

Shootinglee Excavations 2012-22
Pre-excavation Survey and Excavation Strategy
Peeblesshire Archaeological Society 2024
Piers Dixon



Frontispiece: plane table survey in progress 2012

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1. Introduction

Following the successful excavations at Camp Shiel, which revealed the remains of an illicit still of early 19th century date and a late medieval shieling hut as well as retting ponds (Joyce Durham and Piers Dixon 2024), PAS began considering where to direct their next research. Shootinglee was selected for excavation following fieldwork in the area in search of a possible peel tower based on local tradition and a mention in the Innerleithen Alpine Club¹. A stony bank on a knoll on the left bank of the Newhall Burn, about 5km south of Innerleithen (Figure 2), which is depicted on the first edition OS 6-inch map as a sheepfold (Selkirkshire 1863, sheet 6), was examined in the field but no trace of any tower site was located there (Figure 1). However, earthworks were recognised in a small field of rough grazing between a conifer plantation and the Newhall Burn on the right bank of the Burn suggesting there had been a settlement there. Here a building called Shootinglee was marked as 'in ruins' on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map (Selkirkshire 1863, sheet 6), which is built into the stone dyke. The earthworks might be the remains of an earlier part of this settlement, which documentary research suggested had a history dating as far back as the 15th century when it appears to have been a forest stead of Ettrick Forest, with its irresistibly suitable place name.



Figure 1 Extract of first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of Selkirkshire 1863, sheet 6. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

¹ Principal Excursions of the Innerleithen Alpine Club during the Years 1889-94, with a memoir of the late Mr Robert Mathison, first president of the club (1895), pages 59-60

2. Pre-excavation Survey and Strategy

Pre-excavation in 2012, a geophysical survey was carried out by Edinburgh Archaeological Society in a strip of pasture alongside of the drystone dyke that divides the small field containing earthwork traces of settlement from the conifer plantation on the other side. This complemented a plane table survey of the earthworks that showed a coincidence of the terraces and banks with high resistance in the geophysical survey (Figures 3 & 4) On this basis it was decided to carry out a test excavation cutting across one of the terraced areas that might be a garden plot in order to confirm the stone features defining it and its function as well as obtain dating material. Excavation of Trench 1 provided the confirmation sought and provided pottery with a date range of the 12th to the 19th century, including clay pipe, glass bottles and metal objects.

Following this successful trial trench, the question was where we might find buildings from the medieval period that was suggested by the presence of pottery. The plane table survey was extended within the plantation, demonstrating that there was a row of house platforms along the foot of a scree slope, suggesting at least five buildings with enclosure dropping downslope from them and into the field where trench 1 was located. While excavation was continued in Trench 1 in 2013, a new trench was opened, Trench 2, on one of the house platforms that were discovered within the conifer plantation during fieldwork in 2012 in the hope this might be a medieval building.

