



OLD BIGGAR, KIRK.



John Dickson Del.

CADGER'S BRIG,  
BIGGAR.  
1862.

Paolo Priolo Sculp. of Eldin.



BOGHALL CASTLE

## Biggar Town

### – Urban Archaeological Project and brief history

by Tam Ward. 2018.

**Biggar Town - Urban Archaeological Project and brief history**  
**Tam Ward                      2018**

**Abstract**

*A few excavation trenches around Biggar produced little in terms of archaeological interest earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the results are however presented here to highlight the areas investigated and consideration is given to the townscape in terms of antiquity.*

**Introduction**

A Project to investigate the townscape of Biggar was initiated in 1999 by Biggar Archaeology Group (BAG). The intent was to test pit at available locations within the town boundary to establish the nature of any archaeological deposits which may have existed.

The town of Biggar is surrounded by ancient archaeological sites dating back to the Late Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Early and Late Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, and Roman and later periods (various reports see [www.biggararchaeology.org.uk](http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk)). The Roman road from the south almost certainly passed somewhere through the town (RCAHMS 1978). Artefacts from all these periods have been found out with the town, which also has a history dating back to the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century.

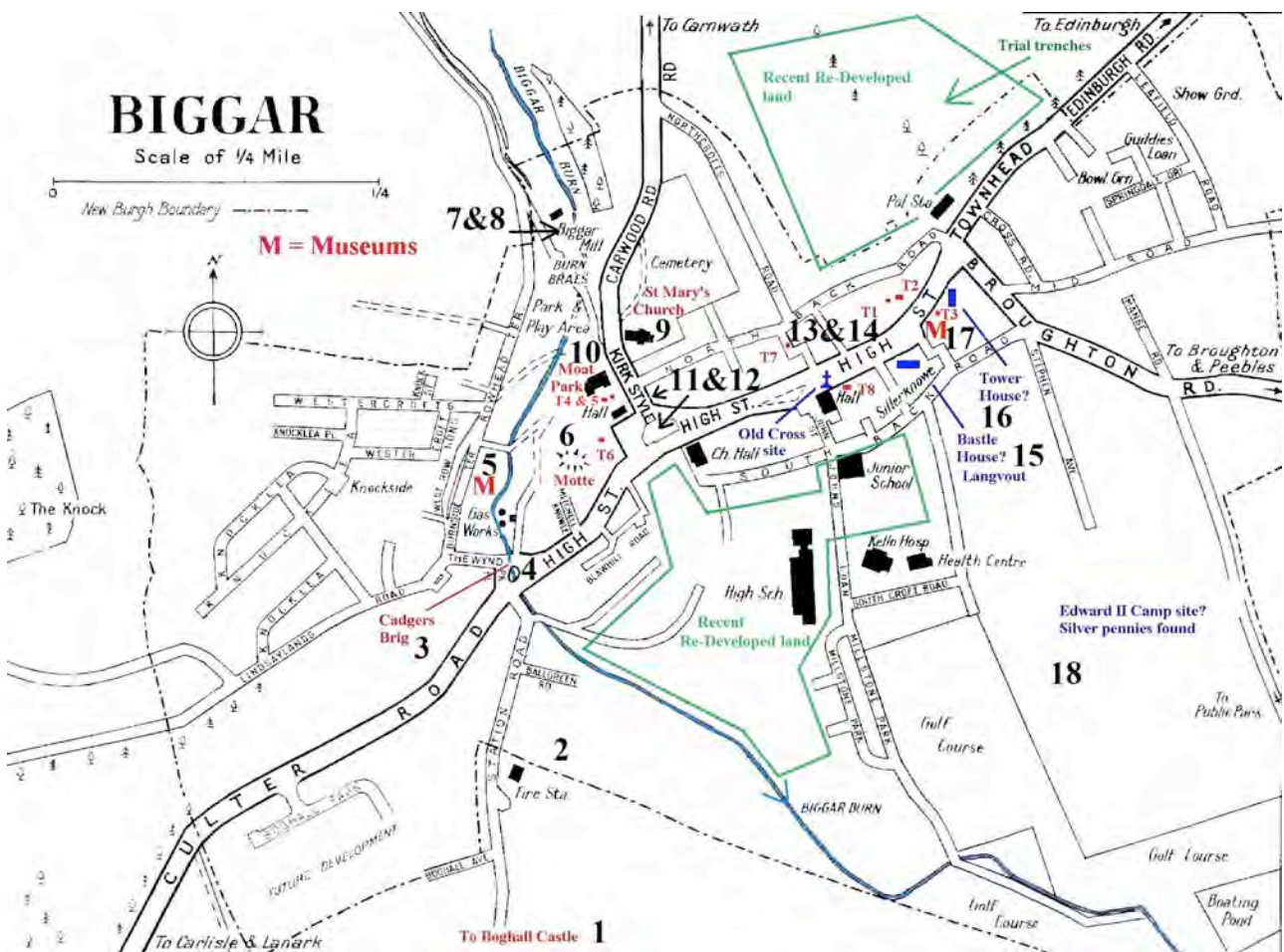
Biggar appears on historical record in 1164 with mention of Robert, who was the first parson of Biggar (Irving & Murray 1864). Stone fragments of a 12th century church are preserved in the existing church which dates to 1545-7. The town has a massive motte which probably held the timber castellated caput of Baldwin De Bigre, the first Sheriff of Lanark who is on record from 1170. The plan of Biggar still retains the classic early medieval layout with the nucleus of church, castle mound and Main Street. Later medieval land boundaries are traceable in the closes and pends, which lead off the broad market street, itself originally much wider, to the back lands of crofts and rigs.

