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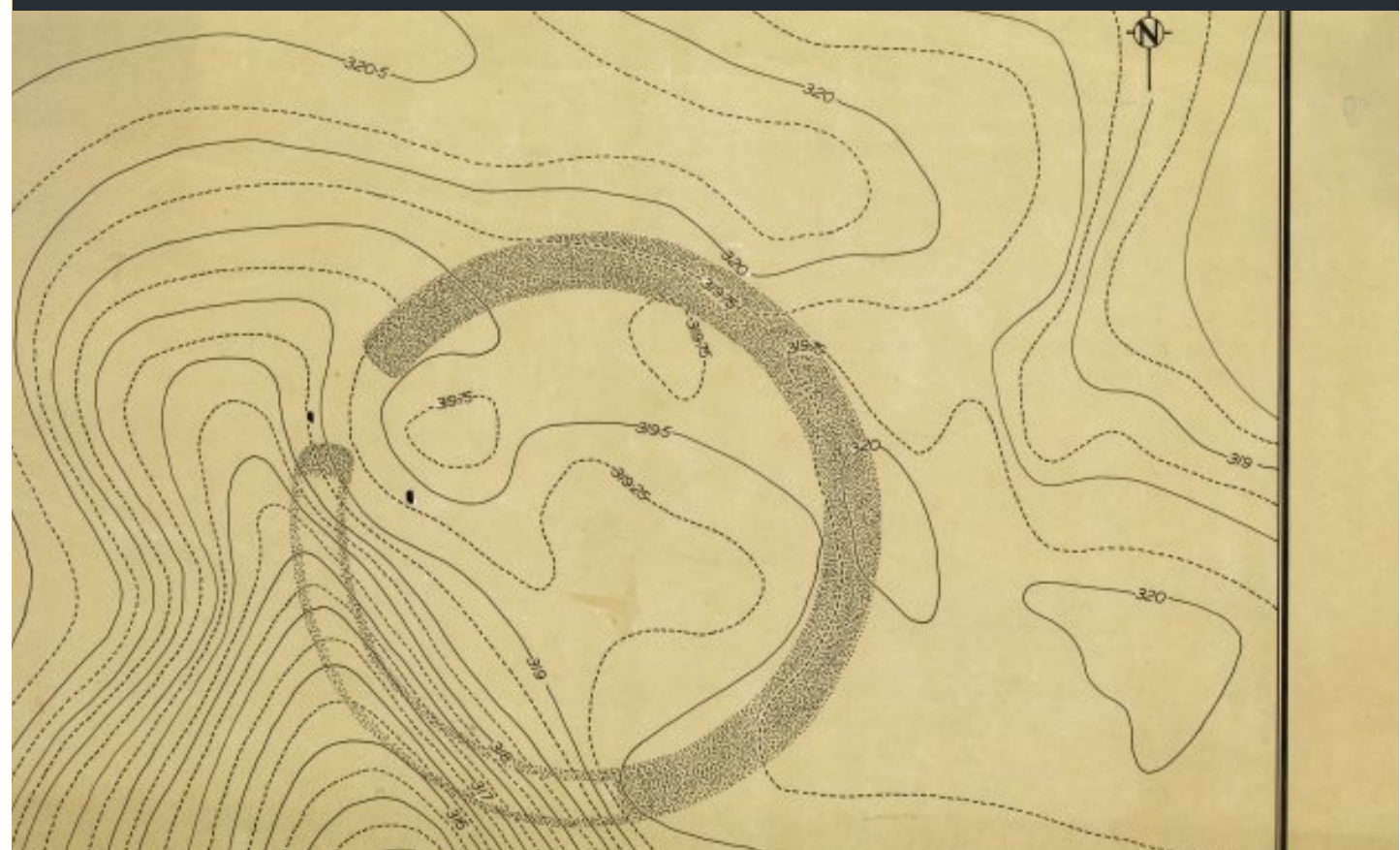


