

An archaeological watching brief
at
Doon Hill, Twynholm,
Dumfries and Galloway
June 2014

Report by John Pickin for CIET (UK) Ltd

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1 Introduction

This Data Structure Report presents the findings of an archaeological watching brief undertaken for CIET (UK) Ltd in respect to the replacement of electricity poles and fittings. The work took place on Doon Hill, Nun Mill, Twynholm, Dumfries and Galloway (NGR NX 6585 4885).

Dumfries and Galloway Council asked for a watching brief because of the proximity of the works to The Doon hillfort and to a possible medieval priory. The main objective of the watching brief was to record and recover any archaeological evidence impacted by the development works.

2 Background

The Doon fort (Scheduled Ancient Monument 1067; Dumfries and Galloway HER MDG 3490) is an exceptionally well preserved horse-shoe shaped hillfort situated within a plantation on the south side of Doon Hill and overlooking Nun Mill Bay. It consists of a single earth and stone rampart with ditch and counterscarp bank enclosing an area measuring 52m by 58m. It terminates on a near precipitous slope to the south.

The location of the medieval priory of St Evoca (Dumfries and Galloway HER MDG 3491) is unknown. It reputedly held lands at Nunton and Nun Mill and was deserted by the early fifteenth century. There is a local tradition that the priory stood close to Doon Cottage (NX 659 488) but there is no archaeological evidence to support this.

The First Edition six-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1854 (Kirkcudbrightshire Sheet 50) shows The Doon fort as an earthwork in a plantation enclosed by a curving field wall. This field wall continues to the east along the top of the cliff edge. No structures or other features are depicted in the field east of The Doon, the location of the watching brief trenches.

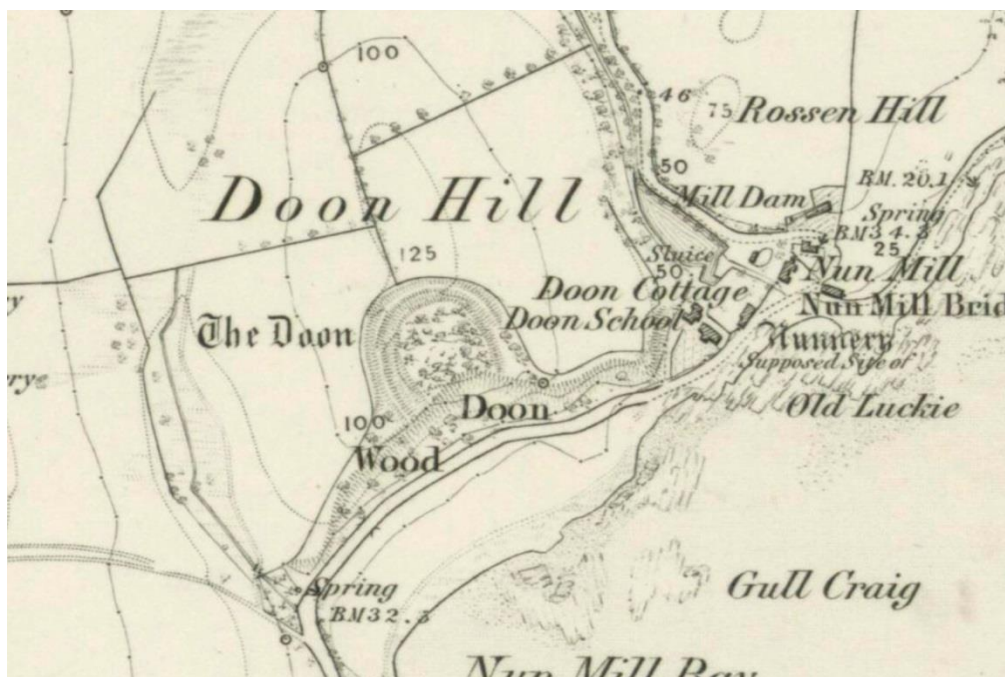


Fig 1. Ordnance Survey 1854 (Kirkcudbrightshire Sheet 50)

The Second Edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of 1895 (Kirkcudbrightshire, Sheet 054.12) shows the same curving field wall or fence enclosing the Doon and also depicts an additional triangular enclosure (marked 860) on the east side of The Doon. The western perimeter of this enclosure survives today as a bank and ditch earthwork within The Doon plantation. No structures or other features are shown in the field to east, the location of the watching brief trenches.

