

5. North Kirktonmoor Farm, Eaglesham

Robin & Susan Hunter, Stuart Nisbet

North Kirktonmoor is a typical upland farm, lying just south of the village of Eaglesham. At first glance it appears to be representative of many such farms, on marginal land on the fringes of moorland in Renfrewshire. What could possibly be of interest on this farm? This article will hopefully demonstrate how a wealth of interesting features can often lie in wait for those willing to explore.

The farm lies a kilometre southwest of the village on a north-facing slope. The name North Kirktonmoor suggests that it was originally common moorland for the old Kirkton of Eaglesham. The Kirkton was redeveloped as a planned village in the 1770's.

Natural Landscape

The area comprises eroded terraces of plateau lavas (basalts) and ash. This is a remnant of a great outpouring of lavas in the early Carboniferous period, which also forms Glennifer Braes and the Renfrewshire hills to the west. From the farm the ground rises towards Ballageich (elevation 333 metres), 2km to the south. Ballageich is the highest remaining lava plateau, a notable feature on the skyline, visible from much of Glasgow. The lavas are overlain by glacial moraine in the southern portion of the farm, deposited at the end of the last ice age, around 10,000 years ago. This material provides swathes of readily available sand, gravel and rubble, which has been used for construction purposes throughout man's use of the moors.

The main watercourse on the farm is the Borland Burn which follows the western boundary, draining from the moors to the White Cart Water, 3 km to the north.

Occupation

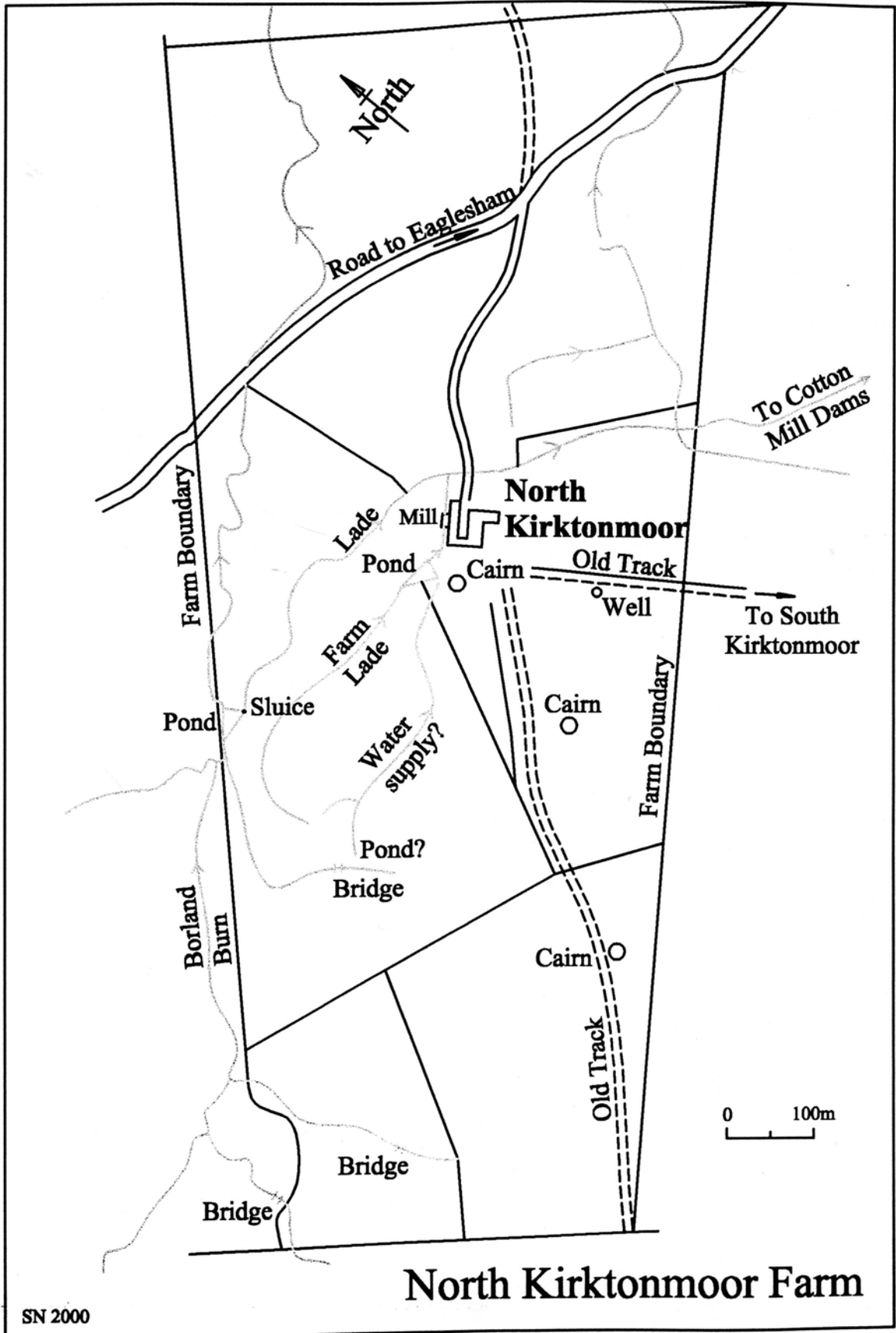
The Eaglesham moors contain a rich prehistoric landscape, much of which has only been identified in the past 30 years. On this farm alone are remains of three large cairns, and several other possible smaller cairns. Such features are not confined to North Kirktonmoor, but are a feature of the farms in the area. It is not known whether the readily available glacial debris encouraged cairn building, but it certainly would have simplified the process.

