

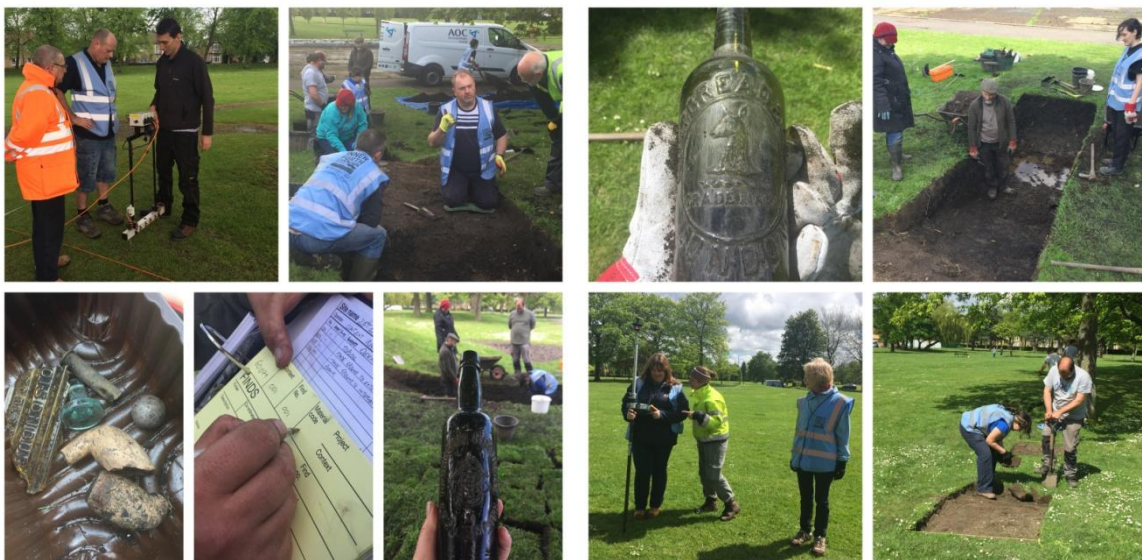
## Investigating Zetland Park

By Charlene Forbes

### Day 1

'It'll be raining every day', I was informed when I told workmates I was going on a weekend dig. Oh how wrong they were. Instead it was a nice warm day when we arrived at Zetland Park in Grangemouth. After the obligatory introductions and risk assessment signing the ten or so volunteers looked at a 15 foot long section strung out across a slope. The first job was deturfing, which is just what it sounds like – cutting the grass into manageable squares and piling them in neat rows to be returned at the end of the weekend. Within seconds we were finding stuff – coins from various years between 1917 and the 1930s. Spurred on by early excitement we carefully piled up the turfs, laid tarpaulin for the soil and got to work. We were warned that bank we were trying to find used to be higher, and that there was a chance the resulting ditch had been filled in with, well, rubbish. As we were to discover, both were correct and I started to wish I'd arrived earlier and bagged the geophysics slot instead.

So what were we looking for? A monastic grange – basically a farm or orchard owned by the monks of Holyrood Abbey and used as a place to grind grain (hence the word 'granary' and the name 'Grangemouth'). It was there, the records pointed to that, but the question was how much was left? This is, after all, a public park that has been used for galas, walked on, cycled on, dug up and replanted for a lot of years. At its core this was an opportunity for local people to find out more about a well-used and well loved park, and to further other community projects. It was a chance for volunteers to turn their hand to some archaeological skills and realise that it's so much more than scraping in a ditch and finding buried treasure or hidden bodies. Finally it's a chance to meet some new people and have a great time.



With the trench open to the elements there were two very different types of digging going on. At one end there was some careful trowelling to find out whether the bottom was the original layer of the grange or natural clay, and at the bottom we were chasing the bank. That basically means digging with a spade or three until the colour and consistency of the dirt changes, which is a lot more

interesting (and difficult) than it sounds. This is when the extent of the refill was discovered. If anyone has happened to lose a plate, teapot or cup in the vicinity of the old Zetland Park paddling pool, it's probably a foot or two under the grass. We found everything from fragments of china plates to whole beer bottles, and more than a couple of old clay pipes of the type that were smoked once or twice then thrown away. Among the more interesting items were a fragment of green glass where the word 'poisonous' was just visible on it, a clay pipe that was still intact (usually the bowl part and the stem part break apart) and a whole bottle, complete with the stopper still in it, marked with a star and with a Falkirk company name. Another bottle was marked with the name of the McGregor Brothers in Grangemouth.