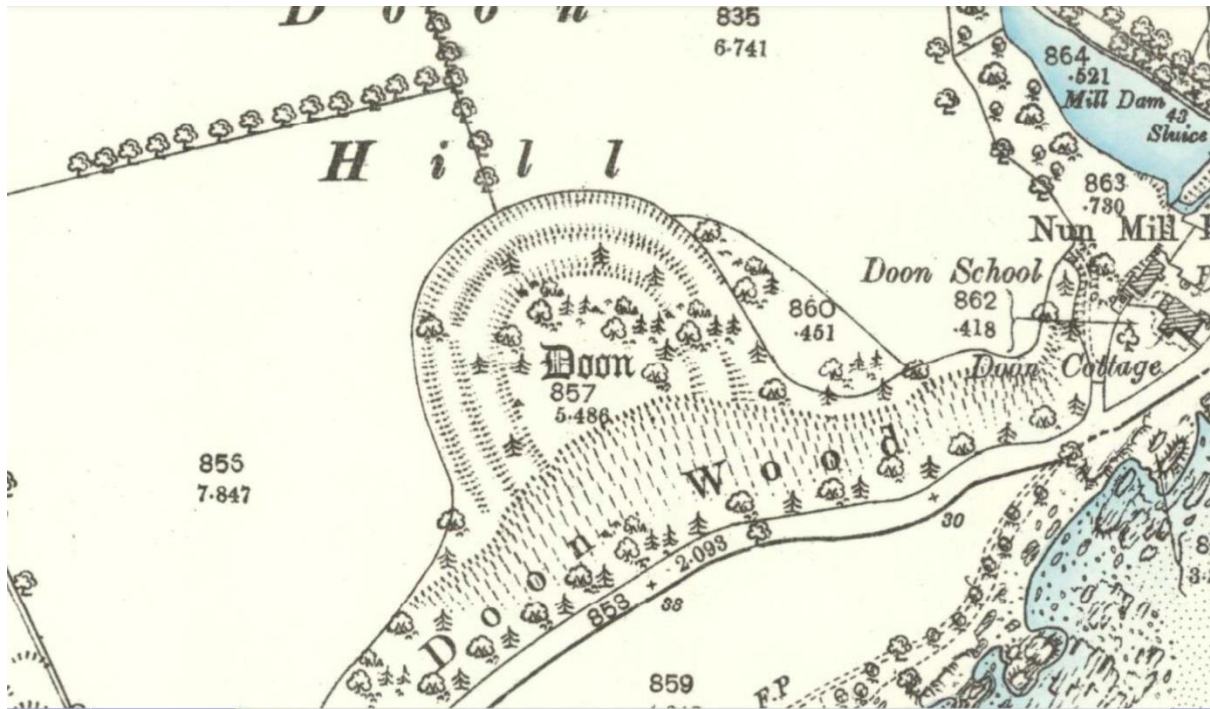


Fig 2. Ordnance Survey 1895 (Kirkcudbrightshire, Sheet 054.12)

In 1952 the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland described the site of The Doon as “recently replanted with conifers”. It is likely that the current plantation dates from this period. The modern fence line, which is aligned further to the east and south-east of that shown on the 1895 OS map, may also relate to this replanting.

3 Project Works

The watching brief took place on 2 June 2014. Two machine trenches were dug close to the fence line in the southern section of Doon Hill field and all ground breaking works were observed. The first trench (pole 10811715) was excavated for a replacement pole and transformer; no archaeological deposits were recorded. The second trench (pole 10811671) was excavated for a replacement stay and block; a small stone-filled feature, a possible ditch or field drain, was recorded.

4 Findings

Trench 1 (NX 65898 48831)

Excavated in the south-west corner of Doon Hill field and against the north side of fence line on the

