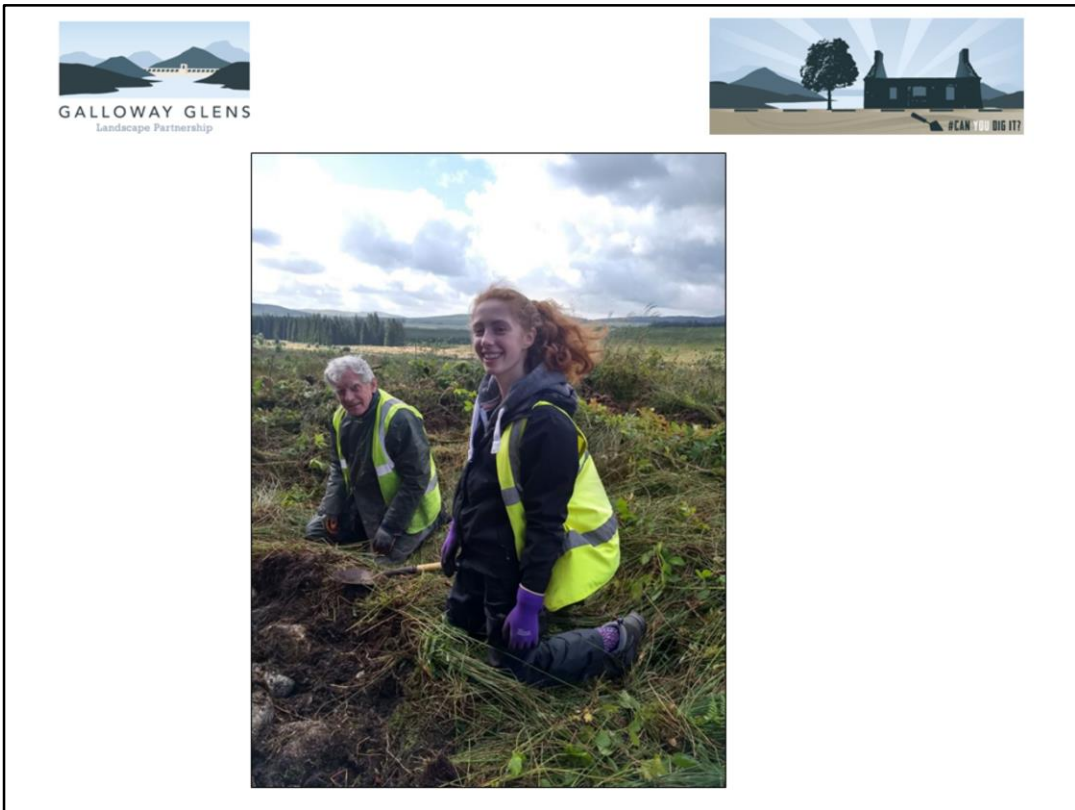
[45] One of the ways we have helped volunteers understand the structures they are working on is by producing 3D models from conventional site photographs. Here is the same kiln barn where you can more readily see the two core elements of the site. We also ran workshops on 3D Modelling to help develop these recording and communication tools



[46] These workshops included a session recording by 3D model the Kirkyard gateway at St Cuthberts in Kirkcudbright, purportedly built from the stones taken from the dismantled town gate – the Meikle Yett – combined with the 1644 Ewart wall monument.



[47] This workshop also looked at using a 3D model to create true vertical images of table graves without the need to physically get above the grave – such as this slab for William Hunter and Robert Smith. These covenanters were captured by John Graham of Claverhouse at Auchencloy in 1684 and were taken to Kirkcudbright Tolbooth, where they were held prior to their trial and execution.



[48] In combination fieldwork and workshops develop archaeological skills while engaging participants with the heritage of their landscape – which raises the issue of accessibility, how do we enable people to volunteer



[49] There are some easy steps we have followed, choosing locations that are readily accessible with every possible activity, even one day surveys, having toilet access



[50] Providing shelter, seating, tea, coffee & biscuits



[51] Making practical adaptations on site so that volunteers are able to focus on the archaeology



[52] And that extends to working patterns that promote access not conformity with an arbitrary schedule



Excavation on the Threave Estate
A 10-day dig near Threave Castle to uncover more about the prehistoric settlement there.
10th - 14th & 17th - 21st September
9am - 4pm
FREE
Booking required: Helen.keron@dumgal.gov.uk
No prior experience necessary!

