

THE ROADS THAT LED BY PRESTOUNGRANGE



Figure 4: Northfield Doocot

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was later owned by Thomas Seton in the 17th century,⁵⁶ and it subsequently fell into the hands of Lord Bankton (Bankton House currently standing on these grounds was later to be owned by Colonel Gardiner of the Battle of Prestonpans).

McNeill has speculated that the old Church of Preston was in this vicinity, and it is postulated by McNeill that the walls enclosing Northfield House, and perhaps also its ancient Doocot, may in fact contain stone from an ancient Church, the stone reused in McNeill's time in "*Katie Herrin's Close*"⁵⁷ an alleyway named after an ancient inhabitant. The Church, as well as the Tower of Preston, was subsequently destroyed by the Earl of Hertford, prior to the Battle of Pinkie. However, it is quite likely that there was more than one church in the district of Prestonpans at this time, as the Canons of Holyrood also had lands in Preston. Furthermore, the presence of the west Churchyard lying off Prestonpans High Street, where there are some very ancient tombstones, also suggests that there may have been a Church connected to this, and it would seem quite probable that a church, if it existed there, could well have been the property of the Monks of Newbattle; with the Canons holding a church at Preston.⁵⁸

Elsewhere, a strange engraved stone is alluded to by McNeill as possibly belonging to the original Church of Preston and being built into a field wall on Wygtrig Hill (Rigley Hill). McNeill describes it thus:

Facing Bankhead House, on the south, right over Wygtrig Hill, runs an old stone dyke, and in this dyke, a little distance down, may be found the very curious memorial

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stone shown elsewhere. What may be termed its base or foundation stone, almost on a level with the soil, is rounded at the corners, and has the appearance of a heavy doorstep. Directly above the foundation lies another stone, a little over four feet in length, and about eight inches thick, reminding us of a sculptured window lintel, but lying in a reversed position; it is of light sandstone. Directly over this again, and in the centre of it, stands a piece of yellowish sandstone in pyramidal form; this is about eighteen inches broad at the base and about eighteen inches in height, running to a narrow point at top. There seems to have been a deal of labour spent on this, which may be termed the chief stone, the chiseling evidently having been attended to with great care. In the first place, it has been "cut out" all round about an inch in depth, leaving a border about an inch in breadth, the central part being cut out several inches deeper. Crowning all, and directly on the point of the pyramid, is a crescent, its horns pointing skywards. There is other sculptured work in the dyke, but no more of the same yellowish sandstone; while the foundation stones of the dyke at this point are large hewn blocks, which had evidently been used previously for a very different purpose.

The memorial slabs have an aged appearance compared with their surroundings, and this has called attention to them previously. The late Dr Struthers, half a century ago, examined the stones. He expressed no opinion as to their being there; but the inscription we give elsewhere is said to have been copied by him. Part of the original inscription may still be found there, but it will be found difficult to decipher. The late Mr J. F. Hislop, another antiquarian of standing in the district, tried also to unravel the mystery, but without success. It seems to us that this dyke, which is a mutual wall between the Northfield and Castlepark lands, must have been built by old Laird Fowler, laird of Wygtrig, and the proprietor of Northfield at that period, with stones taken from Katie Herrin's close, for there may be found blocks of the very same sort, the whole of which, including the memorial stone, may have belonged to the original church of Preston.⁵⁹

On further investigation this stone was located in a field to the north of the A1 by Prestonpans. The stone does indeed bear

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Figure 5: The curious stone described by McNeill. The crescent was part of the armorial badge of the Setons. © A Ralton, 2004.

marks of having been extensively worked. It does however also carry what strongly resembles the Seton Family Heraldic Crest of the half crescent (signifying the Earl of Winton's time spent on the Crusades perhaps). The stone is undoubtedly of great antiquity, but it seems more likely to have come from Olivestob House or perhaps Seton Palace when it was beaten down, or maybe even Winton House (also owned by the Setons).⁶⁰

THE ROUTE OF SALTER'S ROAD SOUTH FROM PRESTONPANS

As well as the East-West Salter's Road there was also a North-South route. The OS Surveyor attributed the name 'Salters Road' to the straight stretch of road just north of the village of Fala Dam, and immediately bordering Whitburgh House on the west. He then shows it skirting to the east of the ancient Fort of Dodridge Law and heading north on a line for 'The Murrays' and Peaston. The OS Surveyor makes the following entry in the Object Name Book:⁶¹

Salter's Road:

A portion of a road which passes through Whitburgh Estate to Prestonpans. Its name is derived from being a thoroughfare of those employed in Salt trade with Prestonpans.