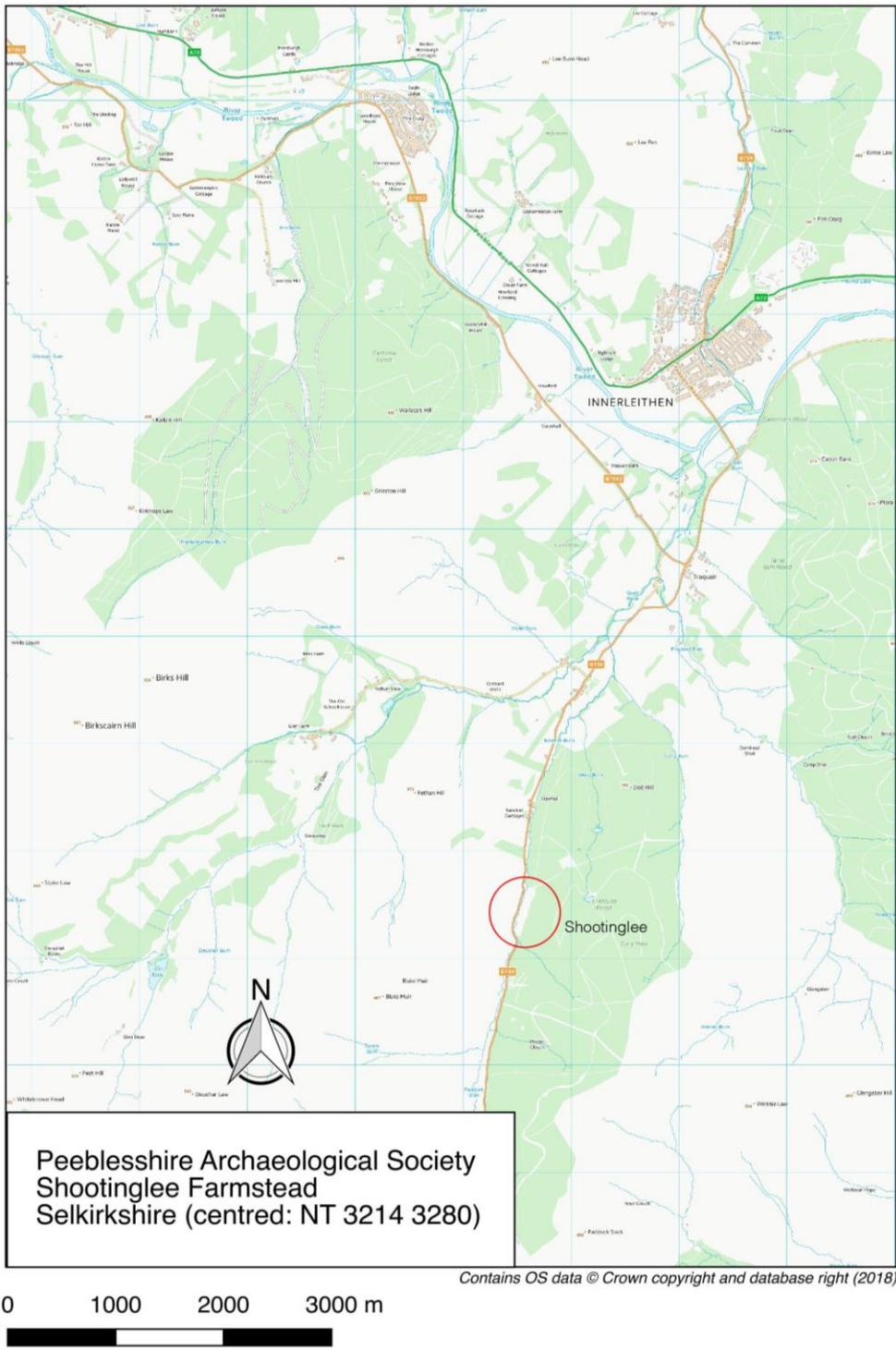


Figure 2 Location map

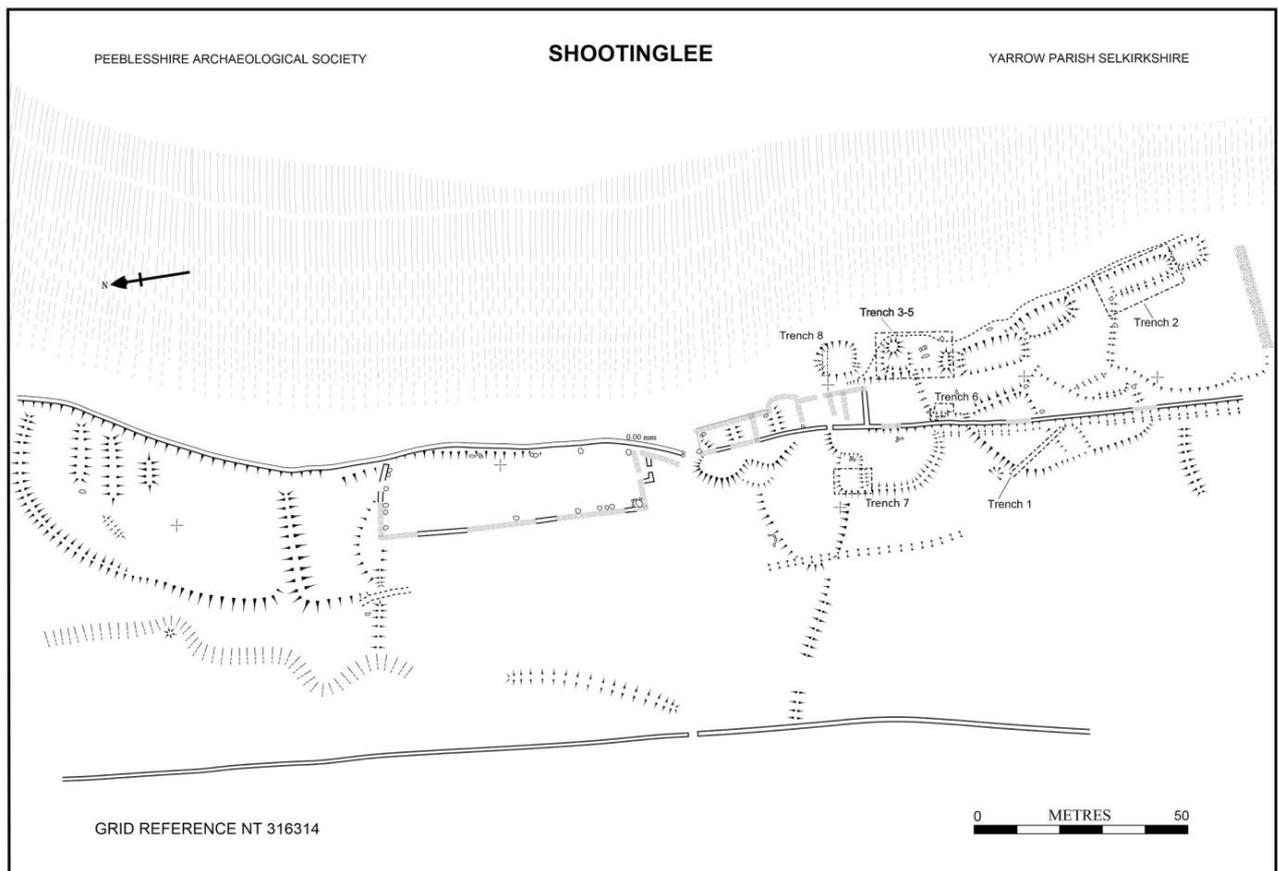


Figure 3 Plane table survey showing the trenches excavated 2012-2022

Trench 2 was successful in revealing a byre house of post-medieval date over an oven dated by C14 determinations to between 1442-1630calAD (95%; SUERC 59056). The building was termed Building 1. As this was at the far end of the row of house platforms, it was decided to test the date of the buildings at the other end in the expectation that they might predate that in Trench 2 and be coeval with the late medieval oven. This became Trenches 3-5, which started as three narrow trenches that coalesced into one once the trees were removed with the help of the Forestry Commission in 2017 and produced the late medieval peel house dating to the later 16th century, henceforward Building 2. The three further trenches, 6-8, excavated between 2020 and 2022, were intended to seek further buildings from this period. Trench 7 located a freestanding byre of mid-late 17th century date, henceforth Building 3. Of these only Trench 8 may have located a building that might originate at the same time as Building 2, but this was only explored in a 1m wide test trench and its function and conclusive dating remain unresolved.