The surviving architecture, apart from the church and motte is primarily 19th and 20th centuries in date with only a few buildings dating to the late 18th C. Nearly the entire street frontage in Biggar dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> C, blocking off the earlier medieval layout and foreshortening the earlier and much broader market street. There is evidence that the corner of a building at Townhead dates to the 16th C and may be part of a tower house. The surviving fragments of Boghall Castle date to the 16th and 17th centuries and these lie just to the south of the town, certainly there was a 15<sup>th</sup> century tower on the site. The 17th C merkat cross was dismantled from a prominent knoll (now removed) on the main street in the 19th century; fragments of the cross are built into the south gable of the prominent Corn Exchange building, built in 1864 on the main street. The War Memorial at the foot of the town takes part of its design from the old market cross. Beside the War memorial is the Cadgers Brig, reputed, but dismissed here, as having been crossed by William Wallace prior to the equally mythical 'Battle of Biggar' (more below).

Even though the town has such an ancient history, very little material evidence of that has ever been recorded. A watching brief by the writer for several decades or

so of most disturbances in the town, for example the installation and repair of services has revealed nothing of ancient structures or artefacts. This Project attempted to address the apparent dearth of ancient material cultural evidence from the town of Biggar, and add some additional information to the history and development of the settlement.

Test pits (T1-7) (Fig's 1-3, Pl's 1-6) were opened at various locations within the town depending on access and suitability. The BAG also used the Project as an opportunity for training in field archaeology, research and post excavation studies. The archaeological investigations revealed hardly any significant new information, although the project as originally intended was never completed.



**Fig 1 showing principal locations and trenches.**

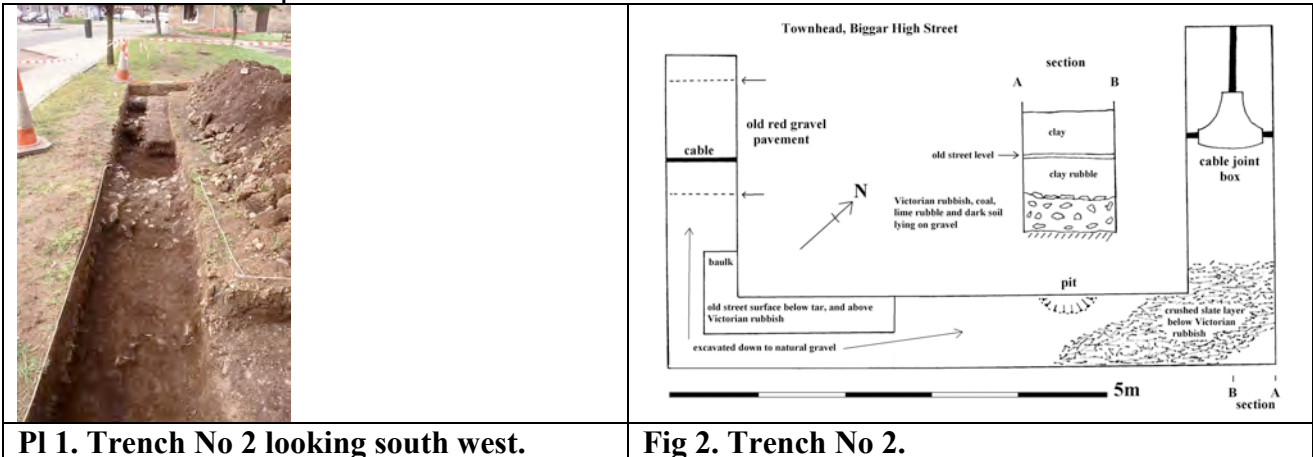
**Excavation results by BAG**

**TOWNHEAD, Biggar High Street**

In 1999 the opportunity was taken to investigate the areas of gardens at Townhead in advance of development. Three trenches were opened; Trenches 1 & 2 on the north side of the street in the garden area adjacent the Townhead Cafe and Trench 3 on the south side of the street and near the southern edge of the gardens area there. The selection of the trench locations was arbitrary excepting for keeping clear of tree root systems as far as was possible.

### Trench No 1. Pl 1 and Fig 2.

This trench, immediately on the east side of the Townhead Cafe was cut into the lawn and measured 1.5m by 1m. Below the turf layer there was a deposit of Victorian material comprised of broken crockery, glass, clay pipe stems and some poorly preserved bone. This layer was up to 0.3m deep, it lay directly on the natural till which had natural weathered broken rock in it. On the till surface lay artefacts which date to the 17th / 18th century; these were green glaze sherds, window glass and Staffordshire ware pottery, some of the clay pipe stems may also date to this period.



### Trench No 2. NT 0437 3790

This trench was cut through an area which had been disturbed the previous year during the Main Street re-development project. The shape and size of the trench was chosen to show as much stratigraphy as possible, this proved to be complex.

The trench measured 7m long by 0.8m wide, running in line with the modern pavement being aligned NE / SW. Two branches to the NW were opened at each end and at right angles to the main trench. The southern branch measured 2.8m long by 0.8m wide and the northern branch measured 3m long by 1m wide.

Three partially excavated baulks were left in situ; the rest of the trench area was excavated to the natural surface which was till at the southern end and which gave way to clean sharp sand at the northern end of the trench. The natural surface at the southern end was 0.5m - 0.6m below the top of the modern clay which was dumped over the area in 1998, at the northern end the natural was 0.7m showing an original slight incline in that direction. An electric cable and joint box were shown to have been placed in a trench which cut through the various deposits and into the natural.

The entire upper area of Trench 2 had been disturbed in 1998 during the street development when a pavement and part of the tarmac road way was removed. The ground was then backfilled by clay to a depth of about 0.25m. When the clay was removed the line of the pavement was located by a layer of crushed red stone chips upon which the paving slabs had been laid. Immediately on the street side of this was a level trampled surface of small stones and upon which the street tar had been laid, this surface is assumed to have been the street level pre-dating the tar surface.

