



NEWSLETTER

The history of a WW2 POW Camp on the Dumfries House Estate, Cumnock



Site Finds



Cap Badge

Lead Nazi Eagle cap badge, Eagle holding a broken swastika.



Various containers

Cherry Blossom, Tonette Dark Stain Boot Polish and a selection of preserve lids.

Welcome to our first newsletter

Cumnock History Group has received a Heritage Lottery Fund Sharing Heritage grant. This exciting project, Pennylands Camp 22 on the Dumfries House Estate is led by Cumnock History Group and has been given £10,000 to explore the history of this WWII POW Camp.

Cumnock History Group is recruiting volunteers who are interested in the rich history and cultural heritage of Pennylands Camp and how this can be shared with everyone. These volunteers will be our **History Champions!**

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ORAL HISTORY

Recording stories

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HISTORIC DOCUMENTS

Researching records

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HISTORIC CONTEXT

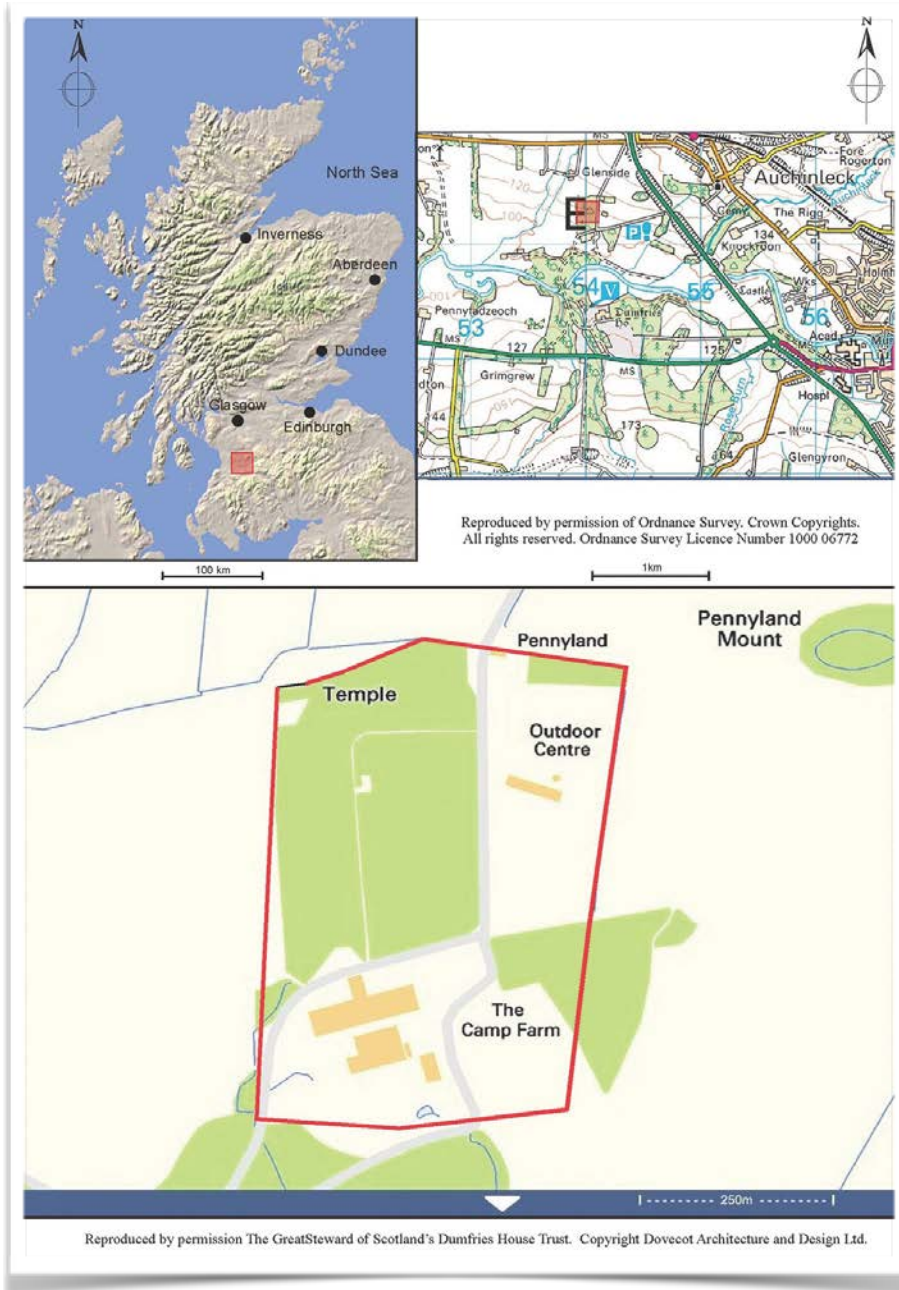
Recording archaeology

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INVOLVE & SHARE

Community & Publicity

Where is Pennylands, Camp22?