The farm supported 15 people (2 families) at the end of the 17th century. Agricultural improvements from the late 18th century brought major changes. One of the most notable man-made features on the landscape are the dead-straight dykes, 1.5km long, on the eastern and western boundaries of the farm. In the first half of the 19th century the individual cottages on the farm became a single-family courtyard farm.

Communications

Eighteenth century maps show a crossroads just north of the farm steading, with tracks heading north, south, east and west. The east-west route still survives. The north-south route is believed to have been an ancient trackway heading across moorland towards Kilmarnock. The cairns lie on either side of the old route.

In addition to traces of the old track, remains of a stone dyke bound it on the west. Another old route linked North and South Kirktonmoor Farms, again still denoted by a surviving dyke. Other short tracks probably serve quarries in the moraine. Several 18th century rubble-arch bridges also survive, indicating other old routes.



Water Supply

A well is indicated to the east of the farm on the first edition OS maps, beside the track linking the two farms. This can still be located, surrounded by boulders and infilled with other rubble. By the 1860's the farm was supplied by a pipe or channel trapping the headwaters of a tributary of the Borland Burn, passing around the eastern side of a small hill. Forty years later the watershed had been changed, and the tributary followed a small lade around the western side of the hill, to a pond above the farm. A reservoir, shown at the headwaters in the late 19th century, and traces of rubble mounds may be related to the changes here.

Farming

Eaglesham estate, including this farm, was traditionally rented from the Earl of Eglinton. The main use over the centuries has been pastoral. However Roy's Map (c.1750) shows areas of ridge and furrow, several of which can still be identified, indicating former arable usage. During the second half of the 19th century threshing mills were added to most of the Eaglesham farms by the landlord. Depending upon the terrain and availability of water, some were horse driven and some were water powered. North Kirktonmoor was water powered, supplied from the pond mentioned above. From the pond an elevated timber lade carried the water to the wheel on the west side of the building. The mill was still in operation in 1970, but the last remnants of the wheel were recently removed. The farm has recently been changed to domestic use, with associated stabling.

A large abandoned pile of fireclay field drains testifies to two phases of land drainage on the farm. U-shaped tiles and soles date from the 1840's, while circular pipes are from the early 20th century.

Industry

Apart from the threshing mill, industrial remains could hardly be expected in such a remote area. However events in Eaglesham at the start of the industrial revolution reached out several kilometres into the moors, to increase water supply to cotton mills in the village. West of the farmstead, the headwaters of the Borland Burn have been trapped by a small dam and sluice. A lade follows the contours to three reservoirs on the far side of the moor road, 1km to the east. There are thus two parallel lades on the farm, one above the other, the high one for the farm mill and the lower for the cotton mills in the village.

Due to the relative lack of disturbance by modern farming, such marginal farmland can often contain surprises. Hopefully the wealth of features identified on this farm will encourage others to investigate similar areas in Renfrewshire. Changes of use continually threaten surviving remains, thus the recording of features is also vitally important.

Robin & Susan Hunter, Stuart Nisbet, Sept 2000

Sources: The site, including sources, will be covered in more detail in a forthcoming archaeological paper by R & S Hunter.