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*Figure 6: Salter's Road north of Fala Dam, overlooking Salter's Bridge
© A Ralton, 2004.*

The occurrence here of the Salters Road is strongly indicative of this part of the route linking to the road over Soutra – the old Roman road of Dere Street and also the later medieval Via Regia (The Kings Road)⁶² – as this route was one of the main routes into Scotland (as it still is, now known as the A68). The route of Salters Road just north of Fala Dam is straight running along a NNW – SSE line. The straightness of this road might deceive us into thinking that it had been left to us by the Romans; rather, this road was straightened through the agricultural improvements in the mid eighteenth century. This process was widespread throughout the country as fields were enlarged and enclosed and roads were made to take sharp turns around the boundaries of walled estates. This can be clearly seen in this case as Salter's Road here makes a sharp turn to the west beyond Whitburgh House, and likewise at its southern end at the Fala Dam burn, the road turns sharply to the east – the natural obstacles in the landscape of Dodridge Law and Fala Dam burn obviously curtailing further 'improvement'. We know this road was improved circa 1755 when the Midlothian Turnpike Trustees deemed that it should receive improvement and the Minutes of the Trustees record the building of a 'new road called Salters Road' near Fala;⁶³ this was an improvement of the older Salters Gait (the old Scots word for road).

The investigations into the medieval hospital Soutra have put forward the case that the line that Salter's Road would have taken between Prestonpans and Soutra was as follows:⁶⁴ via Dodridge, The Murrays, House-o'-Muir, Ormiston, Clutes (now known as North Elphinstone Farm), Corse House just north of Elphinstone, Tranent and Bankton House (formerly Olivestob). The case for this line of route seems very plausible.

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As aforementioned, Olivestob is reputedly the 'Holy' stop of the Monks of Newbattle. Corse-house was the house at the Crossroads, as Corse was often used in Scots language to signify a crossing. Corse House no longer exists as a building, yet the place where it used to be is still a crossroads of the Elphinstone – Tranent public road (B6414), the road eastwards past North Elphinstone; and also the two routes that are still public rights of way today, passing to the north at Myles Farm and onwards to Birsley, and continuing on westwards towards Fa'side Castle. From this crossroads the route past Clutes is interesting in that the name of this place gives a clue to a possible former Prestoungrange property. It is possible that the name Clutes may be contracted from *Sowtercloute*, which was confirmed in a charter as part of the Prestoungrange estate as inherited by Mark Kerr in 1584,⁶⁵ and subsequently by Robert Kerr in 1620.⁶⁶ The meaning of *Sowtercloute* could be the 'House of the shoemaker for cloven footed Beasts,' as *souter / sowter* is Scots for shoemaker, and *clout / cloot / clute* is Scots for one of the divisions of the hoof of a cloven-footed animal.⁶⁷ This hypothesis is admittedly based on conjecture. Deriving the origin of place names can be obscure and there may well be other theories explaining the meaning of this name. However, the possibility is intriguing, given that there should be two possible allusions to the foot in the one place name; and perhaps doubly so when one realises that both the place names Clutes and *Sowtercloute* are now lost. In addition, it would also seem plausible that there should be a smith making shoes for beasts being driven along the several main routes which converge at this meeting point. Haldane⁶⁸ mentions the shoeing of cattle as dating back to very ancient times, perhaps as long ago as the Romans.

Following the road south via Ormiston from Prestonpans is also very logical as this line makes for the higher ground between the Tyne water and its tributaries – the two strands of the Keith and Humbie waters – and the route would also cross the Tyne where it is relatively shallow and weak. This would possibly follow the same general line of the path called 'The Howden' (probably meaning a narrow valley) crossing the Bellyford (possibly indicative of pack-horse traffic: 'bag' or 'belly', which could refer to characteristic use by pack animals, and ford – water crossing⁶⁹). The route may well have continued to the north of Ormiston passing the ancient Cross of Ormiston, where no doubt much bartering was entered into. From Ormiston the River Tyne was crossed and the road

