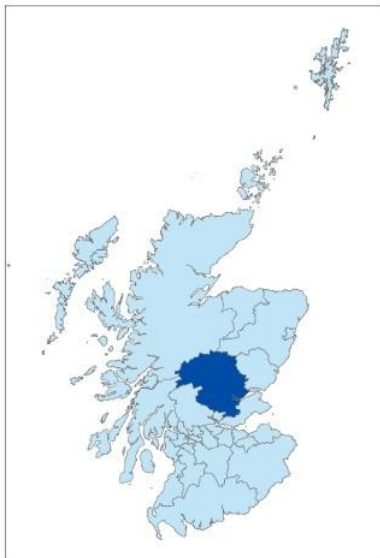


KIRSTY MILLICAN (RCAHMS) – PERTH AND KINROSS

July 26, 2013 Historic Environment Scotland Archaeological Prospection, Day of Archaeology 2013
#myarchaeology, Cropmark, cropmark site, Kinross, Kirsty Millican, Neolithic, Perth, RCAHMS, Royal
Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Scotland, Scottish
Archaeology, Westerton

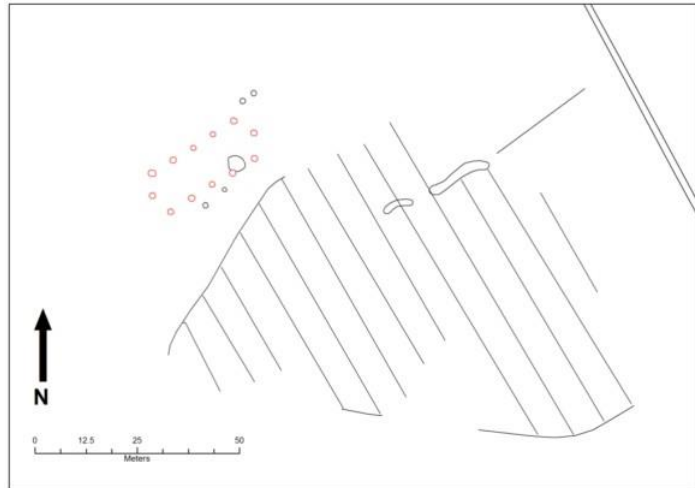


*Perth and Kinross. 'Contains
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My name is Kirsty Millican and I work for the Historic Landuse Assessment (HLA) Project at RCAHMS. The site I would like to focus on may not seem the most spectacular; if you visited it today all you would see is an apparently unremarkable arable field. Instead, like many thousands of sites in Scotland, it is revealed to us just as cropmarks – **the differential growth of crops above buried features** – photographed from the air. At **Westerton** in Perth and Kinross, these cropmarks reveal the former presence of a Neolithic timber enclosure (probably built sometime between around 3300 and 2600 BC, and classified on RCAHMS Canmore pages as a pit enclosure because of the way it is revealed on the aerial photograph), an enigmatic type of monument that I find as fascinating as much for the way in which it is revealed to us today as for the glimpse it gives us of the activities and structures built by our prehistoric ancestors.

The **image here** shows the Westerton enclosure quite clearly – it's the rectangular enclosure in the centre of the photograph defined by two parallel lines of five neat circular dark marks with one centrally placed mark at each end. These circular marks in the crop record the presence of buried post pits – the holes dug to take standing timber posts. The posts themselves have long since decayed and disappeared and only the infilled pits remain beneath the soil. And here's my interpretation of these marks with the enclosure in red. North is at top of this image, so the enclosure is at a slightly different angle to that in the aerial photograph.

Today there is nothing above ground to indicate that Westerton was once the location of an important prehistoric structure (see image below) and indeed it was built of a relatively ephemeral material, wood, which would decay and disappear over time. However, through the medium of differential crop growth and ripening caused by the buried features and the fact that those features were captured on a photograph taken from a small aeroplane, we have this picture of a monument constructed over 4000 years ago. Therefore, from these simple



Interpretation of the cropmarks at Westerton. The timber enclosure is in red, cropmarks of other features are in black. Copyright Kirsty Millican

marks in the crop, it is possible to begin piecing together something of what people were doing, or at least building, here thousands of years ago. This in turn gives us a window onto the past peoples and societies, their lives, activities, beliefs and values. I continually find it amazing the something as apparently simple as the way in which crops grow can reveal so much.



The location of the timber hall today within an apparently unremarkable arable field Copyright Kirsty Millican

So let's return to Westerton and see what it can tell us. The site at Westerton has never been excavated, but we know from similar sites dug elsewhere that it likely dates to the later Neolithic period (probably somewhere between around 3300 BC and 2600 BC) and that those post pits would have held substantial timber posts, probably of oak. This, then, was a substantial timber structure. For a variety of structural reasons it generally thought that Westerton, and other similar structures, are unlikely to have had a roof. Clues to the purpose

and use of these timber enclosures are fragmentary, but they are usually interpreted as having some kind of ceremonial and/or funerary function. Below is one possible reconstruction of what Westerton may have looked like. As only the holes dug to take the upright timbers survive, inevitably there is a lot of speculation involved in reconstructions such as this. For example the

timber posts may have been modified, carved or painted in some way, and there may well have been fencing between the posts. Despite what we do know, there remains an element of mystery about these Neolithic timber structures. Nevertheless, images such as this at least help us to begin to imagine what they may have looked like.

Some of the excavated sites that help us to interpret the cropmarks at Westerton are also found in Perth and Kinross, and the RCAHMS Canmore pages have some wonderful images of these sites. These include the timber structure excavated at [Littleour](#) and one at [Carsie Mains](#). Another similar, though unexcavated, cropmark site has been recorded at [Balrae](#). Several other timber enclosures are also known elsewhere in Scotland. Therefore, we know of several of these mysterious sites both in Perth and Kinross and beyond. Whether they were all exactly



Speculative reconstruction of the timber enclosure at Westerton depicting the enclosure as formed by large, relatively unmodified timbers. Copyright Kirsty Millican

contemporary is impossible to say but, who knows, perhaps the same people who built Westerton knew of the structures at Littleour and Carsie Mains and the communities that built them. Certainly they knew the reasons for their construction, reasons that can only be vaguely grasped today, and will have participated in particular ceremonies and events both within and around these structures. Whatever they were used for, these were undoubtedly important structures. Think of the effort involved in cutting down oak trees without metal tools (these enclosures were built before the introduction of metal to Scotland, so stone axes must have been used) and of erecting the large timbers to form the enclosure without the use of modern machinery.

There is much more that could be said about this site; there just isn't enough room in a single blog post. However, I hope this has given some flavour of why I find sites such as Westerton so fascinating, and the way in which such ghostly marks in crops can reveal a wealth of information. This information would be unreachable (and indeed Westerton and many thousands of other cropmark sites would be entirely unknown) without a combination of the effects of buried archaeology on growing crops, the aerial survey of individuals and organisations such as RCAHMS and the luck that meant someone flew over this site at just the right moment to see and record it. The fact that all these factors came together at just the right time allows us to reach back to the things people and communities were doing and building in a location more than 4000 years ago. It truly is fascinating!

This is what I've chosen for Day of Archaeology, but why not tell us your favourite archaeological sites in Scotland on Twitter using [#MyArchaeology](#).

For further information you can also contact the local authority archaeologist. In this case contact details are:

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