

FROM CASTLES TO COWS: EXPLORING THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES AT ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

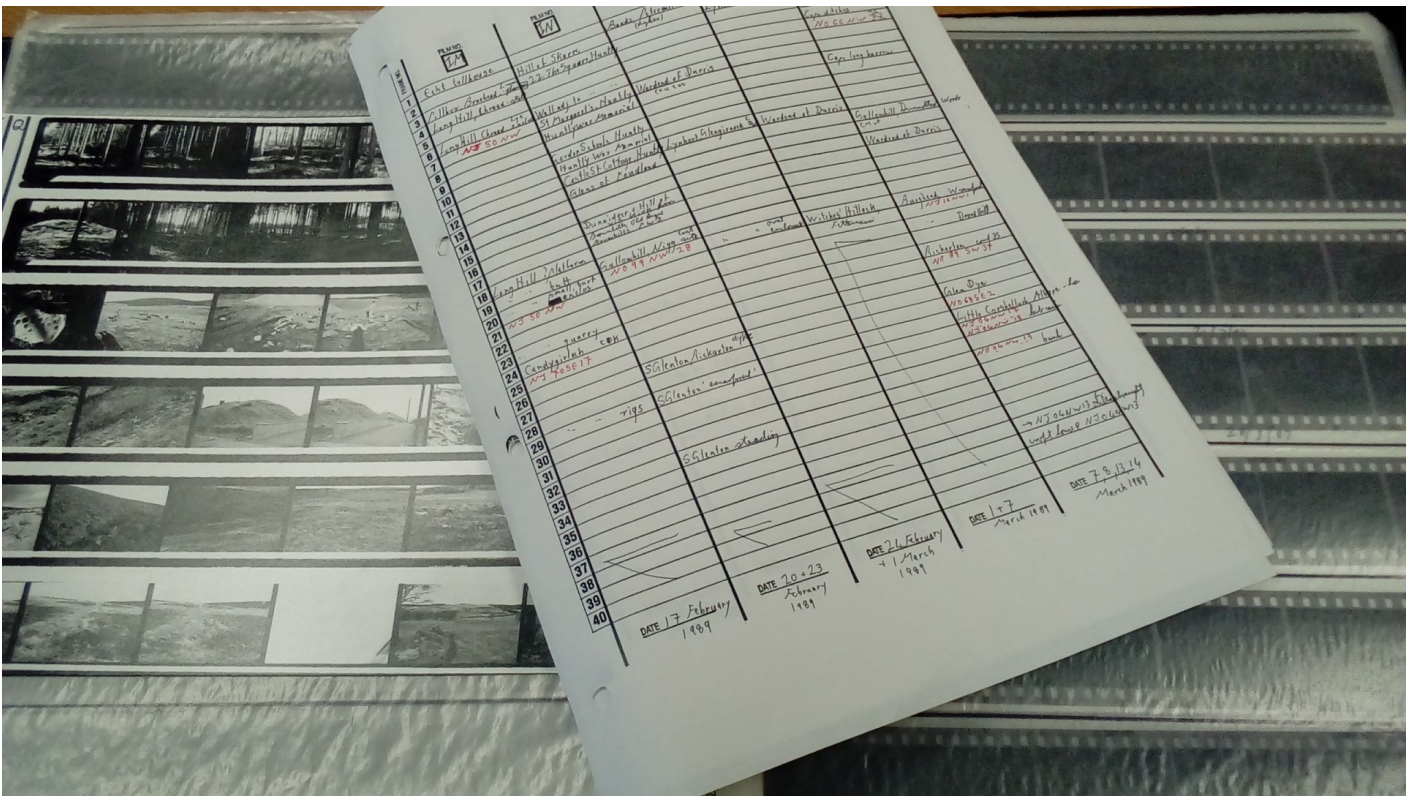
July 28, 2017 Neil Ackerman Day of Archaeology 2017, Digital Archaeology, Explore Posts,UK Aberdeenshire, Aberdeenshire Council, photographs,Scotland, Sites and Monuments Record

As the first Council [archaeology service](#) in Scotland, we hold a large archive dating back to the 1970s and beyond. While this means we have a fantastic resource collected over the years, it also means there is a large amount of data that needs to be digitised to make it more accessible.



Pitsligo Castle emerging through the mist in 1988 (Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service © ACAS – www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology)

One of the projects I have been working on recently is going through our slide and printed collection of ground and aerial photographs. These have all been scanned, and my task has been to ensure that all the images are digitally indexed and attributed to the correct record within our publically available [Sites and Monuments Record](#).



Contact sheets and index from 1989.

As someone relatively new to the area, working on the photographs has been a great opportunity for me to get to know some of these sites better, from the well-known castles to lesser-known but equally important sites such as areas of prehistoric field systems and hidden cairns.



A cow in 1980 tried to become famous, today is its day (Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service © ACAS – www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology)

There have been a couple of challenges in identifying the sites from the photographs. Sheets of slides can throw up some odd sites with little or no description or context. Often these can still be identified by comparing with other sources or by asking colleagues, who have so far shown an impressive ability to know where a blurry field is or what a close-up of a stone shows. The second challenge has been the handwriting. I have begun to develop an eye for reading the scrawls of the previous archaeologists, but some of the scribbles will have to remain a mystery for now. Despite these challenges it is always exciting to find photographs of a site that we did not realise we had pictures of, as well as the occasional outstanding picture of a particularly spectacular site.



Someone at [Dundarg Castle](#) in 1988 had the best day at work ever (Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service © ACAS – www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology)

Having these images properly digitised and cross referenced means we are able to manage and protect the sites within our area better – has that large crack in the wall appeared or changed within the last few years, or was it like that thirty or forty years ago? Images of excavations also offer a great insight: to see the sites being dug, and the “interesting” approach to health and safety standards of yesteryear, not to mention the fantastic fashion on display.