3. Geophysical Survey

Edinburgh Archaeological Society

Summary

An area ground resistance survey totalling 6,400 sq. m. was carried out in June 2012 and October 2014 on a shelving hillside area of pasture at Shootinglee in the parish of Yarrow, Scottish Borders. The survey centred on NGR NT 31566 31383 was carried out at the request of the Peeblesshire Archaeological Society in support of planned excavation over a linear series of earthworks on the E of the site. Twelve 20x20 grids were surveyed in June 2012, extended by a further four in October 2014. The initial survey recorded small interconnected higher resistance anomalies extending for c. 110 metres from S to N along the line of the later E boundary wall of a conifer plantation which has divided the site. The follow-up survey to the N showed further higher resistances close to the wall line.

Introduction

EAFS were requested to survey a series of earthworks on a hillside pasture at Shootinglee. The survey of 160x40 metres along a wall line to the E of the site was bounded by a field boundary wall to the East, by field boundaries to the North and South and by the Newhall Burn to the West.

Shootinglee (Schotynle denotes a place where shooting contests were held). The site was said to be a hunting lodge of the Earls of Traquair, later a farmstead and sheepfold last inhabited in 1848 by the Amos family.

Methods

The TR/CIA area ground resistance measuring equipment was used. The equipment operates in the "twin" configuration in which two probes are mounted on a portable frame 0.5m apart. They comprise one current input and one potential measurement probe. Two remote probes, one for current input and one for potential measurement complete the two circuits. They are inserted about 1.0m apart and are positioned so that no reading is taken with the portable frame nearer than 15m to them. All readings are taken at 1.0m intervals in lanes 1.0m wide totalling 400 measurements in each 20x20 grid.

The processor unit mounted on the frame generates the 137Hz signal current that flows through the ground and the potential drop is detected by the measurement probes; the computer in the unit converts this voltage reading to a ground resistance value in ohms. The resistance value is indicated on a display and retained in a data store for later processing. The data are downloaded via a RS232 interface to a computer running the program "resistivity" The data is saved as text files and uploaded to the Sussex University developed freeware program "Snuffler" The print out is in extended greyscale with black and white limits based on highest and lowest ohms readings recorded.

It is normal practice to print high resistance values as black and low resistance as white within a gradient based on processed resistance values. Data can be further processed by clipping to improve overall contrast and by despiking to reduce abnormally high values. Data is also

interpolated between adjacent 1.0m squares to give a smoother gradation based on 0.25m squares.

4. Results

The survey revealed convincing evidence of wall footings extending along the East of the site for structures which were visible on the East side of the boundary wall. Evidence for a larger structure and possible enclosure to the North was also seen. The angular white “dummy” readings in the north east of the plot, as shown in figure 7.5, indicate the remains of walls where survey readings could not be taken. High resistance lines in the geophysics were a good match with surface features previously mapped by Peeblesshire Archaeological Society, as shown in figure 7.4. Possible field divisions or drains were noted to the West of the site

5. Conclusions

The survey results provided clear evidence for a multi-cell structure and house foundations within a rectangular enclosure laid out along the line of the plantation wall. This was supported by subsequent excavations by the Peeblesshire Archaeological Society who also located further structures within the plantation. Based on the dimensions of the structures revealed by the survey the results are broadly comparable with other records of upland hunting or shooting lodges such as Byrecleugh or Greenhill in the Scottish Borders and it is feasible that the site was converted to a farmhouse with an enclosed garden or orchard and associated byres or sheds by the 18/19th century.