Pennylands is situated in the north-west end the Dumfries House Estate in Ayrshire and is partially covered by woodland. Built during the eighteenth century, Dumfries House was partially requisitioned as a WWII military facility.

Pennylands, or Camp 22, served a variety of purposes during and immediately after World War II. Operating first as a military training camp, then used to accommodate prisoners of war before being used to house resettled Free French and Polish soldiers.

The camp was then used by local families for housing until it was demolished in the 1950s.

Archaeologists have uncovered much of the physical layout, various uses of the camp, and its numerous buildings, and unearthed intriguing personal finds such as toys, insignia, ceramics etc.

BACKGROUND

“Pennylands Camp was built around 1940 by the Royal Engineers as a training camp for the Tank Corps.”

“During that time the Barony Road was lined with many tanks because of the excellent cover given by its avenue of mature trees.”

BBC - Doomsday Reloaded

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ORAL HISTORY - RECORDING STORIES

Cumnock History Group is eager to discover more about the WWII camp, its inhabitants and its impact on the local community.

Oral history research will capture the memories of people who lived in or near the camp during its occupancy and who were themselves, or remember, its inhabitants. Although their numbers are inevitably diminishing over time, prospective respondents have fascinating stories of the facility and its inhabitants, and are happy to share their memories with us.

“After the war it was used for housing displaced persons and in the early 1950s it was handed over to Ayr County Council for use as temporary housing.”

These memories include swapping toys for cigarettes with the soldiers; the stationing of tanks at Auchinleck; and playing with children resident at the camp and on the site once it had been abandoned.

“It was used as a transit camp for many regiments; Grenadier Guards, Inniskillens and some Canadian Regiments.”

Given the passage of time, there is now a great urgency to record and preserve their memories before their knowledge and unique experiences are lost.

“I still have 3 friends older than me I will give them a call, maybe they could give me a name of someone. There can't be too many still alive.”

Dr Sue Morrison will deliver presentations and comprehensive oral history training programmes to members of Cumnock History Group, recruited project volunteers and Dumfries House staff. These sessions will provide insights into how oral history has increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of various social, cultural, political and economic aspects of Scottish life.

The purpose, here, is to show how oral history research can be used in this present project and to indicate areas of potentially fruitful investigation. Volunteers will undertake training and be supported to participate in the oral history research component of this project.

Training programmes will cover all elements of oral history planning, generation, interview techniques, legal and ethical requirements, documentation, preservation and dissemination techniques.

Additional training will focus on digital audio editing; volunteers will be supported to create audio clips from the oral history interviews generated by this project.



The volunteers - our History Champions, will conduct primary and secondary research focusing on the camp, the context within which it was established and its purpose altered, and the circumstances of its eventual demise.

We will explore, access and research local archives held at the Burns Monument Centre in Kilmarnock and/or at the Ayrshire Archives at Auchincruive. These include local Valuation Rolls, Cumnock Town Council Minutes, Burial records, Cumnock Chronicle; the local newspaper from the period, microfiche, and photographic files and/or documents.



Training in research and recording techniques will be provided by Bobby Grierson and Kay McMeekin from Cumnock History Group over a series of 2 hours training workshops held at the Baird Museum research room in Cumnock.

In addition to this training there will be opportunity for learning about Dumfries House and its history, particularly during WWII. This will be led by The Great Steward of Scotland's Dumfries House Trust Curator, Thomas Breckney. This will provide our history champions with the wider background to the project and why and how large country estates such as Dumfries House were requisitioned during wartime.

The experiences of the staff at the house during WWII and of people in Cumnock will be explored alongside experiences of those in the WWII camp, as a training camp, a prisoner of war camp and later as a resettlement camp. This will reunite the different aspects of the wartime heritage of the area and reinforce the connection of Dumfries House to the town of Cumnock.

And It Fired Live Bullets!