[53] With the assistance of the Galloway Glens team, postcards are printed and circulated locally to promote opportunities



Threave Excavation: Accessibility Information

- FREE event
- 10th - 14th & 17th - 21st September , 9am – 4pm.
- Come for one, some or all the days!
- Meet at Kelton Mains carpark, Threave Estate (follow signs for Threave Castle) DG7 1TJ.
- A gentle-paced but all outdoor session with a short walk in. Uneven terrain.
- Toilets available a short walk from the site.
- Small friendly group. Most people won't know each other.
- **No experience of archaeology or digs required.**
- Booking required through Helen Keron



GALLOWAY GLENS
Landscape Partnership

Helen Keron

Galloway Glens Offices
5 St. Andrews Street,
Castle Douglas,
Dumfries & Galloway
DG7 1DE

07827 306 866

helen.keron@dumgal.gov.uk



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www.gallowayglens.org

[54] These communicate procedural and practical issues through Accessibility information and promote a stable contact into the Galloway Glens team



[55] The reality is that much of the practical aspects of archaeology are outdoors and suffer from the vagaries of the weather – we cannot control this!



[56] And however hard we try, we are shown the fragility of the structures we are using to cope with the great outdoors.



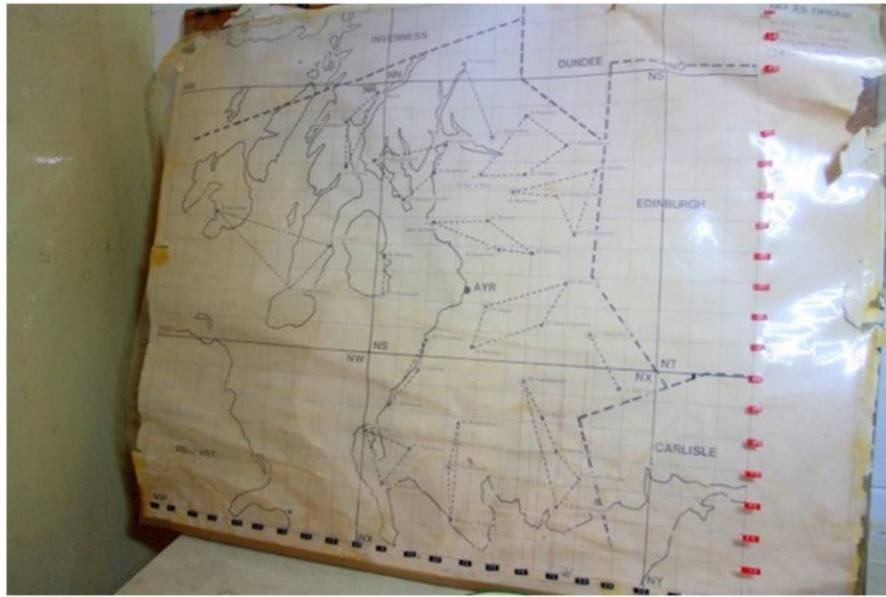
[57] Even with this positive approach to accessibility we need to reach those who cannot physically be involved through online information and video packages.



[58] We've also looked at promoting Can You Dig It through tie-ins with Scottish Archaeology Month and the Dig It project.



[59] We've trialed a vlog tour on Facebook, in this first attempt we traveled through the Galloway Glens looking at multiple Royal Observer Corps posts to look at the role of this important service in tracking and monitoring military aircraft and then, as the Cold War changed, nuclear blasts. This is one of the nuclear monitoring bunkers from the 1960s, set just behind Dalry.



