

Lyne Early Christian Cist Cemetery and Roman Fort Heritage Trail

How to get there

The landscape surrounding you is part of the Southern Uplands of Scotland, an area that has a rich legacy of historical and archaeological sites.

Many of these sites are still visible while others are discovered when the ground is disturbed for some reason. This site was discovered and excavated by local archaeologists from Peebles and Biggar who have joined together to explore and publicise the history of Upper Tweeddale. The same group, thus allowing a new interpretation of the past in Peeblesshire, has now recorded many sites, of different periods for the first time.

Between the 6th and 8th centuries AD, the southeast of Scotland was under the control of the Anglian kingdom of Northumbria. It was a period which saw the increasingly widespread adoption of Christianity. Among these early Christian communities the dead were often buried in slab-lined graves (or long cists). Such cists can occur singly or in small groups, as here and elsewhere in Upper Tweeddale, but some large cemeteries are also known, especially in the Lothians.

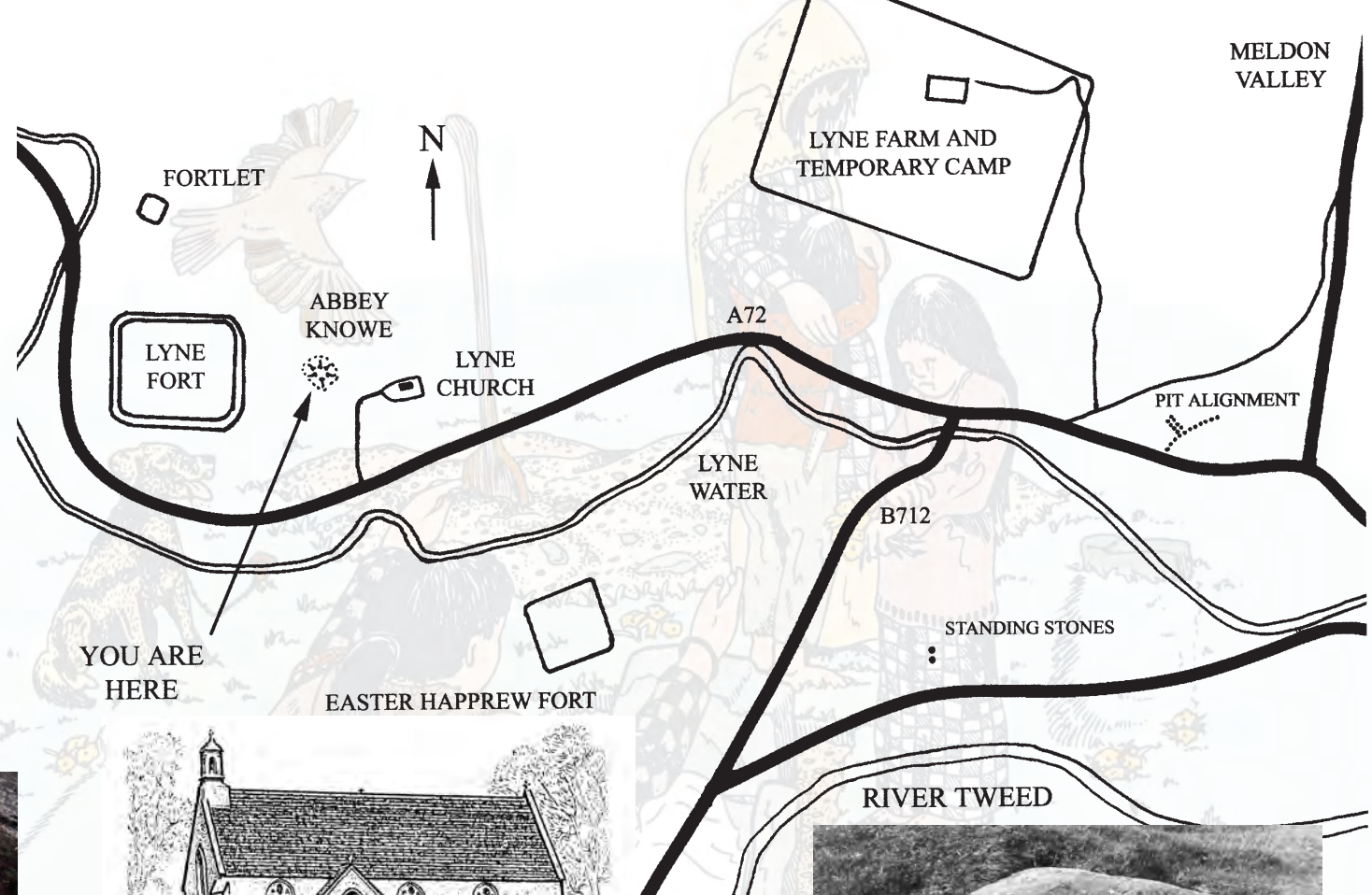


The three small graves seen here are typical long cists, aligned east-west and built with small side slabs and capstones. The bodies were laid full length, with the feet at the narrow end, but in this case nothing remained in the graves. Because of the size of these cists, it is believed they were for children and it is possible that more graves once covered the original Abbey Knowe, which has obviously been quarried. The graves were discovered and excavated in 1998 by local archaeologists because they were under threat of erosion. The cists are in their original positions and their covering stones lie beside them.



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This Trail was devised by the Biggar Archaeology Group as part of a series of heritage trails in Upper Clydesdale. See our website for more information.



Lyne Church

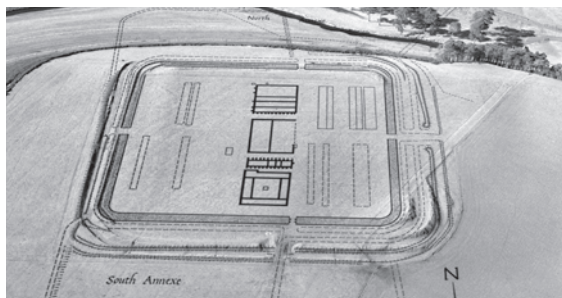
It is suspected that a church may have existed at Lyne since the 12th century. However, since the discovery of the three Early Christian graves here, it may be that an even earlier church stood nearby, hence the name Abbey Knowe. The building as seen today was built between 1640 and 1645. Apart from a few alterations, it mostly dates to that period. The internal fittings are of particular interest: they include a 17th century pulpit, panelled pews that date to 1644, and a medieval font. The churchyard has a rare example of an Adam and Eve gravestone: it commemorates 16-year-old Janet Veitch who died in 1712.



