New light on medieval settlement **in lowland Scotland**

Remotely-sensed data, and especially Airborne Laser Scanning (ALS, aka Lidar) data is becoming ever more widely available in Scotland (https://remotesensingdata.gov.scot/). In response to this Historic Environment Scotland (HES) established the Rapid Archaeological Mapping Programme (RAMP) in 2019 as a two-year research project that aims to develop protocols for creating systematic archaeological data across large areas (Banaszek, Cowley and Middleton 2018; Cowley *et al.* 2020). This initiative is routinely doubling the numbers of known monuments on record in area-based surveys – of Arran, Kilmartin and the Whiteadder River catchment so far. Amongst a range of monuments, these surveys are providing significant evidence for medieval and post-medieval land-use and settlement. On Arran, for example, the HES survey increased the number of records of sheiling sites from 41 to 197, with major implications for our understanding of transhumant land-use and grazing patterns.

As part of this project, the growing ALS data – which will shortly cover much of southern and central Scotland – is being sampled widely to assess its potential contribution across different parts of the country. During assessment of areas in lowland Scotland a previously undocumented deserted medieval village (Canmore Id 364510) was discovered in the grounds of Mertoun House (HES 2020), a short distance east of St Boswells on the River Tweed (see figure overleaf). Such deserted medieval villages are rare finds in the predominately arable areas of south-east Scotland, and this is a reminder of the potential for long-established areas of grassland, like that in historic gardens and parklands, to preserve earthworks of medieval and earlier settlement and land-use. This potential has been recognised before, both through field survey documentation, as at Hume Castle (Canmore Id 58551), and through aerial survey, and the village earthworks recorded from the air in the grounds of Makerston House (Canmore Id 57210). These earthwork survivals are rare in heavily ploughed landscapes and the medieval village site excavated at Springwood Park, near Kelso, for example, was found through artefact pick-up survey (Dixon 1998). The discovery of the deserted village at Mertoun is a significant addition to the corpus of sites, pointing to the potential of the ALS data and targeted examination of areas of long-established grassland and parkland. This is especially valuable for the often-subtle earthworks that may have been smoothed by episodic ploughing for reseeding grass, making it difficult to appreciate from field observation or to capture on aerial photographs.

The deserted village at Mertoun House is typical of a form of medieval settlement found in lowland areas of northern England and southern and eastern Scotland, comprising two rows of houses and yards flanking a street (Dixon 2017). The earthworks of the northern row are more pronounced in the ALS-derived visualisation and comprise some eight yards defined by banks that extend from the back dyke of the village, which also forms a headland along the south side of a block of rig. Subtle hollows mark the sites of houses to the south of the plots, with the same broad pattern visible in even more understated form to the south. The clearance of villages in south-east Scotland was mainly a feature of the 18th century, one element in a range of processes of agricultural or estate 'improvement'. This broad pattern appears to apply to the village in the grounds of Mertoun House, which does not appear on Roy's Military Map of 1747–55 (NLS 2020), a reliable source in this area. Tax returns from the early 1690s indicate that as many as 27 households occupied the village, each with one or two hearths, while the laird at Mertoun, Sir William Scott of Harden, had 24 in his grand house, a distinction that speaks eloquently to the status of Mertoun's village residents.