Towards the end of the day some of the archaeologists extended the main trench to go more inside the assumed structure, and a new trench was opened a few feet away where the entrance possibly was. More deturfing, more spade work.

Meanwhile the rest of the volunteers split into two groups do to something a bit more sedate but no less vital. These volunteers were doing geophysics – sending signals through the ground and analysing the return signal to end up with a grey picture with black blotches where structures could be. The second group did surveying, using technology or pieces of paper and a long measuring tape to draw aerial maps of the site.

## Day Two

We had little overnight rain when we arrived on site for day two. Being a Saturday there were more visitors so the local volunteers could fill them on the bigger picture of the hopes for the park. I hadn't thought about it much, but the presence of the diggers piqued the interest of a lot of local people, which was great to see. The geophysics and surveying continued, as well as scanning the fountain and monument nearby to create 3D models. All very fancy.



To work, the largest trench had to be continued. We were still looking for the extent of the ditch but it was already clear that the internal of the structure was higher than the outside, possibly to protect it from flooding or as some kind of defence. There was even a theory that the ditch was allowed to



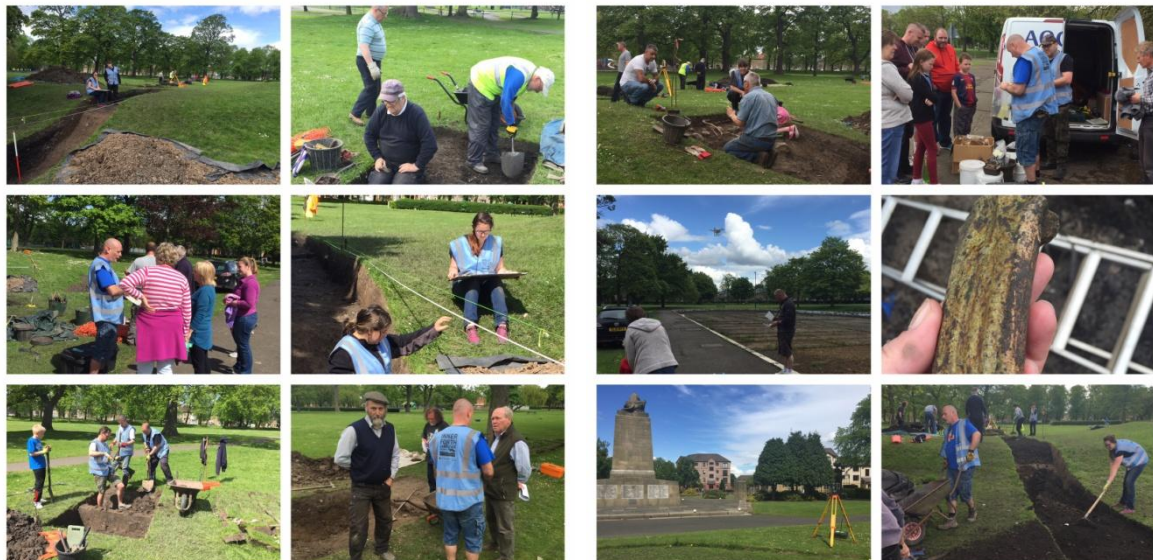
naturally fill with water and provide a moat, a theory that was backed up with the several inches of water stretching across the lowest part of the outside ditch. It was bailed out slightly, and small walls built, but it made the large trench cramped. Work was completed on the internal side, and the bank was found to be sloping down quite a bit. The trench was declared as almost complete, given that we were hampered by the water and attention turned to the second trench, and a third that was opened up behind the largest one.

The second trench revealed another clay bank but some scattered stones and it was here we found another piece or two of medieval pottery to go with the piece found in the large trench. It pointed to buildings having been present on the site when it was in use, getting everyone very interested. The third revealed more stones and part of a spindle whorl; a weight that would have been used on a spinning wheel.

It was a great day for volunteers and visitors alike, number-wise. At 27 volunteers it was the biggest group of the weekend and there was great interest from local people walking past, keeping one volunteer very busy explaining the dig, the finds, and the larger hope for the park.

### Day Three

Day three continued the work in the smaller trenches. Two of the four trenches were quickly planned then filled in, leaving only three; the second one at the possible entrance, the smaller one with the second indication of structure, and a third that had only been opened late on the previous day.