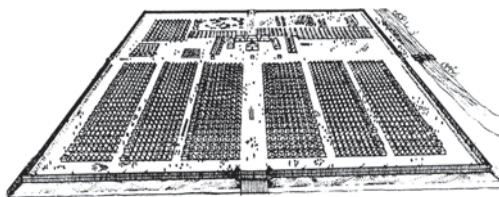
Conine Stone

Another valuable relic of the so-called Dark Ages or Early Christian period is the Conine stone found in nearby Manor Valley. It probably dates to the end of the 6th century AD, possibly about the time when these little coffins were made. It is a memorial to a lady called Coninia, but apart from her religion, little else is known. She must have been an important person and she is certainly the earliest named individual of the area. It can be seen in Tweeddale Museum Peebles.

Lyne Roman Fort



The overall plan of the fort shows how it was used and changed even in its short lifetime. Annexes on the north and south sides were probably temporary storage areas or for holding animals. The shapes of the central stone buildings were shown by excavation.



The Romans meant to stay a long time at Lyne judging by the use of stone buildings in the fort. Local red sandstone was used to build the three central blocks that included the headquarters (central) and the commandant's house on the south side. The Romans always defended their camps, whether permanent or temporary. The so-called 'marching camps' are found along all Roman routes and these were the defended camps where leather tents were pitched, each to hold eight Roman soldiers. These camps are often found near to permanent forts.

Lyne Roman Fort

The Lyne Roman fort can still easily be traced on the ground by following the outline of its broad ditches and earth ramparts. The main buildings in the fort can no longer be seen, but excavations have shown that these were built with red sandstone. They included the headquarters building in the centre, a granary and the commandant's house to the south, and on the north side a large building which may have been a workshop. The rest of the buildings – mainly barrack blocks and stables – would have been built with timber. The few finds show that the fort was built during the Antonine period (AD 142 – 162). It was probably occupied for a few years. The garrison probably consisted of a mixed unit of cavalry and infantry up to a thousand strong.

The fort you see here was built on the Roman road between the great forts of Trimontium near Melrose and Castledykes near Lanark. Along this route there are other forts and camps. Surrounding the farm of Lyne, there is a temporary camp measuring nearly 50 acres in size. However, its outline can now only be seen as a crop-mark from the air. The soldiers who built the fort probably used this camp. Just to the north of the fort is a tiny fortlet of which little is known and which also can no longer be seen on the ground.

Did you enjoy the walk?