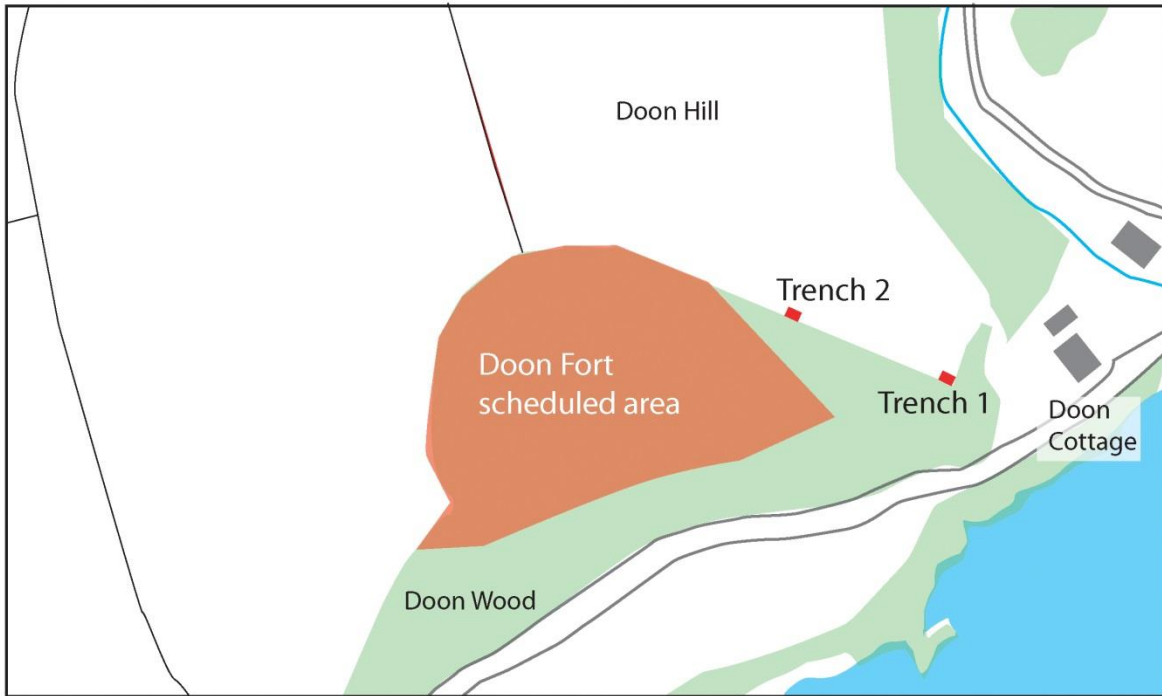


Fig 3. Location of watching brief Trenches 1 and 2.

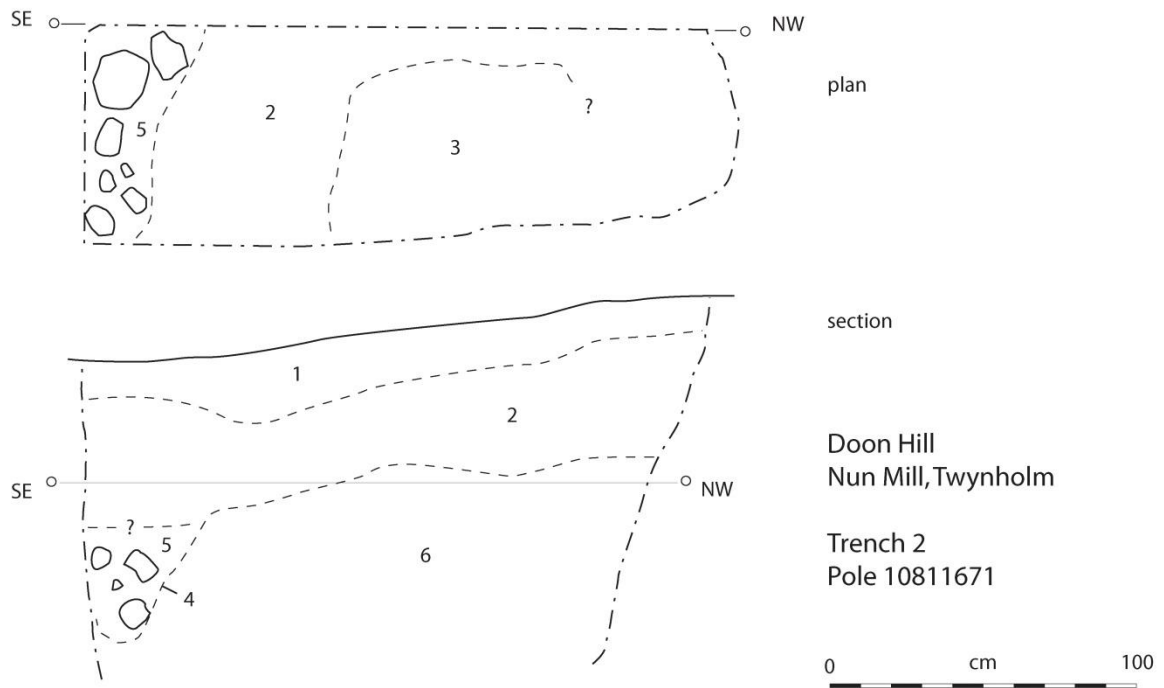


Fig 4. Plan and section of Trench 2.



Fig 5. Trench 1, north section.



Fig 6. Trench 1, view south-east.



Fig 7. Pole 10811670 at Trench 2.



Fig 8. Trench 2, west section.



