

THE ROADS THAT LED BY PRESTOUNGRANGE

MAN IN THE PREHISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Early man's arrival in the landscape of this part of Scotland around about 7,000 B.C.¹¹ was probably by sea, and he is likely to have been met by the view of the dominant Tranent ridge, which at that time was likely to have been covered in oak and hazel woods.¹² Much of the lower lying land would have been swamp and marsh and probably very dangerous to cross.

Prehistoric man's need for food, clothing and shelter meant he had to hunt and gather for life's essentials. Ridgeways, such as the Tranent ridge, afforded dry, safe routes where the wider countryside could be seen, and were free of places where enemies might hide. Such prehistoric ridgeway routes as the Icknield Way in South East Anglia were 'made and maintained' by usage – perhaps following existing animal tracks.¹³ These routes were not fixed carriageways. Instead "the traveller would pick, within the whole width of the ridge, the best, firmest, hardest and driest way."¹⁴

Alternatively, man's ingenuity was utilised to the full in making tracks and routeways across the swamps and moors, such as 'The Sweet Track' in the Somerset Levels.¹⁵ The Sweet Track was a remarkable piece of engineering and planning in which wood, especially managed and harvested for this purpose, was split and laid to form a platform with supporting posts, and this afforded a safe passage across hazardous swamps.

The evidence for such structures and routes in Scotland, let alone our part of East Lothian, is sparse it has to be said. However, it seems likely that there would have been many routes from prehistoric times, particularly over high and naturally well drained land, such as at Tranent ridge. Evidence of prehistoric trade and communication can be seen in the archaeological finds, particularly where petrological evidence is found i.e. the study of where a particular kind of stone that is known to outcrop in only a few places in Great Britain is found out of its natural area. An example of this is the stone axe found in Tranent dating from the Neolithic age and thought to have originated in the prehistoric 'stone-axe factory' at Langdale Pikes in Cumbria.¹⁶ Conversely, deposits of shells and other coastal artefacts inland from Prestonpans may well indicate that these relics have been brought as a special commodity. It is most likely, however, that sea and water routes were the most important means of travelling long distances in prehistoric times rather than land routes.¹⁷

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Early man's way of life changed as his knowledge and mastery of the environment grew. From the hunter and the gatherer nomadic life, he developed over time a system of agriculture and learned to grow food on the land. The earliest known record of the people of this region names them the *Votadini*, ascribed to them by the Greek geographer Ptolemy.¹⁸ These people spoke a language akin to modern day Welsh. The territory of the *Votadini* (*Guotodin* in Welsh¹⁹) spanned from Clackmannan at the head of the Forth to the river Weir or Tyne in England,²⁰ and included Traprain Law where extensive settlement remains have been excavated.

THE COMING OF THE ROMANS

No history of roads should fail to mention the Roman period of occupation in North Britain. We must take a jump through time to the years 78–82 AD when the Romans brought new skill and experience to road construction in Britain. Each road that the Romans built was precisely planned and took the most direct route to its destination; not always straight and sometimes following the natural highways of some of the prehistoric and later routes. The main purpose of the Roman road building in Scotland was to facilitate their military campaign to extend the bounds of the Roman Empire. This was pursued by General Julius Agricola through the building of military roads such as Dere Street (built circa 80 AD), which ran from Corbridge, across the line of what was to become Hadrian's Wall (built 120 AD), to Rochester, to Newstead (Trimontium), and beyond to Lauder, Pathhead, Ford, to Dalkeith and the Elginhaugh Fort, and, it is believed, continued to Cramond (later to be part of a chain of forts across the isthmus that separates the Firths of Clyde and Forth, known as the Antonine Wall, circa AD 143).²¹

The connection with our part of East Lothian becomes stronger when the Roman Fort is examined at Inveresk, where St Michael's church was later to be built. This Fort belongs to the later Antonine period (AD 142–163) of the Roman occupation.²² A road link is suggested leading from Dere Street to Inveresk by the account of the 'Expedecion of His Grace of Somerset) by his Chronicler Patten²³ in the lead up to the Battle of Pinkie:

*Fro this hil of Fanxside Bray descended my Lorde's grace,
my Lorde Lieutenant and another along before their cape*

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(Camp,) within less than two flights shottes, into a lane or street of a thirty feet brode, the fenced on either side with a wall of turf, an elle of height; which way did lead straight northwards, and nie to a church called St. Mighaels, of Undreske.

That the road 'did lead straight northwards' towards St Michael's church is highly suggestive that this was indeed a Roman road and approaching from Falside suggests a line similar to that taken by the current road leading past Carberry to Pathhead and joining the known alignment of Dere Street. 'Strete' is the forerunner of our word 'street' and its original meaning referred to a paved road the type of which was constructed by the Romans.

It has also been put forward that the Fort of Inveresk was linked to the other Roman roads coming from the west via Biggar and the Pentland Hills. One may speculate as to what line this connecting road may have taken. If we are to look at the Ordnance Survey Dalkeith map of 1853 one can make out a straight line leading from the Old Cow Bridge over the South Esk at Dalkeith through the policies of Dalkeith Palace, towards Smeaton Dairy where there appears to be a rectangular land formation suggestive of a fort. This is also shown on Roy's map of 1755. This plus the fact that in the vicinity there is a farm called Castlesteads, and that there has been an archaeological dig uncovering *paved areas*, is very suggestive that there may well be remains of Roman road-building activity. This is at the moment without further supporting evidence, and is surely worthy of further investigation.