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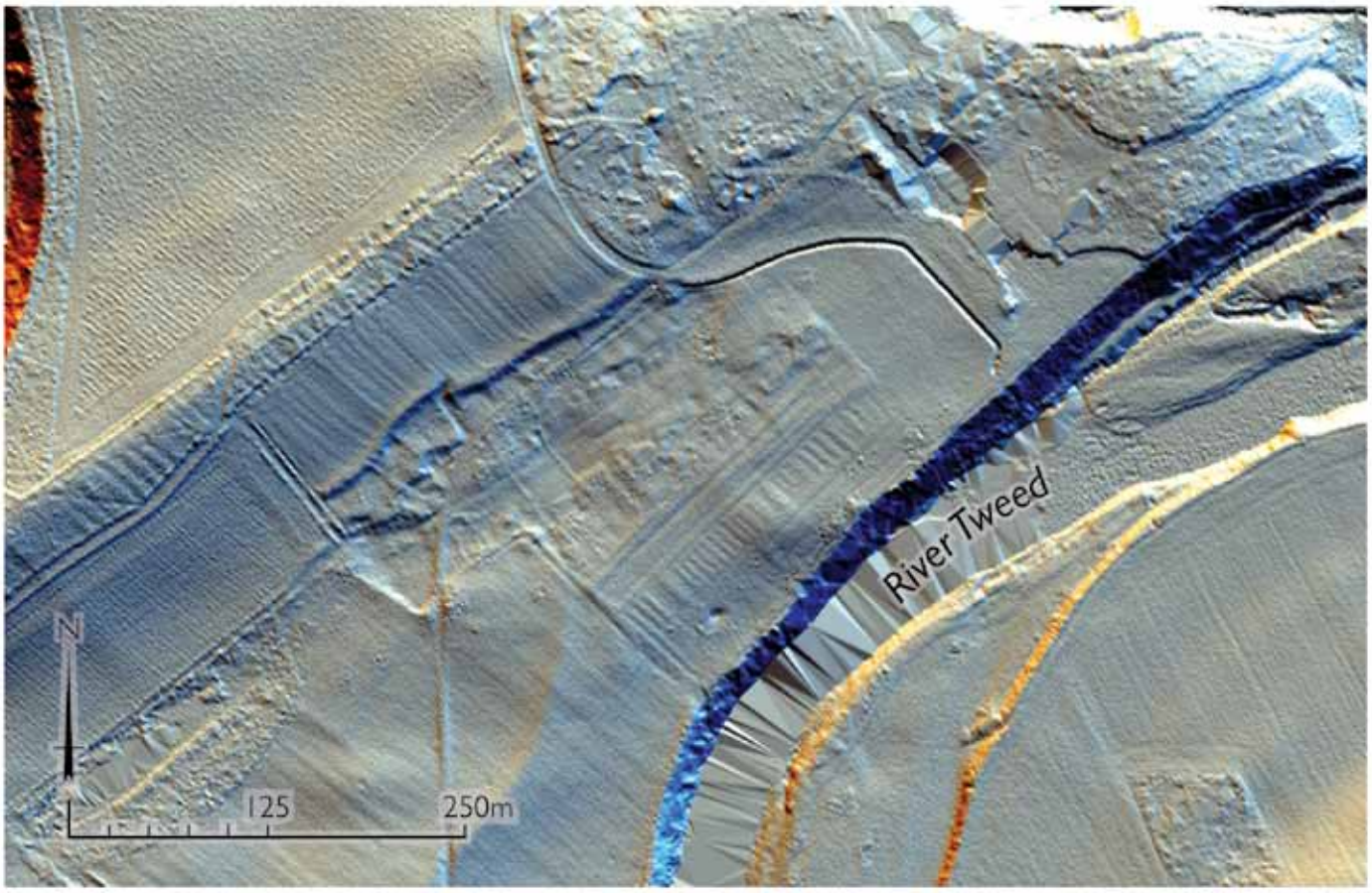

ALS-derived three direction hillshade visualisation of the deserted village in the grounds of Mertoun House. Aspects of the village layout are readily discerned, with hints of stratigraphy in the remains. The River Tweed skirts the village to the east. This image is derived from a relatively low-resolution ALS data point density, collected in 2012 with a minimum of 1 point/sqm, and approximately 2 points/sqm on average. Subsequent acquisitions have been of considerably higher point densities, but this example demonstrates the utility of even the lower resolution datasets. ALS data: © Crown copyright Scottish Government, SEPA and Scottish Water (2012).

Conferences & Events

– FORTHCOMING –

7 December 2020:
SMA AGM and Winter Symposium. See facing page.

7-8 December:
New perspectives on the medieval 'agricultural revolution'. The latest research into medieval farming produces the first direct evidence for the conditions in which cereals were grown and animals were kept. At this virtual conference, organized by the Feeding Anglo-Saxon England project (FeedSax), speakers will explore how the analysis of excavated plant and animal remains enables us to reconstruct farming regimes from across medieval England and beyond. Free registration to this international online conference will open soon. For more information, including the programme of talks, visit: https://feedsax.arch.ox.ac.uk/conference.html or e-mail: feedsaxproject@gmail.com

13-19 September 2021: hopefully in-person,
RURALIA XIV will meet in Viseu, Portugal. The theme will be 'Household goods in the European medieval and early modern countryside'. The Call for Papers is live. Abstracts due 15 January 2021. See http://ruralia2.ff.cuni.cz/index.php/news/