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Figure 7: Roy's map of 1755 (Sheet 8/5a) showing Prestonpans and vicinity, including Ouylystob. © British Library; By permission of the British Library

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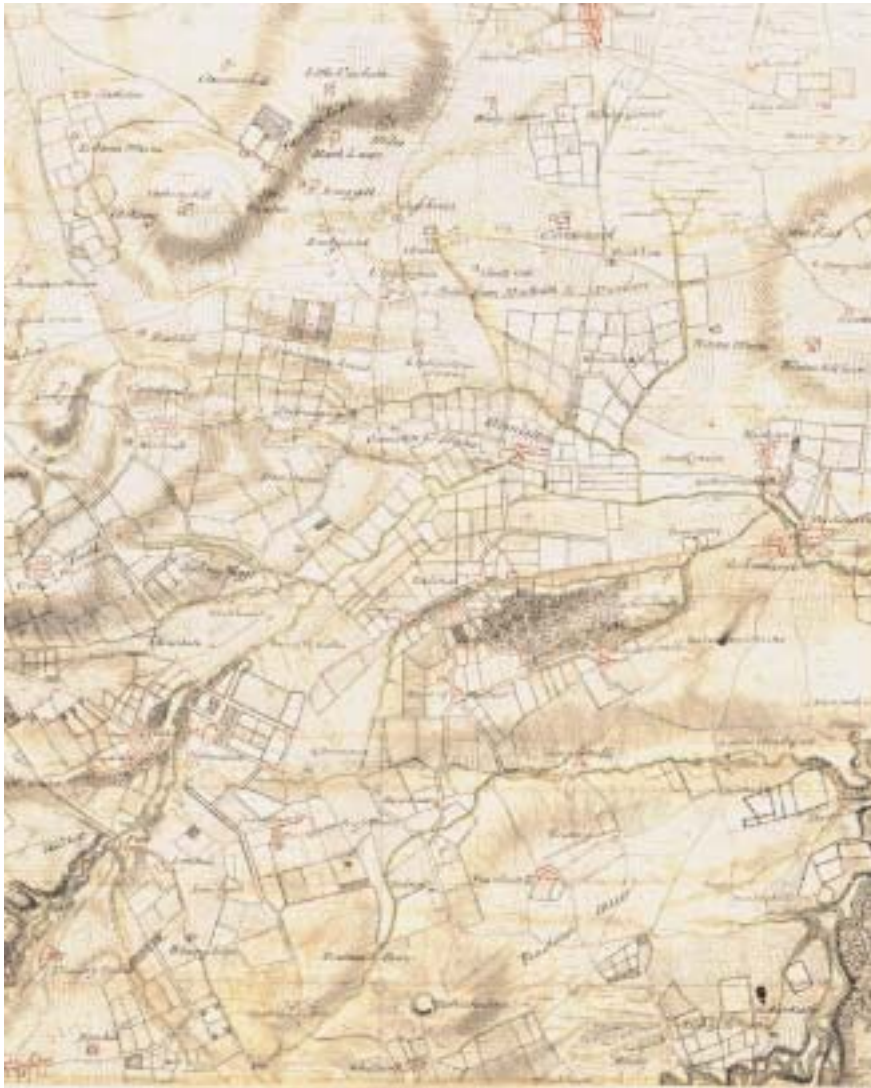


Figure 8: Roy's map of 1755 (Sheet 8/5d) showing Corse House, Clouts, etc. © British Library; By permission of the British Library

past House o' Muir would possibly have been taken, and then The Murrays (the name being corrupted from 'The Muirhouse'), and heading for the high ground of Dodridge Law and Salters Road as marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map.

That there were many tracks over this part of the moor is evident today with the village now known as Pathhead (formerly Peth-heid), which means literally – 'The Head of the Paths.'⁷⁰ There are many 'Moor tracks' shown on the OS Map, and remains have also been found of an old paved road near to Templehall,⁷¹ which itself was supposedly the site of lands owned by the Knights Templar – the guardians of the traveller. It is also possible that the Salter's Road as marked on

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the OS map from Newbattle via Easthouses and Fuffet Wood would have met up with the line of this route around about here.

So where did Salters Road head for beyond this point? The medieval hospital of Soutra would likely have been a key stopping off point, and no doubt the hospital would have used vast quantities of salt in their day-to-day work and life. However, besides Soutra there are clear documented links between Prestonpans, or Salt Preston as it was known, and Melrose Abbey, which was the Mother house of Newbattle.