At the southern corner of the trench a layer of unconsolidated cobbles lay beneath the old street level, part of these were left in situ as a baulk. Overlaying the angular stone layer, was a deposit of clayey rubble which itself lay upon a layer of broken glass which consisted for the larger part of circa 1900 beer bottle sherds, bases and necks were diagnostic of their age. The angular stone layer covered most of the long side of the trench and extended around the northern corner, it was composed broken andesite, a stone type which was quarried locally and used for much of the construction of Biggar town buildings. Beneath the angular stone and spreading over most of the trench including the southern half, was a layer of dark soil which contained coal, ash, sub angular and rounded stones up to 0.25m in size, lumps of burnt limestone up to 0.25m in size and much broken crockery and glass which dates to the 19th century. This latter material also filled a 0.2m deep pit which was cut into the natural boulder clay. The Victorian layer lay directly onto the natural surface over the entire trench, however, at the northern end of the main trench there was a layer of crushed and shattered slate. None of this slate had nail holes or were finished roofing slates and the material is assumed to be the product of making roof slates, either on the site or perhaps just dumped there. A small representative sample of the 19th and 20th century material was retained; the rest was re-deposited before backfilling the trench.

Only at the NW area of the trench were pieces of medieval, or rather more likely 17th - 18th century green glazed sherds found, along with other 18th century ceramics, bottle glass, window glass, a four-hole weaving tablet and a whetstone. Although these items were basal in the stratigraphy, they were to some extent mixed with the Victorian layer.

On the western side of the long arm of the trench the layer of clayey rubble was seen to fill a dip in the earlier ground profile, suggesting a hollow area had been infilled.

Only a small representative section at A-B was drawn to show the profile of the various deposits which varied in depth from place to place.

#### **Interpretation of the evidence.**

The original ground surface was up to 0.7m below the present street level. Over this surface the earlier objects had lain, and they became mixed with the initial dumping episode of household rubbish and building material sometime in the 19th century. It is not possible to say whether the pit was cut before or after the rubbish accumulated. Within this rubbish a quantity of limestone chunks was also discarded, the reason for this is unknown but it is likely to have been associated with the preparation of mortar.

A layer of angular andesite stone was then laid down, this stone is almost certainly the discarded building waste from some nearby house or wall.

Over this was lain a deposit of gravel and on the north branch of the trench a layer of circa 1900 AD broken bottles lay immediately below the gravel. Some of the till was used to fill a hollow on the ground and level it off to some extent. The

till may have come from the foundations of the nearby Red House which is known to have been built around this time.

A layer of small cobbles and stone was spread over the area, presumably as a street surface; this was overlaid at some point with tar macadam. In 1998 the tar was stripped cleanly off this surface and the layer of heavy clay was laid down.

Possibly around the late 1930's the electricity cable and joint were installed in a trench.

### **Conclusion.**

The evidence indicated that a residual scatter of post medieval material lay in the excavation area. The clear picture was one of 19th - 20th century rubbish dumping and dumping of building waste on what was the Main Street. This may have been a deliberate attempt to raise and possibly level the street surface before a more formal surface was laid down. This evidence may be taken as indicative of the amount and types of material in the surrounding area, although it is still likely that archaeology of earlier periods may survive.

### **Trench No 3**

The trench is located on the south side of the street and adjacent to the access road. The trench measured 1.5m by 1.5m and was excavated to natural which was sandy clay and was 0.6m below the grass surface of the area.

It was apparent during excavation that the area had been disturbed and this was shown to be caused by the installation of a fireclay drain pipe at some unknown time and a blue plastic water main in the last decade or so. Both these pipes were aligned across the trench from N to S. The W corner of the trench was the only area undisturbed by the pipe trenches.

The finds included some 18th century bottle and window glass and a mix of Victorian rubbish as well as 20th century items. Two Victorian coins; a penny dated 1862 and a half penny dated 1902 were also found. The finds were totally mixed due to the installation of the pipes and the backfilling of their trenches.

### **Overall results**

The project has shown that a residual scatter of post medieval material is strewn around the general area and over which much 19th and early 20th century rubbish has been discarded. The present levels have been raised between 0.3m to 0.7m and which may be true for the entire area of Townhead.

Only Trench No 2 was planned and the selective finds retained at Biggar Museum are given in Appendix I.

**Excavations at Moat Park Heritage Centre and Moat Park former manse.**

The opportunity to carry out further work during the foot and mouth crisis in 2001 was taken within the Moat Park Heritage Centre and former manse grounds. The former Moat Park church was built in 1865 with a later extension at the rear. The site takes its name from the nearby 12th century motte which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Prior to the building of the church and manse the area was used as a market garden and the excavations showed that the top soil had been extensively worked and all stones removed in the process. On the area of grass to the south of the building several semi mature lime trees were removed around 1980. The root balls were pulled out and since then depressions in the grass were evident, the repair of these was undertaken and at the same time a trench was opened at one of them to determine the nature of any archaeological deposits that may have survived.

Work during the renovation of the former church into the Heritage Centre (now closed) showed that the entire footprint of the building had been cleared down to the till which is formed of layers of sand and gravel as indeed is the nearby motte, all being the product of glacial melt water deposits.

#### **Trench No 4. PI's 2-4**

The trench measured 3.1m in an E/W direction by 1.5m N/S. The surface of the ground sloped up to the N by 0.1m. The trench was aligned to be parallel with and 3m from the boundary wall with the Municipal Hall and was placed at the base of the slope, being aligned on the long axis on the level alignment. The W side of the trench was 7m from the corner of the boundary wall.

The total excavation depth of the trench was 0.6m along the southern long side and 0.7 on the northern long side but only 0.6m in the centre where the depression caused by the removal of the tree was evident.