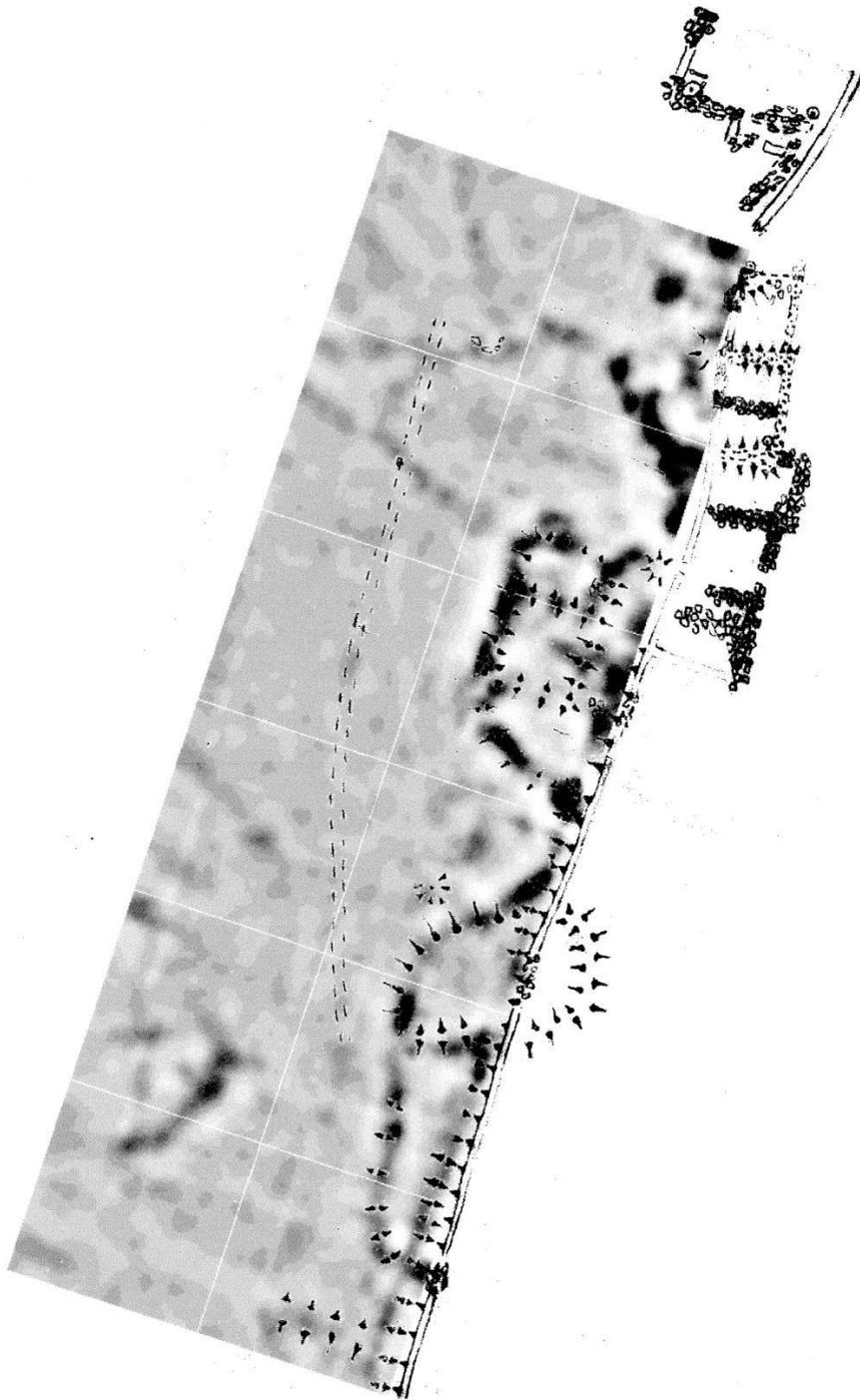


Figure 2 Geophysical data superimposed on plane table site plan (©Edinburgh Archaeological Society)

4. Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the landowner Thistlelane Ltd for permission to excavate and Charlotte Cavey-Wilcox, the manager of Scottish Woodlands in the Borders for her patience and support over the years. I should also thank the many volunteers who have made the excavation possible: Bob Knox, Jack Boughey, David Drury, Jeff Carter, Peter Jack, Bill Glass, Andy Jepson, Gillian Brown, Maureen Erasmussen, Neil Crawford, David Paterson, Stephen Scott, Brenda Dreghorn, Sue Cotterill, Kevin Cotterill, Brian Tate, James Garry, Geoff Parkhouse and particularly Joyce Durham, co-director on the project.