The Roman road continued from the Fort at Inveresk beyond to the Roman Harbour at Fisherrow and along the coast, behind what is now Portobello, to what was to become the Edinburgh village of Restalrig along the Fishwives Causeway.²⁴ As Anderson²⁵ has stated, there is no direct evidence of Roman presence at Prestonpans; although, recent finds of chards from a Roman amphora (a jug-like storage vessel) at Prestonpans again raises this idea as a possibility.²⁶

There is a strong link between the Romans and salt making of course. The Romans had their *Via Salaria* as we have our *Salters Road* (leading from Prestonpans to Dalkeith, of which more later). The importance of salt to the well being of all living things cannot be underestimated.²⁷ As well as providing essential minerals to the body, salt was also used to preserve food. The Romans, as an advanced and refined society, knew

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this well and they had even coined several words in this respect. The word 'soldier' comes to us from 'Saldare'²⁸ meaning to give salt; and 'salary' has its meaning from the same origin, as the Roman soldiers were paid in salt.

The Celtic word for salt was *Halen*,²⁹ and evidence of the use of this word in lowland Scotland may possibly be seen in the settlement of Halltree, (also known as Kirkcoltoun when it was the property of the Monks of Newbattle³⁰), to the east of Heriot and near to the current line of the A7. This meaning, if correct, would suggest that this was a *Salt Settlement* and may have been an important centre of salt trading, during the resurgence of the Celtic peoples after the decline of the Roman Empire. That there must have been a localised centre for trade would seem highly probable as the position of the settlement is at the crux of three main valleys (Wedale of the Gala Water, the valley of the Armet Water, and the Heriot Water valley); and these valleys today form main lines of communication into the Borders. This point of time in the history of Scotland is known as the Dark Ages.

THE DARK AGES

The country we now call Scotland was inhabited by a number of different peoples and was fought over by each of their tribes at this time. It is in this period that Christianity gained prominence in Scotland most notably through Columba in 565 AD,³¹ then others such as St. Patrick and St. Ninian. Another, holy man at this time who had East Lothian connections was St. Mungo, or St. Kentigern, who was later to become the late sixth century Bishop of Glasgow.

Mungo's mother was Theneu who was expelled from the settlement on Traprain Law for being pregnant out of wedlock; according to the 12th century account of Jocelyn the Monk of Furness,³² who states that Theneu was cast out into the Firth of Forth in a simple boat, which drifted by the Isle of May where the people of Belgae and Gallia (the people of the Low Countries and France) fished.

The Firth of Forth was thus at this time frequented by people from Continental Europe and again an important trade would have been in salt.³³ It is likely that before long the potential of Prestonpans to be a centre of salt production, through evaporating sea water, would have been realised.³⁴ With the incursion of the Anglic peoples from Friesland³⁵ (part of the low countries to the north of Germany), who themselves

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had mastered the technology of salt production,³⁶ and the establishment of the settlement Aldhammer (Old Village) in the mid seventh century at what was to become Prestonpans, it is quite likely that salt making grew as an industry. However, not much is known about roads in Scotland at this time, although we can infer that there would have been some organised means of transport parallel with that in Ireland.³⁷

The name of the hamlet of Cuthill has claim to being perhaps one of the oldest surviving settlement names in Prestonpans, as it possibly derives from the Gaelic *Comhdhail*, meaning: assembly; conference; or tryst; not necessarily indicating a court of law.³⁸ Further investigations may point to early forms of this name, but it is conceivable that it may date to the Gaelic period of Kenneth McAlpin, King of the Scots and the Picts, and his ninth century invasions of Lothian – at that time an Anglic territory.³⁹

SALTER'S ROAD FROM NEWBATTLE ABBEY

It was King David I (1125), Earl of Huntingdon, who was a major influence in establishing monasteries in Scotland such as those in the Scottish Borders at Dryburgh, Kelso, Jedburgh, and Melrose (where an earlier seventh century monastery had previously existed). King David's reign encouraged the immigration of Norman settlers from England such as Robert De Quinci. He also established Newbattle Abbey (Newbottil or new building) of which Melrose Abbey was the parent house, or Eld bottil (old building). As mentioned earlier, Newbattle Abbey plays a pivotal role in the history of Prestonpans and particularly in our study of roads. The Monks of Newbattle were very industrious and salt-making played a key part in their affairs.

Looking at a modern day Ordnance Survey Map of East Lothian one would see several other references to 'Salters Road.' When the OS Surveyor was gathering information on the county to enable him to include place names on the first edition map of 1849, he would have talked to local landowners and proprietors and recorded this information in his Object Name Books. Some of this evidence has to be treated with a degree of caution, and perhaps some entries are based on local folklore.⁴⁰ However, much of this pertaining to our subject can be backed up by reference to other material such as old charters.