The soil profile of the entire trench was consistent with only two layers lying above the natural which is an orange coloured gritty / sand deposit and is of fluvio glacial deposition. Throughout the entire depth of the trench and penetrating the natural were living rootlets from nearby shrubs, decayed roots and root cavities derived from the former tree on the site, and worm activity. The natural surface was fairly level excepting for some slight depressions in the NE corner of the trench; these are judged to be of natural origin. Only an occasional stone of fist size was included, and the remainder of stones were small pebbles. Pebbles of unworked radiolarian chert were noted throughout the trench, most likely naturally occurring in the drift geology.

The upper layer consisted of the turf and black humic soil to an overall 0.3m depth, including the area of the north side of the trench where the ground had depressed. This layer produced a variety of modern rubbish, 19th century crockery and glass sherds. Also present were green glazed sherds and clay pipe stems of indeterminate date.

The remainder of the trench depth consisted of lighter brown soil between 0.3m and 0.4m deep. This layer contained none of the material found in the black soil above but did produce green glaze sherds of pottery and a few unglazed examples. A single sherd of salt glaze, possibly from a Bellarmine was found and

some further clay pipe stems. The lower 0.15 depth of this soil produced further green glazed sherds but a higher proportion of unglazed pottery. A small piece of folded lead from this depth may be a lead seal; it has no decoration or legend. Finally, lying on the interface with the soil and the natural was a flint scraper. Numerous tiny fragments of coal permeated the entire soil profile and even into the till.

**Summary**

The levels of the finds demonstrated text book archaeology with the age of the finds grading to older as the depth increased. The cut off of relatively modern material was distinct and restricted to the humic top soil while the pottery from below appears to have graded in age downwards, this opinion will have to be validated by expert analyses of the sherds. The quantity and small size of the medieval sherds may be taken as indicative of the amount of pottery lying in the immediate area, however it offers no good clues as to the previous land use which may have taken place there and may be described as background evidence of the medieval settlement in Biggar. The discovery of a single flint tool in what was probably a primary deposition is the first excavated pre-historic tool to be found in Biggar. (A stone axe, and a flint barb and tang arrow-head (PI 57), have been found in separate but nearby gardens in Westercrofts).



**PI 2. Young archaeologists in T 4.**



**PI 3. Trench No 4 completed.**

**Trench No 5. PI 4**

This trench which measured 1m square by 0.65m deep lay directly in front and on the north side of the Moat Park pavilion. The location was chosen because the ground required to be repaired, a depression in the ground caused by a tree boll being removed some time ago needed to be levelled off.

Several small green glazed and unglazed sherds were found scattered throughout the dark humic soil which was homogenous to the entire trench. An old gas pipe and a water main were encountered in the otherwise featureless trench.





**Pl 4. Showing T 5.**



**Pl 5. Showing T 6.**

#### **Trench No 6. Pl 5**

This trench was opened within the Manse grounds and in an area where trees were recently felled. The area was to be developed into the existing gardens.

The trench aligned NW/SE, measured in area 3m by 1.2m and was 1.2m deep at its southern end and 1.45m at the northern end. The area where the trench was cut lay on a gentle slope rising to the NW.

The upper layer (001) measuring from 0.2m to 0.4m consisted of a very dark, almost black humic soil, within which were a layer of weed roots and much modern litter. Below this, but only at the northern half of the trench was a layer (002) of lime rubble, slate and angular stones. This was most evident on each of the sides of the NW corner of the trench, on the eastern side of the trench, the deposit gave way to only chunks of andesite rock, some pebbles and gravel intermixed. The next layer down (003) was a dark brown sandy soil with occasional charcoal flecks, hardly any stone existed within this soil, it was homogenous in colour and texture for its entire volume. The depth of 003 varied between 0.7m and 0.85m. 003 interfaced with another soil horizon (004), this was darker in colour due to the existence of organic material which appeared to be the remains of decayed wood, possibly tree root systems, and there was an equal lack of stones within this soil. 004 lay directly onto the natural orange sandy gravel which is fluvio glacial in origin and can be found interbedded with fine sand, in most areas of Biggar. Cut into the gravel was a channel (006) which had a steep face on its southern side and a shallow angle rising on the northern side. The maximum depth of the cut into the assumed gravel horizon was 0.2m. The cut was aligned NE/SW

for the short distance it was visible, only the western half of the trench was excavated to natural.

Contexts 001 - 004 were permeated with tree roots up to 0.1m in thickness (not shown in section) and which radiated over the trench at all levels. The few finds which were retrieved came from the upper half of 003, Victorian crockery was found within the rubble layer and the upper level of 003, this and more modern material from nearer the surface was not gathered.