It's been an exciting end of the year for 80 families of squatters in Pennyland Camp, Auchincruive.

Thrills included the prowlings of a "ghost," the "shooting up" of the camp with live bullets!

Bobby, son of Mr and Mrs Kennedy, of the camp, was playing cowboys and Indians with his little sister and a group of children.

As Bobby fired his gun eight-year-old Geronimo Donis (Geronimo, incidentally, was the name given to a famous Indian chieftain) saw smoke pouring from the gun barrel.

Realising Bobby was firing live ammunition, Geronimo grabbed his four-year-old sister Basilia and ducked as a bullet soared its way through his bogey.

Camp caretaker, George McNeil, gingerly approached the youthful cowboy and took away his gun.

Bobby was quite huffed! He had found the gun behind some plaster boards in a disused hut.

Police are trying to trace the owner, but it is thought the gun was left behind when Polish soldiers quitted the camp last summer.

To date the camp's ghosts haven't appeared quite as "live" as Bobby's bullets. They made their debut on Christmas Eve. Mr and Mrs P. Burns were visiting Mr and Mrs Matthew Johnstone. As they sat in front of the fire a hand appeared at the window. It started to fumble with the latch.

Mr Burns dashed out—saw nothing. Fifteen minutes later Mrs Paul, another

member of the camp community, heard a faint moaning and scratching at her window. She hurried over, but saw nothing.

A posse of 20 men, mostly miners resident in the camp, was quickly formed. They patrolled the thickly-wooded countryside around the camp—found nothing!

On Boxing Day three of the posse were patrolling a line of huts when they heard a sound. Mr A. Miller swung his torch towards the window. A scared face peered out at him. The three men broke down the door, dashed inside. They found nothing.

On Hogmanay the campers ran a "tonic" dance. It was a grand success. Everyone enjoyed themselves. But the kiddies wouldn't stay in by themselves. They had quite a time watching their elders "jiving" to the music of two accordions.

Every time the womenfolk stepped outside the hall they took their huddies with them.

Some of the older local folk still believe the camp is haunted. Legend has it that the figure of an abbot or monk has been seen hovering near an ivy-covered ruin known as the "Temple." There will be no peace, they say, until the squatters move out and leave the old "abbot" in peace!

Sunday Post
2 Jan 1949

Online, we will access records held by Scotland's People, National Newspaper Archive, Canmore, Scotland's Places, Secret Scotland, Radio Marconi, SCAN and any other organisations that will assist us.

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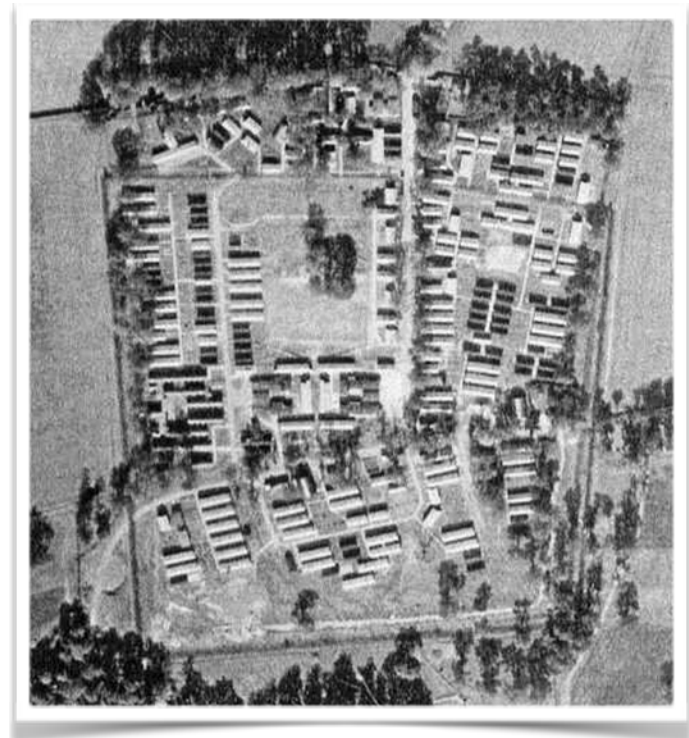
HISTORIC CONTEXT - RECORDING ARCHAEOLOGY

There were over 100 huts within the compound and recent archaeological excavations at the site have recorded many of these, with brick foundations, concrete floors, pathways and shower blocks all identified. The finds from the site include metal badges, NAAFI crockery and cutlery, concrete moulds and children's toys.