Fig 9. Trench 2, west section, showing feature 5 cut into natural deposit 6.

top edge of the hill slope. Following the removal of the electricity pole, a trench 0.7m wide x 2m long was excavated by machine to a depth of just over 2m. A thin top soil (001), approximately 0.15m deep overlay a brown-orange clay subsoil (002), approximately 0.30m deep, which rested on a compact orange boulder clay (003). The trench was archaeologically sterile.

Trench 2 (NX 65853 48851)

Trench 2 was 100m north-east of Trench 1 and excavated against the plantation fence dividing Doon Hill field from the scheduled area of The Doon fort. The trench, 0.70m wide and 2m long, was taken down by machine to a maximum depth of 2.1m. The south-west face of the trench was recorded in section and a plan made of the south-east end.

The ground level dipped gently from north-west to south-east. A loose top-soil (001), with an average depth of 0.20m, overlay a deposit of brown, clayey soil with occasional small stones (002). This layer rested on a natural deposit of yellow clay with angular stones (006). An irregular sided pit (003) cut through layer 002 and into the top of deposit 006 and contained the stay and block for the electricity pole; it was observed in plan but not in section and its north-eastern extent was not recorded. At the south-east end of the trench a linear feature (004), 0.35m wide x 0.70m long and 0.45m deep, was cut into the surface of deposit 006. It was filled with a grey, clay-rich soil containing a number of water-rolled cobbles (005); the relationship between this feature and layer 002 could not be established. No dating evidence was recovered from the trench.

5 Discussion

The archaeological watching brief failed to find any archaeological deposits in Trench 1. The location of St Evoca's priory remains unknown but on topographical and empirical grounds it is more likely to have been sited close to Nun Mill and Doon Cottage rather than the southern section of Doon Hill field.

The most recent feature in Trench 2 was pit 003 which was excavated to take the block and stay for the existing electricity pole. Layer 002 is a standard plough zone deposit and probably relates to the ploughing of this part of the field before the eastern extension of The Doon plantation field boundary to its current position. Only part of linear feature e00 4 was recorded and its full extent, date, function and associations are unknown. It is too large to be a plough furrow and is perhaps best interpreted as a narrow ditch or possibly an early stone-filled field drain (fired clay field drains were in common use in Galloway by the mid nineteenth century). It is unfortunate that a relationship could not be established between feature 004 and layer 002.

6 Conclusion

The watching brief failed to locate any archaeological deposits in Trench 1 and an undated linear feature, probably a ditch or field drain, was recorded in Trench 2. The archaeological potential of Doon Hill field remains untested.

7 Appendix 1 - Record Summaries

Context summaries

Trench 1

Number	Interpretation	Description
001	Top soil	Black-brown humic soil
002	Subsoil	Brown-orange clay with occ. pebbles
003	Natural boulder clay	Compact orange clay with occ. pebbles

Trench 2

Number	Interpretation	Description
001	Top soil	Black-brown humic soil
002	Plough soil	Brown, clayey soil with occ. small stones
003	Modern pit for electricity pole stay	Loose brown soil
004	Ditch or field drain	Linear feature , 0.35m wide x 0.45 deep
005	Fill of 005	Grey, clay-rich soil with cobbles
006	Natural boulder clay	Compact yellow clay with angular stone

Site photographs

Photo no.	Description	From	Date
1 DH	Trench 1, general view of machine cut	NW	02.06.14
2 DH	Trench 1, layers 001 and 002	SW	02.06.14
3 DH	Trench 1, erecting replacement electricity pole	NE	02.06.14
4 DH	Trench 2, general view before works	SE	02.06.14
5 DH	Trench 2, machine clean to natural 006	NE	02.06.14
6 DH	Trench 2 section	E	02.06.14
7 DH	Trench 2, feature 004	NW	02.06.14
8 DH	Trench 2, layers 001, 002 and feature 004	NE	02.06.14

8 Appendix 2 - Discovery & Excavation in Scotland report

Local authority: Dumfries and Galloway

Parish: Twynholm

Site name: Doon Hill

Name of contributor: John Pickin

Type of project: watching brief

Name of organisation:

NGR: NX 6585 4885

Report:

A watching brief was undertaken for CIET (UK) Ltd in advance of replacement work on two electricity poles. The watching brief was required because of the proximity of the work to The Doon hillfort and to the possible site of the medieval priory of St Evoca.

Trench 1 (NX 65898 48831) was archaeologically sterile. In Trench 2 (NX 65853 48851) a linear ditch, partly stone-filled, had been cut into the natural boulder clay. Only a small section of this feature could be examined in the trench and no dating evidence was recovered.

Location of report: DGC HER; RCAHMS

Funder: CIET (UK) Ltd

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9 Contact Details

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