### **Conclusion**

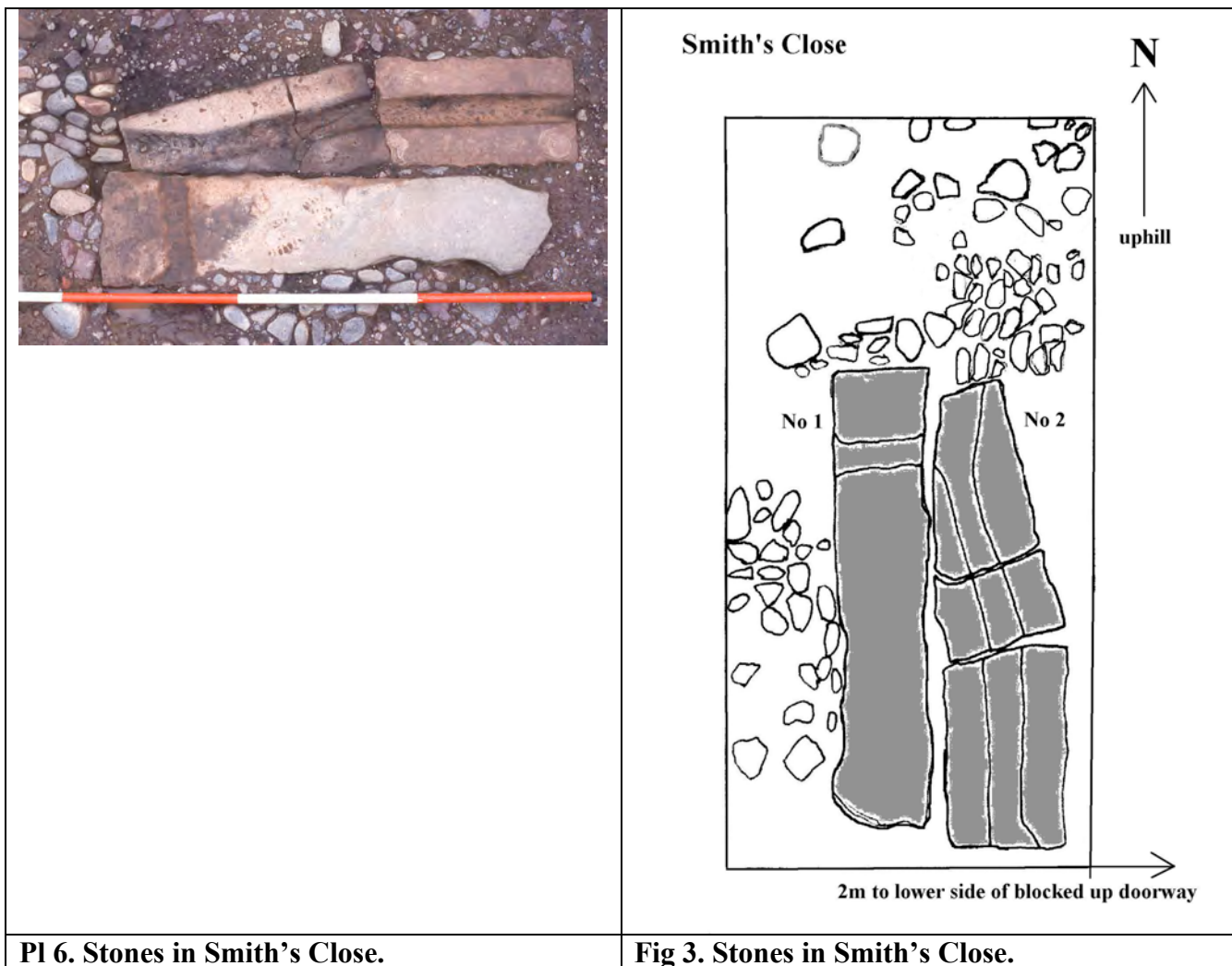
001 is a very organic soil due to the large quantity of annual leaf deposition from the surrounding trees. 002 is interpreted as a dump of building rubble of late 19th century date. 003 is interpreted as a cultivated soil, it is known that the area was an early 19th century market garden, the absence of stone within the soil suggest deliberate removal and the depth of the soil is unusually deep, most plough soil horizons in the district seldom reach 0.3m in depth. 004 may contain evidence of timber work, rather than just decayed roots, given that the cut 006 is clearly not the product of natural erosion. It may be that 006 is a palisade trench perhaps dating to the time of the nearby motte, however, no other archaeological evidence was found to support such an assumption.

### **Trench No 7. Pl 6 & Fig 3. Smith's Close NT 0421 3788**

This trench lies within the pend known as Smiths Close or James Square on the north side of the High Street. Located centrally on the sloping pend, the ground is in an area known to the writer since childhood and where a flat stone was always visible on the un surfaced road. This stone (No 1) which was only ever partially visible, turned out to be a long flat slab of greywacke measuring 1.3m long by 0.25m wide, it was smoothed and flat resulting in foot traffic and it lay on the gentle slope of the close, lying directly over natural till which is composed of sand and gravel. At its northern end a channel (circa 100mm wide by 60mm deep) had been cut across it. Lying adjacent and on the east side was another long stone (No 2) (1.2m by 0.3m) and which was also partially visible, this time of a cream coloured sandstone and which had a similar channel but cut neatly along its central axis, however the stone was broken in three parts which originally conjoined. Although slightly thicker than the greywacke slab, it was also laid on the slope and on the natural till surface.

The remainder of the exposed area consisted of trampled stones lying on the till, and of which most of the pend had consisted before it was finally covered in the present layer of tar macadam.

The two long stones had been deliberately laid together to form a surface on the sloping close, the purpose of this is unclear. They may have been part of a larger area covered by similar stones; however, the grooved stones bear some resemblance to courtyard stones found in ecclesiastical complexes and even Roman forts. An old (unfounded) tradition described the pend as 'The Canon Gate', to be used as a route from the High Street to St Mary's church. Biggar has long been suspected as being the possible site of a Roman Fort, again on unfounded evidence, however these stones may represent some aspect of one of the two periods.



**Trench No 8                      Biggar High Street    NT 0429 3782**

Within the front garden of the cottage on the east side of the Corn Exchange several areas were opened as training for the Biggar Young Archaeologists Club. Unfortunately, none were completed however it was established that the ground below the sloping lawn had been made up with a quantity of Victorian rubble and rubbish to a depth of around 0.5m, nothing below that was investigated. The area is potentially important as it was the incline from the old street frontage which led up to the Market Cross, situated on a knoll which was removed when the cross shaft broke in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The area where the market cross stood and where the annual Biggar Hogmanay Bonfire takes place was heavily excavated to install gas mains in the 1990's, the trenches were examined by the writer, but nothing of note was observed.

**Excavations by others**

Since planning legislation was enacted to cater for archaeology on development sites, several small-scale excavations have been undertaken professionally in various parts of the town. Since no significant finds have been made by these,

reference should be made to Discovery & Excavation in Scotland for details. Furthermore, in advance of a larger scale housing development to the north of the town, extensive trenching of fields was undertaken (PI 7), no important findings are recorded there.



