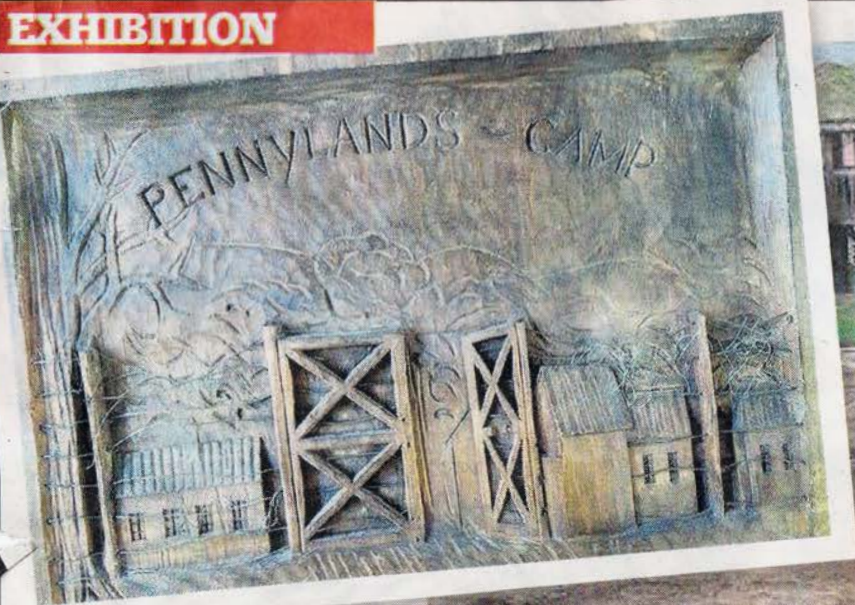


Ayrshire

Your guide to health, wealth and wellbeing

Life

EXHIBITION



Carving Showing the quite substantial perimeter fence



Grainy An RAF aerial shot of Camp 22 in the 1940s



Very smart A Frenchman perched on a wall in Auchinleck Road, Cumnock



Hidden past Earth was dug up to unveil the camp foundations

A fascinating glimpse into our wartime past

At the time, nothing could be admitted of its existence.

Wartime reporting restrictions put paid to any mention of Pennylands Camp 22. After all, loose lips sank ships.

Camp 22 began in 1942 as a tank corps training site in the deep Ayrshire countryside.

And French resistance fighters were put through SAS-style manoeuvres to take back across the Channel to fight the Hun.

But as the Second World War deepened, prisoners were transported back from the wretched front lines of France to rolling fields near Cumnock.

Germans were housed alongside Italian captives in a spot on the Dumfries Estate not far from the big house.

A fascinating exhibition will open next month, telling the story and revealing some artefacts dug up by archeologists.

The camp was where the new farm education facility is now.

Thousands of children – and the odd pig and rooster – are now walking over the footsteps of wartime history.

There were more than 100 huts, mostly for accommodation, but also a mess and admin buildings around a central square.

To round off its international flavour, it became a repatriation centre for Polish soldiers after 1945.

Before it was almost completely bulldozed by 1951, Ayr County Council used it to house local people in need of a roof over their heads.

The Pennylands Camp 22 exhibition opens at The Baird Institute in Cumnock on Saturday January 13.

Men were billeted at Pennylands from many nationalities, an obvious attraction to the local ladies, and among the relics dug from the earth was a cosmetic compact (Californian Poppy Rouge).

The charming monsieurs of the Free French underground were of particular interest. They were being trained at Pennylands using SAS tactics and didn't hang around for long.

A dig was mounted in March by the Cumnock History Group after a £10,000 windfall from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Amidst a small wood and rough ground, foundations for six brick and concrete huts were found, nine drain junction boxes, five concrete paths, old basins from the washhouse and a road.

Evidence was also unearthed of the diet of prisoners such as ketchup and fish paste as well as beer and whisky bottles, toys, military insignia and old radios.

These will be on display at the exhibition with extracts from oral history interviews that capture the recollections of members from the local community as well archival

documents from the period.

Accompanying this exhibition will be a series of three free talks by Cumnock History group and the team behind the research, starting with 'Digging into the Past' by Liz Jones of Addyman Archaeology on Thursday, February 1 from 6.30pm to 7.30pm.

This will be followed by 'Collecting Stories' by Dr Sue Morrison on Thursday, March 1 from 6.30pm to 7.30pm and 'Remembering The Past' by Bobby Grierson of Cumnock History Group on Thursday, April 5 from 6.30pm to 7.30pm.

There will also be a free fun day on Friday, April 13 from 1pm to 3.30pm, where families can explore some of the memories told and objects in the exhibition through drama, arts and crafts workshops.

The Pennylands Camp 22 - Hidden Histories of Ayrshire exhibition will run until Saturday, April 28 and admission is free.