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Stobs Camp Project Quarter 1 Report

April – June 2017

Executive Summary

During this period the project was officially launched at Hawick Museum. There followed a period of surveying and supervised excavation where volunteers and school pupils were able to participate and learn archaeological skills. A talk was given to a local community council and a workshop on surveying techniques was held for volunteers. Working alongside responsible metal detectorists, an exercise was conducted over one of the camp areas which resulted in many interesting finds. Research continued on family connections and the search for the original huts that were sold off began in earnest. Publicity and promotion was extensive during this period with articles about the project appearing in many newspapers and online news feeds. Short films were shot by ITV Borders and the Scottish Borders youth group, *Voice Of My Own*. A total of 535 volunteer hours were recorded during the three months from April 2017.

Introduction & Background

Stobs Camp was a military training camp prior to the First World War but then became first a civilian internment camp and then a military POW camp. It is internationally important as so much of it remains upstanding or visible. The community and other stakeholders are keen to see the site properly recorded and receive adequate recognition.

The Stobs Camp Project is a community project being led by Archaeology Scotland (AS) co-operating with Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Borders Council Archaeology Service, Live Borders Museums and Archives, Hawick Archaeological Society, Hawick Callants Club, Hawick High School, Project Hawick, Borders Family History Society, University of Aston, landowners and potentially other organisations (including Youth Borders and Voice Of My Own) and many individual volunteers and local schools.



Aims & Objectives

The aims of the **Stobs Camp Project** are to encourage both local people and the global online community to:

- Better understand Stobs Camp and the role it played in the First World War
- To value, share and commemorate Stobs and the people connected to it
- To protect Stobs Camp for future generations

Progress towards aims:

Objective 1 – to better understand Stobs Camp and the role it played in the First World War.

1. Cemetery Area

The first area of study, begun in October 2016, was the abandoned German cemetery. We wanted to establish, if possible, how the graves had been arranged and ascertain whether the original headstones had been placed in the vacated graves. We also wanted to establish how the memorial had been dismantled (local folklore suggests that it had been blown up with dynamite).

In April we conducted a 2-day excavation as follows:

- The stone spread from the memorial cairn was photographed and recorded. A small excavation was conducted at the base of the memorial stone which revealed a section of the stone plinth. This was recorded and covered back up. The spread of fallen stone indicated that the cairn had been knocked down by a heavy object (possibly a mallet or hammer) in a right to left motion when facing the front of the monument. There was no evidence found that supported the local myth.
- A new test pit was opened at the base of the stone steps. Photographic evidence had suggested that a sixth step was beneath the current ground level. The small excavation revealed the surface of this sixth step. This was measured, photographed and covered back up.
- A new test pit was opened to explore a possible entrance way to the cemetery on the north side. This revealed a band of stone but it was not conclusive whether this was part of the natural bedrock constituting the edge of the memorial platform or otherwise. This was photographed and covered up.
- The previous trench that had revealed a headstone shoe was re-opened and extended northwards and eastwards. This extension revealed another headstone shoe to the north. This was connected to the first. Whether this concrete band of headstone shoes continued further northwards was undetermined as there was not time to extend the trench further. The cut of the first headstone grave was excavated to a depth of over a metre but stopped when the bottom became waterlogged. Apart from one or two nails no artefacts were found. Analysis indicated that the removal of the bodies may have been speculative, the headstones being used to locate the bodies. It would appear that the headstone shoes lay over the upper torso area and so the shoes had to be broken to enable extraction of the remains. It is more than likely that the headstones were removed before this procedure. No evidence of the headstones exists, either in the original grave cut or elsewhere at the cemetery. This trench was recorded and filled in. Discussion suggested that useful pieces of cut and dressed stone such as headstones may have been re-used locally as garden features with the engraved side lying face down.



2. Practice Trenches

A walkover survey was conducted to ascertain the best practice trench to examine in order to discover the method of construction and whether the practice trenches were excavated in full prior to the FWW or just as an exercise as part of the soldiers' training. It was decided to survey and excavate one set of trenches near to Barns Farm (Fig.1.).