**PI 7. Large scale exploratory work beside Edinburgh Road, Biggar.**

### **Acknowledgements**

The Biggar Archaeology Group is grateful to the following for their help in this project;

South Lanarkshire Council Community Resources staff for permission to carry out the work on the High Street and for co-operation and advice.

Mr Jimmy Porter for allowing work in his front garden beside Corn Exchange.

Rev C McKenzie for allowing work within the manse grounds.

### **HISTORICAL BIGGAR**

A brief guide and historical and pictorial synopsis is given of the principal features of interest in Biggar, and which may be used as a walking guide to the town.

The numbers of locations are given merely as a convenient order in which to walk a suggested route, beginning at Boghall Castle.

Biggar Museum is unsurpassed as a small-town museum in Scotland, it contains objects and displays dating back over 14,000 years in human terms, and interprets the local geology. It has records and archives including thousands of

photographs past and present of the town, these are available on request at the museum.



**PI 8.** The original street frontage has been obscured by early 19<sup>th</sup> C development which included prestigious buildings such as banks & post office, shops and upmarket houses were also made to service the still wide street upon which open market and fair days were held into the 20<sup>th</sup> C. The older buildings are still traceable behind the street frontage. Note the



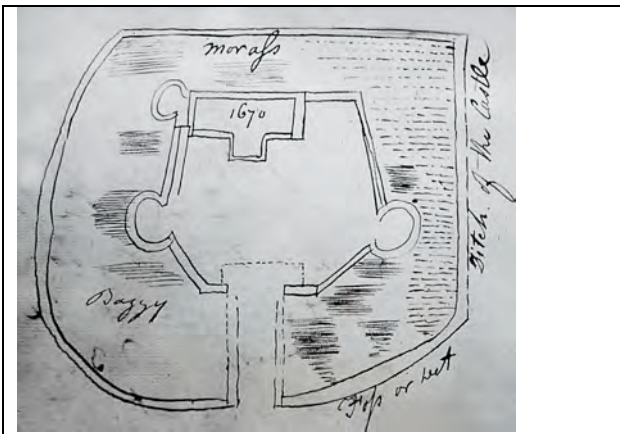
**PI 9. Showing the medieval layout of the town.**

**1. Boghall Castle. Fig's 4-5, PI's 10-15**

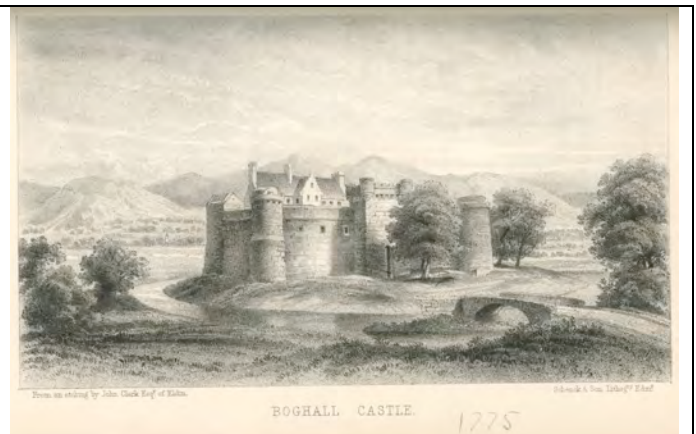
At the foot of the town follow the Station Road to just outside the built-up area to Boghall Farm (5 minutes). Immediately past the farm an access road leads to the forlorn remains of the once important Boghall Castle; ancestral home of the Fleming family, who featured in much of Scotland's history, especially from the time of Robert The Bruce and the Stewart dynasty. Legend tells us that Lord Fleming brought the Comyn's severed head out of Greyfriars church in Dumfries after Bruce had stabbed him, and declared "Let the Deed Shaw" (let the deed show) which afterwards became the motto of the family and is retained as such

for the town of Biggar. The Flemings married into the Stewart Royalty and it is recorded that James V and Mary Queen of Scots stayed at Boghall. The royal Mary's cousin; Mary Fleming, was one of the famous four Mary's who grew up with the Princess and continued to serve her as both Queen of France and Scotland. The fragments of the castle are two flanking towers which date to the 16<sup>th</sup> C and the stair tower of a house which dated to 1670. Originally a 15<sup>th</sup> C tower stood in the centre of the complex. The castle was attacked by the regent Moray in the 16<sup>th</sup> C and later by Cromwell's troops in the 17<sup>th</sup> C. However, it's impressive remains succumbed not to military action, but to quarry it for stone to build town walls and - dog kennels!

From the illustrations, gun holes will be seen which protected the castle from attack. Amazingly a 'hagbut' gun was found on the site in the 19<sup>th</sup> C and it proves to be one of if not actually the oldest known gun in Scotland. The gun can be seen in the Museum along with a fine model of the castle as it may have appeared when complete.



**Fig 4. Old plan of Boghall Castle.**



**Fig 5. Boghall Castle as it once was.**



**Pl's 10-12.** Details of the Boghall Gun - the oldest known gun in Scotland. A hagbut, it would have been mounted on a beam using the hook and fired through a gun port in the castle wall. It was probably made in France.



