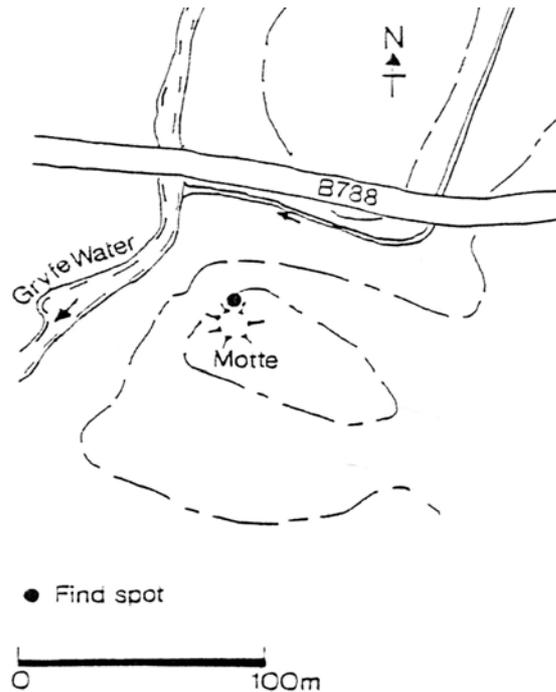# 8. A Short Note on the Discovery of a 'jetton' at Denniston Motte, Renfrewshire

Derek Alexander

A 15th - 16th century bronze or copper jetton or counting piece was found, along with a sherd of pottery, in a sheep scrape on the north side of the motte of Denniston, Milton Bridge, Kilmacolm
(NS 3580 6834).

The 'jetton' was identified by Nick Holmes of the National Museum of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh. It was briefly described as an early example of a type made in Nuremburg, Germany and probably dates to between 1440 - 1493, although it could be early 16th century. This is unusual because the majority of examples at this time were made in France, the German ones only being imported in large numbers in the 16th century.

Both sides are relatively corroded. The obverse side shows what may be a stylized animal, perhaps a lion or a monkey, as on other contemporary examples. The reverse shows a crest or shield. The lettering on these items are often just gibberish, with no translation possible. Basically they were made to look like coins but fulfilled a different function.

They were used on a board for counting, something like a 2-dimensional abacus. The reason they were imported from abroad was purely based on where the metal for making them was most readily available at that time. Thus the change from French to German examples.

The sherd of pottery is probably of similar date, or perhaps a little earlier.

Both these pieces were found right at the base of the motte, where the slipping of earth down the side may suggest that it came from further up. It is extremely unlikely that they represent the continued use of the site as a 'defended' structure but as a place of meeting, a function for which many mottes are known to have fulfilled in their later lives.

Finally, the date of the 'jetton' falls into one of the few well documented events in Renfrewshire's history, the siege of Duchal Castle by James IV in 1489. Although it is unlikely to be connected, and impossible to know, it does conjure up images, helping to focus the imagination on time and place.

Obverse   Reverse

O   1   2cm

2