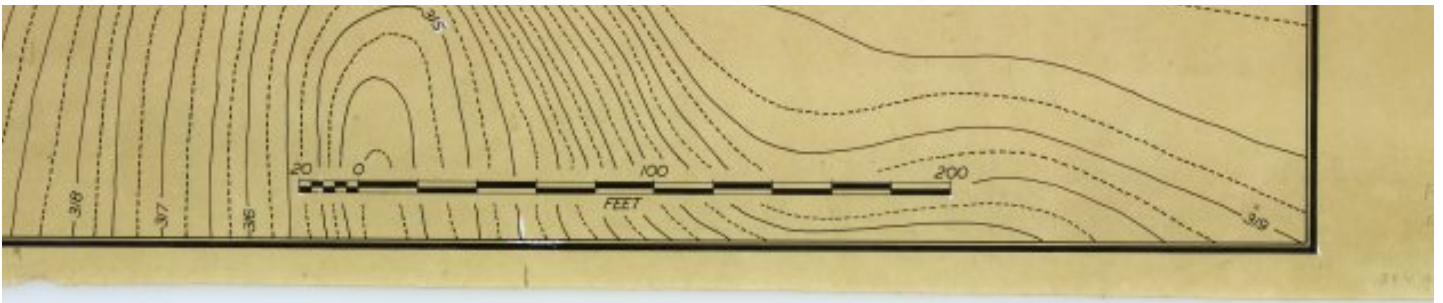
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Balfarg Henge - Glenrothes, Fife





An ancient site in a modern context

Located on the edge of the new town of Glenrothes, the henge is part of a larger complex of Neolithic sites in Fife. It consists of a circular ditch and bank with a single entrance. The construction was completed in phases. Around 6000 years ago pits were created and large amounts of pottery were deposited into them. Approximately 1000 years later further deposits of burnt bone, pottery and charcoal appeared at the site. It was after this that the Henge itself was constructed when a circle of 16 large timber posts were erected. Eventually they were replaced by a circle of standing stones. Two of the stones survive on the site and a modern version of the timber circle has been recreated. In the centre of the Henge a young male was buried and covered by a two ton stone which is also still visible.

The strangest feature of the circle now is its location as the centre point of a circular housing estate built in the late 1970s called 'The Henge'. The site was extensively excavated between 1977 and 1978 by Historic Scotland before the houses were built. The housing plans were permitted to go ahead, but only on the condition that the Henge remained intact as the focal point of the community. In 1996 the timber circle on the Henge was recreated, suggesting that the local community wanted more than just the knowledge of its existence, but wanted to re-build it to allow people to physically experience the structure.

Meaning in the past vs meaning in the present

We can attach meanings to prehistoric landscapes today, but when we combine advances in scientific knowledge with the modern, 21st century outlook we may create, and attach, meaning to these sites which would have been completely different to their creator's ideas thousands of years ago. It is very hard to establish whether a potential relationship between the wider landscape and a monument was in fact a deliberate choice, or if it exists by chance. However, if you subscribe to the theory that the stones at Balfarg henge relate to the features in the landscape around them, we have to question if the current surroundings are influencing the original setting of the monument.

Glenrothes status as a new town now means that the connection between the inhabitants and the physical landscape, which the older residents of the community would have grown up with, has been greatly changed. When generations of a family have lived in the same place for a long time there is a feeling of ontological security, of being part of the place. Glenrothes was the first town in the UK to have an appointed town artist, David Harding. Harding wanted to address this issue and create artworks that could function as community landmarks and link the people to their environment. One of his works is called 'The Henge', a modern stone circle set in another council estate and created with the same material used for the houses surrounding it. It is now a focal point and meeting place for the community possibly echoing some functions of the original Henge. The ancient circle has woven its way into the fabric of the new town.