**Pl 13. Boghall tower after preservation 1912. Note the gun ports.**



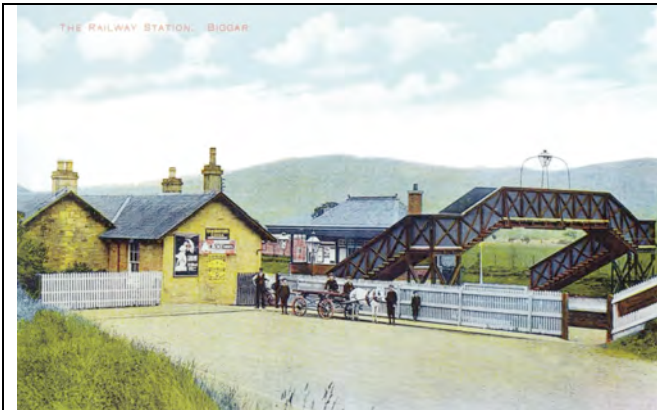
**Pl 14. The Boghall gun. A 15<sup>th</sup> C hagbut.**



**Pl 15. Model in Biggar Museum made by volunteers. How the castle may once have looked.**

## 2. Biggar Station. Pl's 16-17

Biggar station was built in 1860 as a branch line from the mainline Caledonian Railway at Symington, to Broughton and later extended to Peebles. Nearly the entire country was serviced by local railways and allowed city business men to commute daily to their factories and return to the countryside and their fine mansions. Some of these impressive buildings still survive in the district, while many have been demolished. The station and line were closed in the infamous 'Beeching cuts' in the 1960's, however, much survives including the engine shed, signal box and station buildings.



Pl 16. Biggar Station in bygone days. Old postcard.

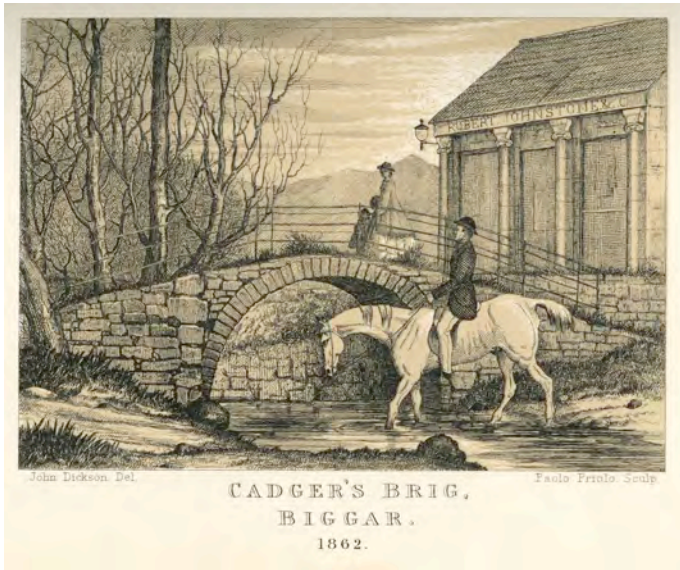


Pl 17. Biggar Station signal box.

## 3. Cadgers Brig. Fig 6 & Pl 18

Properly described as a pack horse bridge, it lies beside the ancient ford leading out of the town en route for Lanark. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> C a new road and bridge were built to carry wheeled traffic south and west of the town towards the villages of Coulter and Symington respectively. A cadger was an itinerant seller of goods who often travelled with a packhorse to carry his wares. The footbridge has however been mythically associated with William Wallace when he allegedly crossed it disguised as such a person to spy on Edwards I's camp, prior to the equally spurious 'Battle of Biggar', where Wallace was supposed to rout a superior English army. Firstly, the event never took place, but it is most likely confused with the Battle of Roslin in 1303, where the Scots *did* beat a contingent of the English army, and before which the Scots from the south west of Scotland mustered at Biggar for the battle. Secondly the bridge most likely dates to no earlier than the 17<sup>th</sup> C or the 18<sup>th</sup> C.





**Fig 6.** The Cadgers Brig seen with the adjacent ford in action. The rather grand shop in the background shows what small towns have lost in character due to ‘improvements’, many of which can be described as acts of official vandalism. Note the gas lamp on the building. The present road bridge was operational at this time meaning the ford need only be used to give a horse a



**Pl 18.** Cadgers Brig and old ford leading to the old Lanark Road. William Wallace NEVER used this bridge.

**4. The War Memorial. Pl's 19-20**

The graceful War Memorial takes its design from the old market cross which once stood further up the main street of the town (see below). Like most towns and villages in Britain, communities remember their fallen heroes of WWI, WWII and later conflicts by such memorials, with the names of individuals who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. A few Commonwealth graves can be seen in

the town cemetery, but most lie in far off places where they fell. The ground on both sides of the burn here was made up with material which made up the 'Cross Knowe' [knoll] (below) and it is possible that parts of the original market cross are buried in the vicinity.



**Pl 19. War Memorial.**



**Pl 20. War Memorial, based on the cross, but very much in the 'Art Deco Style' of the period.**

**5. Biggar Town Gasworks. Pl 21**

The old town gasworks is signposted from the main street, follow the lane past the Cross Keys Hotel. Built in 1839, it is the only surviving town gas works left in Scotland and is open to the public as a museum where the operation and history is explained. Now bereft only of its chimney, the adjacent cottage was the managers house. The original retorts where the gas was cooked out of coal remain and were operational up to 1975 when North Sea Gas was piped into the town.



**Pl 21. Biggar town gasworks, the only example left in Scotland - open to the public.**

**6. The Motte. Pl 22**

Continue in the public park and look up to the right. The steep sided hill is one aspect of the ancient Motte upon which would have stood a massive timber castle dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> C, it is the oldest known site in the town. This was the caput of 'Baldwin the Fleming' who operated under the patronage of Malcolm IV (1153-1165) and was made the first Sherriff of Lanarkshire, which, at that time, extended into the area of Glasgow city. It is uncertain if this Baldwin (a common Flemish name) is the originator of the later 'Flemings of Biggar', but it is possible. The massive motte is actually a natural mound of sand and gravels left by the last Ice Age, and like the royal (motte) castles of Lanark and Peebles, they were modified to build the first (timber) castles in Scotland. Despite searches, no trace of a bailey, or secondary defensive enclosure has been found, but it may have been on the ground where the nearby former Moat Park Church and manse still stands. No archaeology has been done on the motte.



