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Tillydrone Mote - City of Aberdeen





Appearances can be deceptive – the motte that never was

Hidden in plain sight in Seaton Park, Aberdeen, Tillydrone Mote is a great example of how difficult it can be to accurately identify archaeological sites – even for those of us who are meant to be experts!

For most of its life, Tillydrone was declared to be a motte or castle mound, with its origins in the medieval period. And at first glance, there is no reason to doubt this interpretation. It bears all the hallmarks of a motte – a conical, flat topped mound, its base circa 30m in diameter, standing prominently in an elevated position in the landscape, in an area where other medieval sites have been recorded.

However, excavations carried out in the early 2000s at the behest of Historic Scotland, turned this interpretation on its head. The excavation revealed that far from being a mere 1000 years old, the mound was in fact closer to around 4000 years old.

While the lower part of the mound was seen to be natural, at its core was a large man-made stone structure which appears to have marked out an area used for burials during the Bronze Age.



An Iron Age site

The mound was reused in the Iron Age for an altogether different purpose, something more akin to that of a medieval motte. It appears to have been used as a small defended occupation site or "fortlet", a palisade (wooden fence) having been built on one side of the mound with a stone revetment (which included a saddle quern) on the south east side. Within this defended area, multiple layers of occupation and demolition were recorded; one feature was radiocarbon dated to 170 +/- 45 AD while in another feature a sherd of mid-2nd Century AD Samian ware was found, definitively placing the use of this site in the Iron Age period.

Other artefacts found include a number of flint tools and a copper alloy ring, possibly part of a horse harness. Tellingly, no medieval artefacts were recovered.

No doubt there are more secrets buried within Tillydrone Mote. If there's one thing this site teaches us it's that you should not be afraid to question what's gone before you - there is always more to learn!

Claire Herbert - Regional Archaeologist, Archaeology Service for Aberdeenshire, Moray, Angus and Aberdeen City Councils



<https://canmore.org.uk/site/20205/tillydrone-mote-hill>
<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM1907>
<https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/>





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