The reference to *Salters Road* is made for the name given to the road running between Prestonpans and Newbattle Abbey.

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In addition to the Salter's Road near Newbattle, there is a Salters Road north of the village of Fala Dam in Midlothian, which crosses *Salters Burn* over the *Salters Ford* or the *Salters Bridge*; and also *Salter Sykes* outside Penicuik. There is also the *Salters Ford* which crosses the Loch Burn by Toxside, Midlothian; as well as the *Salters Ford* at Darnick by Melrose.

Of our first reference to Salters Road, the OS Surveyor tells us that this was:

*A small piece of bye road frequented by smugglers conveying salt from Preston Salt Pans. It leads off the line of road from Dalkeith to Lauder near Newmills Toll Bar joining the public road from Dalkeith to Cousland.*⁴¹

The position of Newmills Toll Bar (outside of Woodburn) places the Salters Road directly on course for Newbattle Abbey at Ordnance Survey grid reference NT 337 670.

The earliest map showing fragments of the Salters Road is the first edition Ordnance Survey map of Dalkeith in 1853, and it runs along the line of road, as described, heading for Newbattle, (which is still called Salter's Road today in the community of Woodburn), and then heads for the 15th century 'Maiden Bridge.' Salter's Road is then shown running south eastwards to the north of *Queen Margaret's Burn* and then to the north of Easthouses at NT 344 660; it then is shown as heading east at the field edge at approximately NT 363 660 to the south of Fuffet Wood.



*Figure 2: Maiden Bridge, in the grounds of Newbattle Abbey, dating from the late 15th century
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The name *Salters Road* is not given to the road through Wallyford (later to become the A6094) on this map until the second edition in 1893. The most direct line from Dalkeith to Prestonpans would have followed this general line of a route through, or near Inveresk where the Abbots' dwellings were, and on to Wallyford (one must ignore the 'Duke's Dykes' enclosing off the Dalkeith Palace grounds and picture this scene in medieval times).

It is also possible that the route from Prestonpans to Newbattle would have gone via Cousland gaining access to the Fa'side ridge and down the coast to Prestonpans. In support of this, there have been aerial photos taken which do indeed suggest a line of ancient routeway between two woods on either side of it at nearby Chalkieside.⁴² This would indeed line up with Newbattle Abbey if one was to follow the 'lay of the land' and the occurrences of the Monks' properties – Whitehill and Cowden.

Looking at the charter evidence of the Newbattle Abbey, as interpreted by Innes,⁴³ one can find numerous references to their travels and industry. The Newbattle Monks' properties and lands were extensive. They owned most of the Moorfoot Hills (from *Moorthwaite* meaning Moorland clearing⁴⁴), parts of Leith, Haddingtonshire, Peeblesshire and Clydesdale.⁴⁵ In this latter area their property became known as the *Monklands* and this was also an important centre of coal mining in Scotland. The Monks of Newbattle constructed a road to the



Figure 3: Woodlands near Chalkieside demarcate the possible line of Salter's Road © A Ralton, 2004.

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Monklands, and this was to become the main line of communication between Edinburgh and Clydesdale, taking the line of road through the Melville lands of *Retrevyn* (unknown, but probably meaning earthwork fort from the Gaelic or Welsh *rath*,⁴⁶ and possibly relating to the ancient fort or settlement by Mavisbank on the River North Esk by Lasswade), by *Strabroc* (Broxburn), and *Bathcat* (Bathgate).⁴⁷ The Monks were also engaged in lead mining in the Leadhills of Lanarkshire, and no doubt lead was a useful commodity in making salt pans. Both of these enterprises required serious road building at which the monks were adept. Road building was seen as an act of Christian charity and devotion.⁴⁸

There would indeed be a strong need to retain open communication between all these properties. In 1189 Alexander II granted travellers the right to cross over land with cattle and to pasture them on common land 'saving corn and meadow'.⁴⁹ However, the Monks, in order to stay on good terms with landowners, often paid landowners on a yearly basis with a gift of a Newbattle Cart filled with timber or building materials.⁵⁰

The industry of the Newbattle Monks and the potential for raising tax was no doubt recognised by James V who granted the Monks permission to build a harbour formerly known as *Gilbertis-draucht*.⁵¹ James V's subsequent Acts of Parliament of 1555 commanding all highways, especially those from burghs to sea ports, to be kept open⁵² would no doubt have helped give fresh impetus to the Monks to keep the Salters Road open through Wallyford to Newbattle at this time. However, it would not have just been salt which was transported on the Salters Road. The Monks' coal workings at Newbattle would have been carted to their seaport for export, and rather than return empty, the famous 'Newbattle Cart'⁵³ would return with salt, shellfish and other imports from the Continent.⁵⁴

THE NEWBATTLE MONKS AND THE EARLY CHURCH OF PRESTON

According to Lord Wemyss when writing his appendix to the First Statistical Account of Prestonpans, direct connection of the Newbattle Monks with Prestonpans can be seen in the name *Olivestob*: meaning Holy Stop, or the place where the *Host* stopped,⁵⁵ and this place was meant to mark a stop on the procession of the Newbattle Monks from Preston. *Olivestob*