In the Bannatyne Club's *Liber Sancte Marie de Melros* there is an early charter which grants the Melrose monks one Saltwork at Preston, and the right to cut wood from the wood at Preston to fire the salt pans at *Salina de Prestun*.⁷² It is interesting to note that it was not coal that was being used here to fire salt pans, but wood. Woods were a fairly scarce resource, as were peateries, in ancient Scotland. It is known that woodlands at Keith near Humber, Dalkeith and Pencaitland were managed for timber for various purposes. In fact, ancient coppiced Oaks have been discovered in what is now part of Dalkeith Country Park dating from at least the time of King Robert the Bruce (early 14th century) and possibly earlier, demonstrating that these trees were extensively managed and their wood harvested in a planned cycle.⁷³ Apart from this each of these names has a common place name element in their etymology originating from the Cumbric word 'ced' which means wood.⁷⁴

Further proof of the connection between Salt Preston and Melrose may be seen in the place name of the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Roxburgh: 'Salter Ford.' This was the ford crossing the Tweed above the rivulet of Darnick. This ran "to the East of the Pavilion Cottage then by Gattonside Bank, Easterhouses Byres through Mosshouses then Bluecairn and Blainslie."⁷⁵

The OS Surveyor says of this as follows:

Salters' Ford

*This was a ford across the Tweed between Melrose beside Melrose Bridge when the Salt Cadgers, were in the habit of crossing, with their salt on pack horses. It is not now used as a ford. This ford is ridden every second year by a gentlemen living near Melrose so as to keep a right of use for the public.*⁷⁶

This route described is in fact using parts of an ancient track from Darnick and linking in to Dere Street. The references to

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cadgers, as with the other Salter's Road's reference to smugglers, may well have some truth, and is supported by Whatley's assertion of smuggling being rife in the two preceding centuries before this entry.⁷⁷ However, it seems more than likely that this route pre-dates this to the time of the Monks of Melrose. The whole of this route from Darnick to Blainslie is now part of the long distance walking trail – the 'Southern Upland Way.'

Further evidence linking Prestonpans to this part of the Borders is found in the charter granting in Feu farm to William Hall the lands of Nether Blainslie, and Overtown of Blainslie, to which fish or salt was to be brought from North Berwick or *Salt Preston*, or neighbourhood 'for the sustenance of the Convent and household in the summer'⁷⁸ by John Thornton, "Prothonotary Apostolic Precentor of Moray" and also by Steven Culross, Treasurer of Orkney confirming a Charter (dated at Melrose 8th March 1546–7). We also have the charters of Sir Robert Hamilton of Fingalton (who lived in Preston Tower) in the year 1460 giving over the rock-cut Salt Pans and a farm to the Monks of Melrose.⁷⁹

As mentioned above, there was a Salters Ford at Toxside crossing the Loch Burn,⁸⁰ which was also owned by the Newbattle Monks. Furthermore, an ancient droveway has recently been uncovered here.⁸¹ It is quite possible that this route was on the line of the way the Monks would have taken to their Grange at Rommanoch in Peeblesshire; now the settlement of Romannobridge – from the Gaelic Rothmaneie meaning 'Monk's Dwelling.'⁸² This is also intriguing in that the Gaelic language would pre-date the time of the Monks of Newbattle and may give us clues to an early route between the ancient monastery of Iona on the west coast of Scotland, who may be the monks referred to. The first abbey founded at Melrose between 635 AD and 651 was by St Aidan, Columba's disciple.⁸³

The monasteries' influence in Scotland waned with the dawn of the religious reformation. Church lands were let or feud and, at Prestoungrange, the main beneficiary was Mark Kerr, Commendator of Newbattle Abbey when two Charters were passed in his favour by the Old Scottish Parliament on 28th July 1587. The lands of: 'Prestoungrange and Sowter Cloute, in Haddington; *Eisthouse* [Easthouses] and *Westhouse* [now lost but then south of Mayfield], Morphat-toun [Moorfoot, where the Monks had a Grange], *Huntlawcoit* [Huntly Cot], *Toksyde Hill* [Toxside Hill], *Coitlaw* [unknown] and *Gledhouse* [Gladhouse], in Edinburgh; *Lethinghoipis*,