Fig.1. Aerial view of practice trench



A metal detecting survey was conducted prior to breaking ground to ascertain the area as safe to continue exploration. Only small finds were recovered including half a dozen empty bullet casings and two coins; a 1901 Queen Victoria halfpenny and a 1905 Edward VII penny (Fig.2).



Fig.2. Photograph of empty bullet casings and coins found whilst metal-detecting, May 2017



Fig.3.

Location of practice trench, E of the derelict Barns Farm



A survey and recording workshop took place on Saturday 20th May at Wilton Dean Village Hall which was attended by 12 volunteers. The aim of the workshop was to introduce delegates to the methods of surveying and recording archaeological sites and included the following topics; assessing risk and writing condition reports, using standard reporting terminology, conducting a plane-tableing survey, drawing plans, sections, elevations and site sketches and taking a photographic record.

The following week volunteers conducted a supervised plane table survey of the practice trench.



Excavation of the trench site was then undertaken with volunteers and pupils from Hawick High School over four sessions in two days. The practice trench is approximately 39 metres in length and follows an approximate NW-SE alignment. A 3m x 3m excavation site was chosen (over three directional changes in the practice trench) perpendicular to the direction of the practice trench (Fig. 4.) on a NE-SW alignment to ascertain how it was constructed and its dimensions.



Fig.4. Location of 3m x 3m excavation trench



The excavation revealed no trace of wooden lining nor was the bottom of the trench revealed as it became too narrow and water-logged in parts to safely excavate. Two sondages (Fig.5.) were excavated which revealed that construction was not consistent throughout the length of the trench. Discussion surmised that 'forward' facing sections would be for firing from and therefore slightly wider than 'back' sections that were merely for transit. Only small finds were recovered, the most significant being a regimental button, discovered by one of the pupils whilst sieving the spoil heap (Fig.6.). The site was back filled and closed.



Fig.5.



Fig.6.

3. Metal Detecting Camp B

Within the POW barrack hut area Camp B was chosen as the most suitable site to conduct a metal detecting survey to establish whether significant finds could be made that would be indicative of the whole POW area. Volunteers were recruited from SARG and the SDC detector clubs and the area was GPS located at 20m transects. Detectorists were asked to set machines to discriminate against iron to eliminate nails and rusting wire etc. Volunteers followed the detectorists bagging and recording finds. Over two days 287 finds were recovered including many bullet casings, coins and regimental badges. These finds are currently being assessed and will form the material for a finds processing workshop for volunteers in July



Fig.7. Sample of finds from metal-detecting survey in Camp B

Objective 2 – to value, share and commemorate Stobs and the people connected to it.

The project was officially launched on 1st April at Hawick Museum which was attended by over 60 people and the local press. Short talks were given by the museum curator Shona Sinclair, Council archaeologist Dr Chris Bowles and local MSP John Lamont. This was followed by a short presentation by the Project Development Manager and Project Officer.

A press release was issued regarding the start of the project which resulted in articles appearing in The Times, The Herald, The Scotsman, BBC Scotland news online, Southern Reporter, Hawick News and The Hawick Paper.



A further article seeking information about internees and prisoners was published in *Who Do You Think You Are* magazine.

Work has begun on the mobile phone app that will encourage visitors to the site and help to illuminate the visible and hidden remains. The 'app' will be accessible from the internet so will be of interest to the wider public.

Some of the volunteers have formed a sub-group specifically to research and seek out barrack huts that we know were sold off in the 1920s and 1950s. Twenty-one potential huts have been discovered so far of which fifteen are still upstanding.

Researchers at the Borders Family History Society continue to look for connections to prisoners, internees and British soldiers' families from the period.

An update on the project was given to the Hawick Community Council which was attended by some 20 local people.

ITV Border News came along to film excavation activities with Hawick High School and the programme was broadcast on two occasions. One of the young volunteers has also published a blog about her experience on the cemetery dig on Twitter and this will be uploaded to the website.

The Stobs Camp Project Twitter account now has 400 followers and tweets have reached many thousands of people.

Invitations have been received to share experience and findings with two similar projects in the North East of England.

Objective 3 – to protect Stobs Camp for future generations

All the work described above will contribute to the future conservation plan and continuous assessment of the standing remains is a constant of the project.

Andy Jepson
Project Officer
July 2017