



## Galloway Glens 'Can You Dig It' Community Archaeology project – Technical notes.

# #1: Polmaddy Deserted Settlement – The Auchendrain that never was

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Sitting roughly 700m west of the A713, between Carsphairn and St John's Town of Dalry, are the remains of the deserted settlement of Polmaddy. The site is located in an area of open ground within the Galloway Forest Park, bounded to the south and west by a loop in the Polmaddy Burn. Car parking facilities and a picnic area are provided nearby by Forestry Commission Scotland, who have also created a [walking route](#) which allows access to the site.



FCS Access Sign

## **Its History**

A settlement was first recorded here in 1505 AD, when King James IV granted the lands of Polmaddy to the McClellands of Bombie, a well-known local family with strong connections in the area around Kirkcudbright and the Dee Valley. The ruined buildings that survive today appear to be much later: the settlement probably remained occupied until the late 18th or early 19th century. At this point, it was abandoned, as part of a wider re-organisation of the agricultural landscape across south-west Scotland.

## **Improvements**

During this period of change, known as the agricultural improvements, the traditional small communities or 'ferm-touns' were abandoned. They were replaced with much larger enclosed farms tenanted by a single farmer who were encouraged to use a variety of techniques - such as applying lime or seaweed to the soil as fertiliser - to improve yields and profits. The tenants of the fermtouns, who had traditionally eked out a living through growing a range of crops and livestock on often poor soils, faced losing their tenancy when lands were organised. Often, they were forced to seek alternative employment in nearby towns and cities or even further afield.

## **The Fermtoun**

[Polmaddy](#) provides us with an unusual and well-preserved example of a traditional post-medieval fermtoun in lowland Scotland. A total of twenty-three different buildings were identified here during a detailed survey of the site which took place in 1971, their walls sometimes surviving to over 1m in height. A number appear to have been houses, but the remains of a byre were also found, identified by the presence of drainage holes at the base of the wall. Five kilns for drying corn were also found, as well as the ruins of the mill building where grain grown by the community would have been ground into flour for making bread. The mill would have been water-powered: the mill pond and lade can still be seen in the centre of the settlement, to

the north of an area which shows traces of the raised rigs where crops would have been cultivated.



One of the buildings at Polmaddy

## **The Pack Road**

An even more unusual survival at Polmaddy are the remains of an inn, built to serve the needs of travellers using the Pack Road which passed close to the settlement, and which had its origins in the medieval period. It is known to have run from near Glenlee to Carsphairn, but may originally have formed part of a much more extensive road linking Ayr to Kirkcudbright. The route forded the Polmaddy Burn just southwest of the settlement of Polmaddy, skirting its northwest edge. The inn sat slightly apart, to the east of the road, which can still be seen in places as a rough track which now survives as a hollow.



Waymarker at the Inn

## The excavations

The 1971 excavations revealed a number of finds in and around the investigated structures which helped shed light on the lives of their inhabitants. There were large numbers of fragments from clay tobacco pipes, and sherds derived from glazed red and white earthenware vessels. The assemblage was dominated by artefacts of late 18th or early 19th century date, i.e. material lost or discarded close to the time of abandonment. Some small pieces of structural ironwork and a single coin with an illegible legend were also found.

## Saving Polmaddy

In 1971, the importance of Polmaddy became more widely known when the area was acquired for forestry. A local resident, Mr Ansell, championed the site, which was preserved in a clearing within the afforested area. At the time, the aim was to create a local amenity which featured a reconstructed house and kiln. This would have

created a facility similar to the open air museum at [Auchendrain](#), which had been established in Argyll in the mid-1960s. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, the plans never came to fruition, making this the Auchendrain that never was.

## Its Current Status

The recognition of Polmaddy's importance in the 1970s meant that it was protected in an open space in an area which formed part of a much larger forestry plantation, now included in Galloway Forest Park. Its unique and valuable role in Scotland's heritage was further highlighted in 1992, when it was granted statutory protection as a [Scheduled Monument](#). This means that metal-detecting and ground disturbance without consent is illegal across the site, with disturbance of the standing structures similarly prohibited. This ensures that the site and all its component parts will remain intact and undisturbed for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

## Further Reading

[Yates, M J.](#) (1978) *'The excavations at Polmaddy, New Galloway'*, *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 3rd, vol. 53, 1977-8. Page(s): 133-46

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