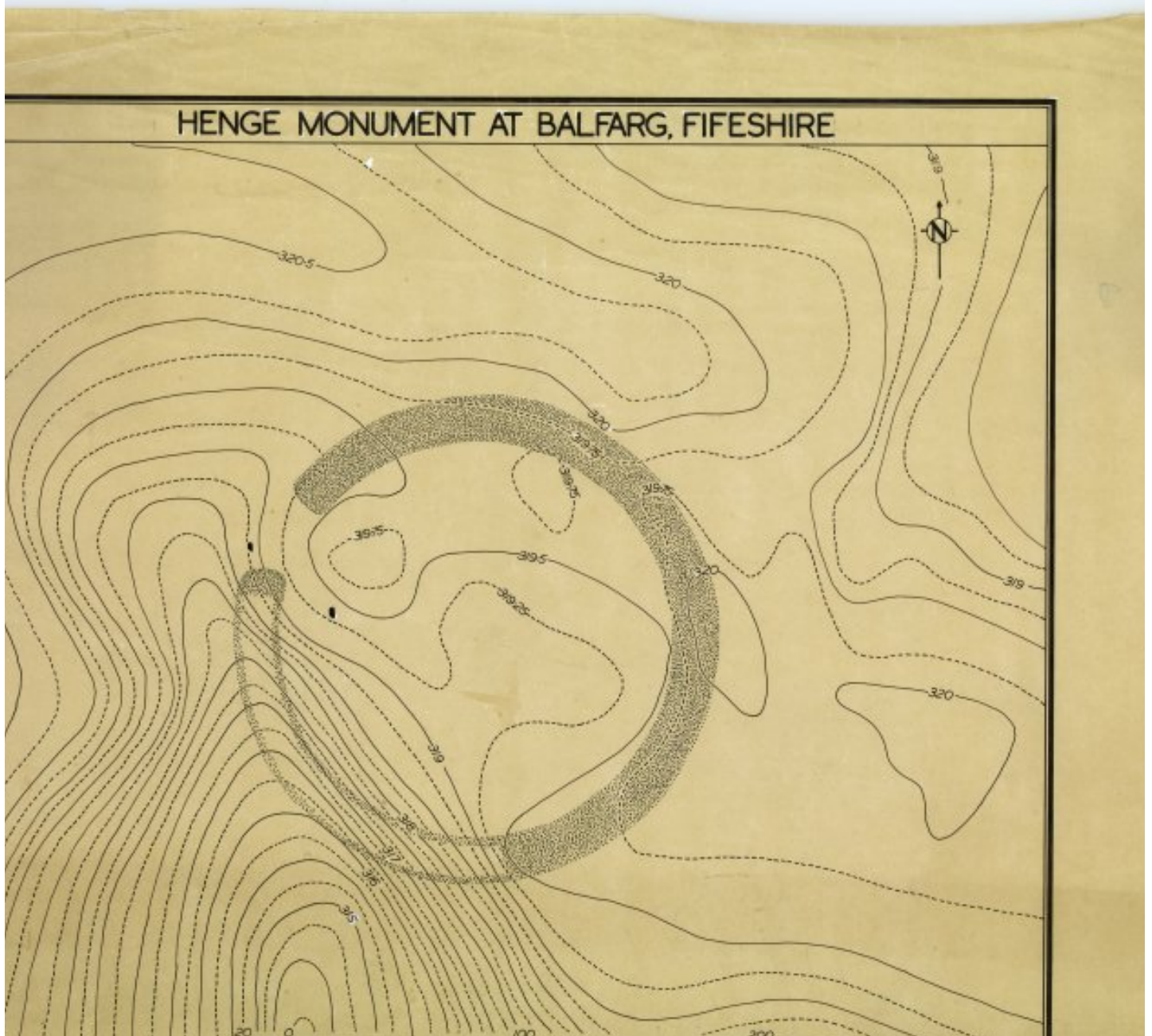
Another monument, Balbirnie stone circle, lies to the south east of Balfarg henge. Both monuments are thought to have been created around the same time and form part of a wider ceremonial complex. Balbirnie stone circle was situated next to the A92 trunk road which was widened in 1970. Unlike Balfarg henge, Balbirnie stone circle was not left intact when the road development occurred and was moved 125 metres to the south east of its original location. This completely changed the context of the monument in the landscape and arguably takes away from its meaning and significance. What do you think? Let us know on social media using the #ArchInSites hashtag.

Next on InSites, we will be looking at a recumbent stone circle in Aberdeenshire. What, you may ask, is the difference between a recumbent and a regular stone circle? Join us this Friday to discover the answer.

Catherine Mylles - Imagery Production Assistant, NCAP



<https://canmore.org.uk/site/29990/balfarg>
<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM2184>



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