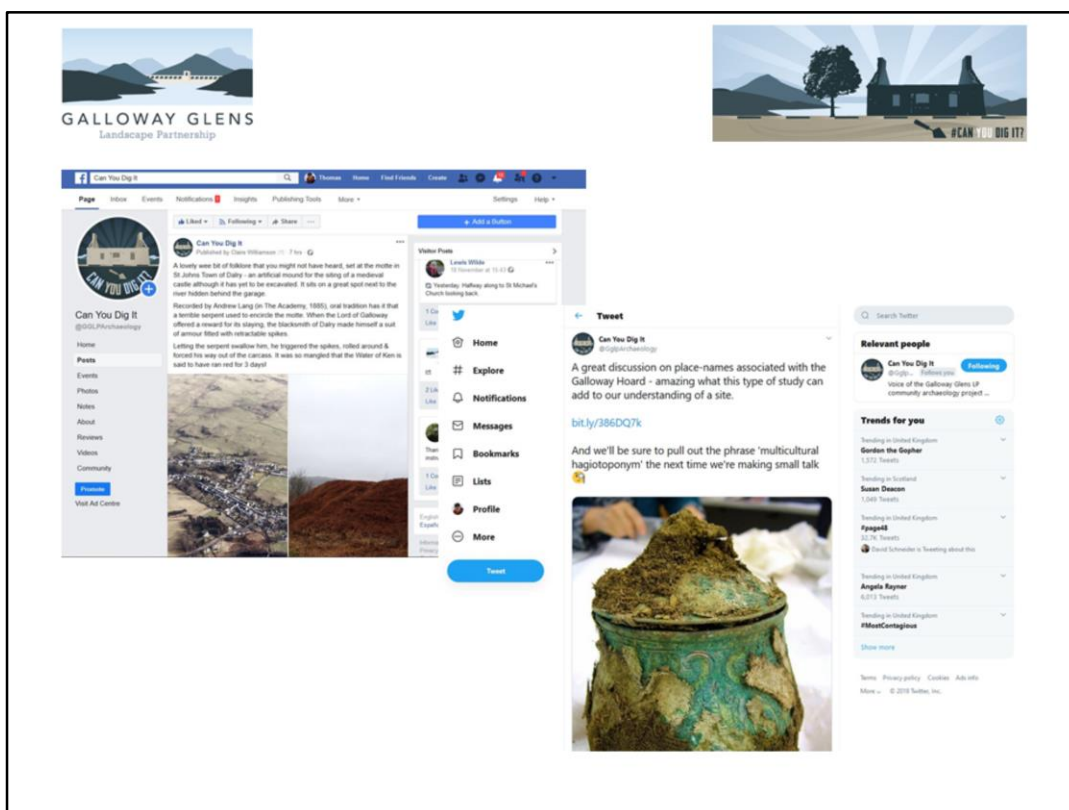
[60] The locations of the bunkers are known – you can see the string running from Carsphairn down to Kirkcudbright on this military plan – but their current condition is very varied.



[61] For instance the Castle Douglas bunker has been grubbed out, though a visible earthwork remains in the field where this once lay.



[62] We also have some survival for the post-war 1950s orlit posts in Galloway Glens – these prefabricated structures were installed when the role of the ROC was still that of aircraft monitoring, before their descent into the bunkers. The promotion of these intriguing sites was well received and we were delighted that it prompted Border Life to film a similar package for broadcast in the near future.



[63] All the work of Can You Dig It is supported by a branded Facebook site and Twitter feed – this is a locally controlled asset where you can find out what we are doing, what we’ve found and how you can get involved.



1911-13 Excavations

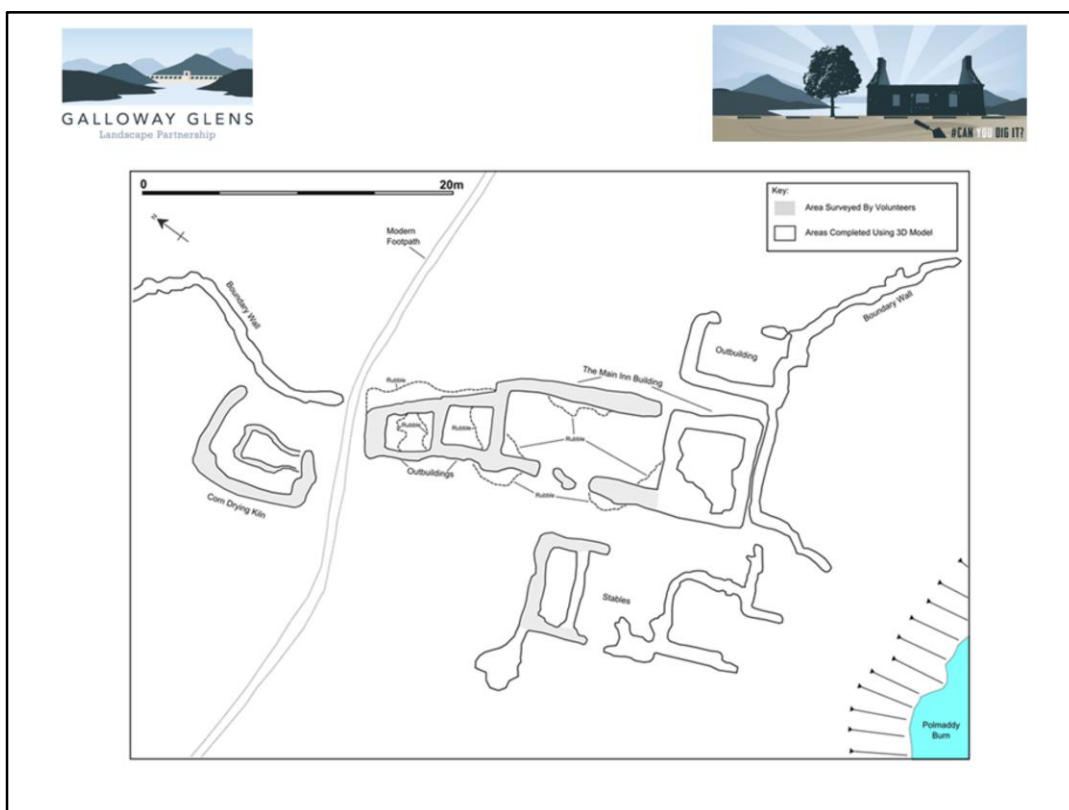
[64] we also use these sites to promote historic excavations in the area through Facebook Notes, in the case of these images they came from the 1911-13 excavations at Castledykes.



