

King's Seat, Dunkeld: Excavations of a Royal centre of
the southern Picts, 2017-21



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with contributions by

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Front cover: *a view from the south with the King's Seat fort in the centre foreground on the hill occupying the bend in the River Tay (© Crown Copyright: HES).*

Back cover: *a reconstruction view from the south showing the fort complex with the summit 'citadel' and western, eastern and southern enclosures (artist: Chris Mitchell).*

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‘It is not easy to discover the origins of Early Historic kingdoms and dynasties. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the ancestry of most of them has been lost in the mists of prehistory, or has foundered in the even more treacherous swamps of proto-history...’

Leslie Alcock: *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain AD 550-850* (2003: 40).

‘So ancient is Dunkeld that its origin is unknown, and its early history borders on the mythical.’

Elizabeth Stewart: *Dunkeld - An Ancient City* (1926).

‘The Gaelic language is spoken universally in this parish, though all the people, at the same time, understand more or less perfectly the English. It is a curious fact, that the hills of King’s Seat and Craigy Barns... have been for centuries the separating barrier of these languages. In the first house below them, the English is, and has been spoken; and the Gaelic in the first house, (not above a mile distant), above them.’

The Old Statistical Account of Scotland (OSA) XX, Dowally: 490.

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Notes

Chronology and terminology

All radiocarbon (¹⁴C) dates mentioned in the text are calibrated (cal) unless otherwise stated.

The following chronological definitions are used, in line with the Scotland's Archaeological Periods and Ages (ScAPA) thesaurus: Bronze Age (2200 – 800 BC); Iron Age (800 BC – AD 400); early medieval (AD 400 – 1100); medieval (AD 1093 – 1603) and post-medieval (after AD 1603).

While historically labelled 'the Dark Ages' and since also termed Early Christian, the Long Iron Age, and Early Historic, the term early medieval period has been adopted throughout in line with both the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework Medieval Panel (ScARF), and Perth and Kinross Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF 2022).

While 'hillfort' is widely used and understood, it is problematic as while most sites occur on hilltops, they also occur in other locations (Lock and Ralston 2022: 77–9). The term is additionally problematic in Scotland where an independent tradition of recording, dating back to the late 19th century, has used 'fort' (Christison 1898: 111–12). As a result, Historic Environment Scotland's *Scottish Monument Thesaurus* notes 'hillfort' as a non-preferred term, and promotes 'fort', defined as 'an enclosure, often located on a hilltop, bounded by one or more banks, ditches, ramparts or walls'. The Scottish Monument Type Thesaurus (<https://canmore.org.uk/thesaurus>) has been adapted to describe monument types, in particular:

rampart: an earth embankment built around a site for defensive purposes.

outworks: a series of defensive features, such as walls, banks and ditches, which protect a building or settlement.

hut-circle: a roundhouse where above ground features, such as an earth or stone bank, survives

roundhouse: where no above ground remains survive, but a circular building has been identified as a cropmark, through geophysical survey, or by excavation.

Descriptions of contexts

Square brackets are used for all contexts, including deposits, cuts and structures [123], and rounded brackets retained for small find references (SF 123) and bibliographic references.

The initial character in the context number is the trench reference, for example [203] is Trench 2, [403] is Trench 4; the exception are contexts from Trench 1, which begin at [001]. Similarly, the initial character in the small finds number is the trench reference, for example (SF 406) is from Trench 4.

Use of Canmore references

Sites are occasionally referenced by their unique identifier in the Canmore National Record of the Historic Environment (see <https://canmore.org.uk/>) in the format ID 1234. These records provide descriptive records and more detailed bibliographic information.

Geographical terms

Sites within Perth and Kinross are located by a local placename only, while outside this they are generally accompanied by their modern local authority area, or historic administrative area where this brings more clarity.

Abbreviations

Keys are provided within the text. Select general terms are listed below.

ha	Hectare
HES	Historic Environment Scotland
m	Metre
NMS	National Museums Scotland
NGR	National Grid Reference
OD	Ordnance Datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
XRF	X-ray Fluorescence