Why not try out other Heritage trails: Wintercleuch, Glenochar Bastle and Lyne Early Christian Cemetery.

On the other side of the river and south west of here at Easter Haprew, there is another Roman fort. This smaller fort was built and used between 79 and 86 AD when Agricola marched the first Roman armies into Scotland.

The native tribes of Tweeddale and Clydesdale were the Selgovae, as described by the Romans. Numerous hill top forts and lower defensive settlements of these people can be visited in these areas. Relations between the locals and the invaders were probably not friendly, judging by the defensive requirements of each group. However, it is likely that many native hill forts existed before the Romans arrived, showing that hostilities already existed between tribes in southern Scotland. The people to the east were named Votadini; while those to the west were the Damnonii and the Novantae.

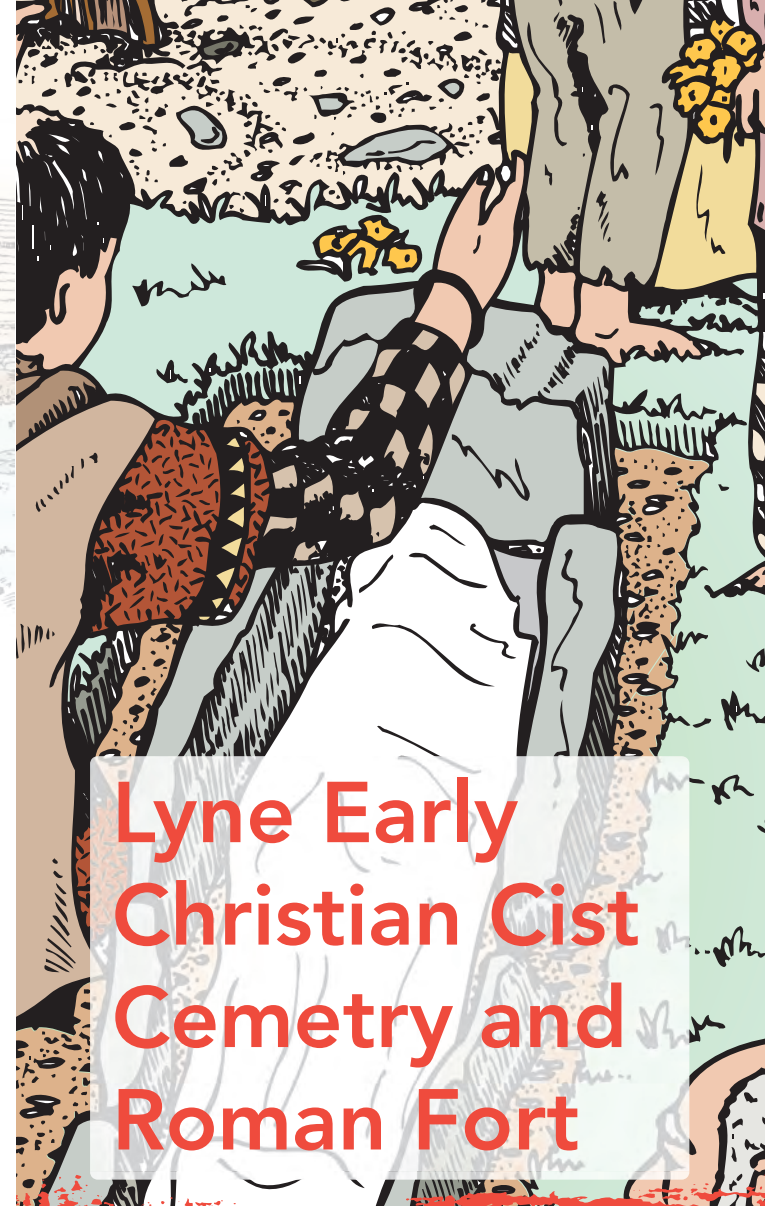
Comprehensive Roman displays may be seen in Glasgow and Edinburgh museums while local aspects of the Romans in Scotland may be seen in museums at Biggar and Melrose.

Acknowledgements

The Peeblesshire Archaeological Society and Biggar Museum Archaeology Group wish to acknowledge the support given to this project by the Wemyss Estates, and for their permission to access the sites. John Hooper of the Peeblesshire Archaeological Society and the Russell Trust donated funds to purchase this panel, which was designed voluntarily by Steven Ward of Biggar. The Roman graphics are by Alan Braby. The Roman fort plan and Conie stone image are copyright by kind permission of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Lady Elizabeth Benson formally opened the site in 2005.

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