[65] As a part of the larger Galloway Glens landscape project we have also flexed our activity to connect and support with other projects – for instance we undertook an extended survey workshop at Polmaddy to link in with a walking tour on the new Glenkens path and a poetry project.



[66] This enabled us to look at deserted settlement at Polmaddy which was first recorded in 1505, surviving through to the early 19th century. Our particular focus was the Inn which lay beside the pack road passing through Polmaddy.



[67] And from the survey work we generated the first plan of the Inn, believed to have been the last inhabited structure in the village, since it was originally surveyed in 1971.



[68] We also made use of the paths created by access improvements to hike up the Corserine.



[69] In this case to survey a series of high ground wrecks – aircraft crash sites from WWII. This is the site where a Mosquito crashed in 1944 to the east of the summit at the Scar of the Folk



[70] Another one of the sites we recorded was the crash site of the Avro Anson from 1942 to the north of the summit. All these crashes involved the loss of lives by the aircrew involved, often during night time navigational training.



[71] These surveys were in part about communicating the idea that the whole landscape has been occupied and used by human communities and that the traces of our shared heritage can readily be found even on the summit of our highest hills.



[72] We have also supported the delivery of a Historic Woodland Assessment as a subproject at Barhill Wood by Kirkcudbright. Here surveyors looked at how a historic woodland is created, shaped and used.



[73] Identifying some of the structures from the original late 18th century planting of poorer ground by the Earls of Selkirk including an array of early stone dykes, quarries and roadways.



[74] And identifying elements of the original 1780-s planting such as this sweet chesnut stool in Janet's plantation – with the report and tours provided by the specialist surveyors from Dendrochronicle enabling the community to better understand the resource they were gaining control of.



[75] In many ways Can You Dig It is also about linking people with assets already there – like HES providing tours of Threave while we dug on the NTS estate



[76] Visiting the Stewartry Museum during our fieldwork at Castledykes to see a display of historic finds from our site that are being curated by the museum.



[77] And becoming an asset for other community initiatives like running a subproject as a station on the Kirkcudbright Arts & Crafts Trail



[78] Or providing staff so the local Scotlands Rock Art Project team had the first aid cover needed to lead a public tour



[79] As you can see from this summary we have been very active over the past 12 months and have made a series of discoveries that enrich our understanding of the historic Galloway Glens – I hope you will agree that we are acting as a positive force enabling the community to explore their archaeological heritage both through discovering new information and from rediscovering what we already have.



[80] Can You Dig It will not stop here – our hope and intent over the coming years of the Galloway Glens landscape partnership is to push further to build skills in our communities, supporting more targeted project work on archaeological sites and seeking to promote our archaeological heritage.



Questions & Feedback



@GGLParchaeology



Helen.Keron@dumgal.gov.uk

[81] If you are interested in continuing or becoming involved this year – please get in touch.

Take this opportunity – give us feedback on sites or issues you want to see addressed, email us to hear about volunteering opportunities and stay in touch!