This will involve clearance of the vegetation above the buildings to expose the building masonry and remaining features such as drains, steps and pathways. These will be recorded using digital photography, scale drawing by hand and electronic survey.

Volunteers will be trained in archaeological techniques by professional archaeologists and introduced to the different aspects of historic building recording. In addition to learning archaeological techniques, they will also review historic plans and aerial photographs of the site to demonstrate desk-based assessment techniques.



Aerial photographs taken in 1945 by the RAF show some of the buildings have gardens and in the central area are a group of larger huts, presumably the mess, kitchen and recreation buildings. Later photographs from 1951 show the camp almost totally demolished by then, with only a few huts surviving at the North end.

Building on this work, Addyman Archaeology will deliver public talks and a 2x day workshop programme to the volunteers, other interested participants and general estate visitors. Participants will join archaeologists to undertake an archaeological survey of one or more of the remaining hut bases.



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INVOLVE & SHARE - COMMUNITY & PUBLICITY

A Reminiscence and Launch event will be held on Friday 13th January at 2pm in the Pavilion adjacent to Dumfries House in order to provide the setting for the project. It will include illustrated talks about the archaeological excavations at the WWII Training & POW camp and a display of the finds; alongside a discussion of the history of Dumfries House during WWII.



The event will be open to all and would hope to reach 50 people. People with memories to share will be invited, alongside volunteers who wish to be involved in the oral history recording and historic research and members of the community who have an interest in Dumfries House and history, including staff from the house and people from the local area.

There will be an opportunity in the spring to visit the site of the archaeological excavations and see some of the surviving remains of the camp.

Artefacts recovered from the archaeological excavations at the WWII Training & POW camp will be used to stimulate people's memories and discussion about life in the camp. All three research elements of this project will result in the recording and preservation of the past.

The oral history strand will generate c.15-20 unique testimonies from people who lived or worked in or near the WWII camp. We will digitally record their memories, experiences, stories and feelings during those important years before, during and immediately after WWII. The resulting archive will be retained at Dumfries House, with a copy donated to an authorised repository.

We will stage an open day at the end of the project in October to celebrate the work and launch its findings. We will deliver a series of talks and presentations about the project, what was learned in terms of research findings and skills development, and show what will happen to the records and project outputs. We will celebrate the friendships that we are sure will be formed during this project, and we will award training and project certificates to volunteers and respondents.

The event will feature exhibitions of: Oral history research and unique audio testimony; Original photographs of the project activities, volunteers and respondents; Archival images and documents copied or donated from our respondents' personal collections; Archival images, documents and text generated via archival research; Personal artefacts borrowed from or donated by project respondents; Archaeological images, texts and documentation; Archaeological artefacts loaned by Addyman Archaeology.

In addition to the Launch Day exhibition, we will create a mobile exhibition containing a selection of previously noted materials. Both during and after the project, CHG members and other volunteers will take this into schools, libraries, museums and community centres.

Community & Publicity

CHG members will stage public lectures and school presentations to further circulate project findings; here they will have access to the mobile exhibition and oral history archive - both audio and transcribed extracts; We will create a project page on the CHG website, containing a variety of project information, oral history audio, an 'online museum collection' and downloadable research materials.

We will design and print c.500 information leaflets to publicise the above noted research collections and additional outputs: the oral history archive, photographs, images, graphics, archaeology surveys and reports, websites and information packs, etc. Leaflets will be distributed to local schools, libraries, and community venues. PDF copies will be uploaded to the CHG website and other project related websites (inc. Oral History Research & Training Consultancy). Addyman Archaeology will submit an article to Archaeology Scotland promoting the project.

We will video document the project's progress and activities; the edited film will be used to publicise the project and direct viewers to the research collections and outputs. The film will be screened at post-project events and uploaded to project-related websites.

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Working alongside

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Liz Jones - Addyman Archaeology

Thomas Breckney, Curator - The Great Steward of Scotland's Dumfries House Trust

Please contact us and become a History Champion! Or you may have other skills you can share, some free time to help or just want to be kept informed - we will be pleased to hear from you. You can use any of the above contact details or use the Sign-up form on our site.

Pennylands: Camp 22 has been supported by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to research the history of this WW2 POW Camp on the Dumfries House Estate in Cumnock, East Ayrshire.