Not all was finished with the largest trench, however. It had to be properly recorded with a section drawing and context cards. Context cards record the different layers and attempt an interpretation of the site. A section involves drawing those contexts as they appear, with accurate measurements, opposed to a plan which would be an aerial view. Once that was complete the trench was filled in. Two days to empty it and, thanks to a dozen volunteers pitching in, only a couple of hours to fill it back in. It's an odd feeling when you do that. There's a sense of accomplishment that goes with it,

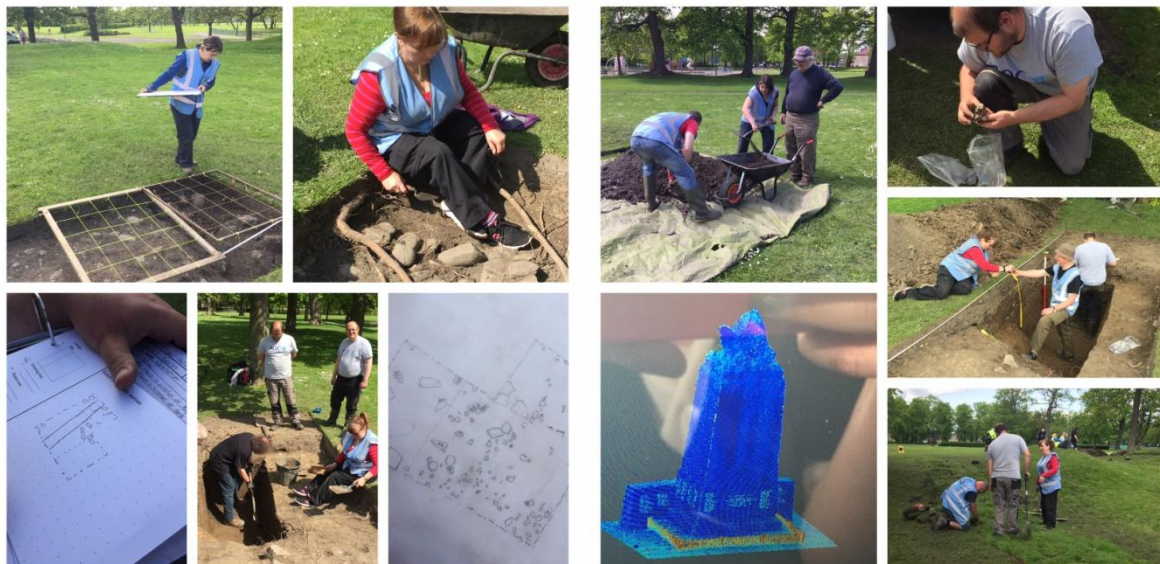
knowing it told you everything it could but it's also poignant knowing that within a short while it should look like we were never there in the first place.

For the smaller trenches, the one showing only more of the clay bank, was quickly planned and closed. Two down, three to go.

#### Day Four

You'd think on the last day there would be little to do, and it's true it was the smallest group. The visitors, however, barely let up and there was still a lot of work to be done before the end of the day. The morning was spent letting the new volunteers, including a local councillor, get their hands dirty with the remaining trenches. My morning was spent doing something quite a bit different; planning the third trench with the stones in it. This involves using a square search grid to accurately draw on the positions and sizes of features in a trench. It's a job, much like the section done yesterday, that people either enjoy or really don't. Personally I enjoy it but it can be easy to lose focus and make an error, and backtracking to find it can be tricky. Nevertheless, I produced a plan of the trench that appeared to show a track of drain, although it isn't obvious looking at the trench itself, and some scattered stone, possibly from a fallen structure. This trench, along with the furthest away fourth one, was closed late morning.

I then spent part of the afternoon assisting with creating a 3d model of the monument near one entrance of the park. This isn't quite as thrilling as it sounds; it involves taking overlapping photographs of as much of a object as possible, which a computer programme then stitches together to create a model. Apparently one chambered cairn on another dig required over 9000 photos! Thankfully the monument could be covered in a few dozen.



During this time two school groups visited the site and were shown the finds and the conclusions of the dig. Unfortunately by the time the second group arrived we had started to fill in the final trench but there was still enough for them to see, and to ask questions of the professional archaeologist. To answer their questions, in case you were also wondering, we found neither bodies nor treasure, and if we had it would have belonged to the treasury. At last, on a sunny Monday afternoon, the final

trench was filled, turf replaced (and jumped on by the children and everyone else) and everything was packed up.

Another dig ended and most of the finds were made in day one but more interesting was the information gained about the structure. Even more valuable could arguably be the exposure the project gave the wider hopes for the park to rejuvenate the old pool we were digging next to, and for IFLI as well. Much fun was had by all.