**Pl 22. Biggar Motte as seen from Burn Braes park.**



**Pl 23. Biggar Corn Mill, currently being converted to housing.**

**7. The Corn Mill. Pl 23**

The swing park area is the site of the old bleaching fields for the towns women after washing their linen in the burn. Further up the burn at the other end of the

park is the 19<sup>th</sup> C corn mill, last used as such in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> C and currently being converted into a house.

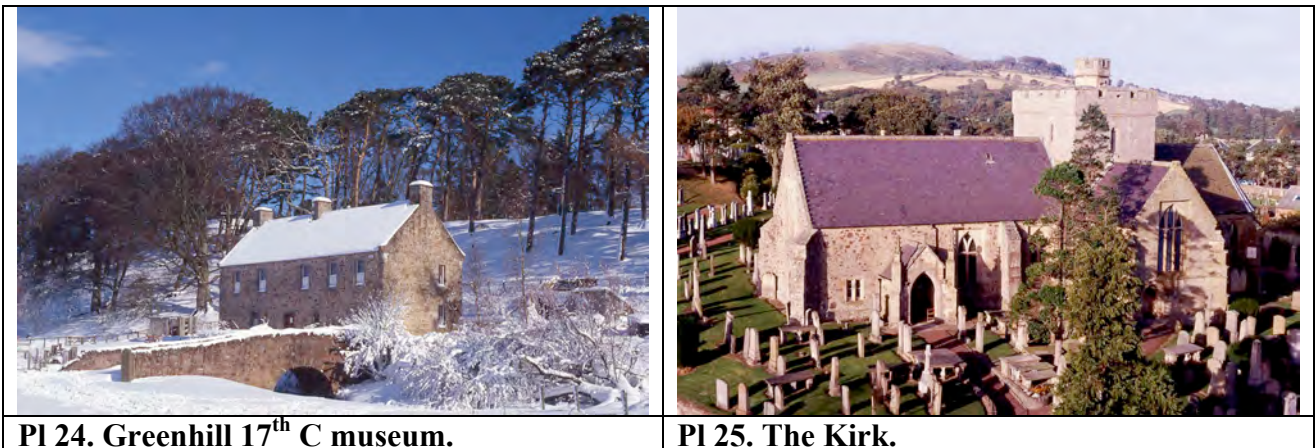
**8. Greenhill Farmhouse and Bridge. Pl 24**

On the other side of the burn is Greenhill Farmhouse Museum, a ground-breaking project by Biggar Museums which removed a historic building from nearby Tinto Hill, and re-erected it here as a museum to tell of the turbulent 17<sup>th</sup> C; Covenanting history of the area, of which the building had associations. The bridge over the burn was also built by the museum in traditional style, making it the second pack horse bridge in Biggar, albeit not an original one. Both buildings were Community Projects with young trainees gaining work experience.

**9. Biggar Kirk. Fig's 7-8 & Pl's 25-32**

By far and away, the star of all Biggar architecture is the old kirk, proudly overlooking the town and formerly styled St Mary's Church, but before that dedicated to St Nicholas. The cruciform shaped church is unique as being the last Pre-Reformation church to be built in Scotland (1545-1547). Certainly, an earlier stone church stood there as the site is first recorded in 1164 when mention is made of one 'Robert the parson of Bigir'.

The church has an amazing story behind it, both in historical and architectural aspects, and for a full account see 'Biggar St Mary's – A Medieval College Kirk' By the then minister; Rev Rutherford. (A copy may be consulted in Biggar Museum).



Amazingly, the foundation of the existing building has its roots in a murder! John Fleming was hunting near Broughton in 1524 when he was accosted by his neighbouring enemies – the Tweedies. John was killed, and his son Malcolm taken prisoner, fairly typical behaviour for the period. The outshot of it all was that John Tweedie was ordered to pay £10 Scots annually for a chantry and chaplains at Biggar to pray and sing mass for the deceased, a good deal for a murderer if ever there was one. Later around 1540, Malcolm Fleming decided to build a Collegiate Church, perhaps in defiance of the looming Reformation. The charter of foundation detailing the operation of the new church with its office bearers and ceremonies was ready by 1545 and work began on the building which we see today. It was all about getting the Fleming family members an easier passage through purgatory!

Much has been written about the church and its interesting architectural features, however, certain significant aspects of the building have *never been considered*; the

attractive Norman style south door has been reinforced on the *inside* by a draw bar, a characteristic feature seen on castles and tower houses of the period, and later defensive bastle houses (the latter of which Upper Clydesdale and perhaps Biggar has examples). Such a feature is designed to keep people *out* of a building, hardly appropriate for a church? However, the most conspicuous aspect of non-church architecture is seen on the battlemented walls of the cross tower. Two embrasures, more often seen on castle parapets, are on each of the four walls, furthermore, on each wall the embrasures flank typical splayed gun ports of 16<sup>th</sup> C design, like those which survive at Boghall Castle! Here then is a church built for defence! It would hardly be appropriate merely to describe such features as ornamentation, they can only have been included as a measure to hold the building against unwelcome attention.

A suggested reason for this is the fact that the builder; Malcolm Fleming was a devout Catholic and obviously had faith that the impending Reformation may not succeed. The situation was however sealed at the Battle of Pinkie (1547) where Fleming and some of his retainers died fighting off the last vestiges of the 'Rough Wooing' by Henry VIII, although Henry had recently died. The church was probably incomplete at that time and Malcolm Flemings first official 'duty' was to be buried in his own church, complying with the terms of his will which he drew up before the battle. He must have considered that his new church may have to be literally defended against the adherents of the new faith; Protestantism.

The church is well worth a visit, for its beautiful stain glass windows, a rare 'cutty stool' dating to 1694 (for offenders to sit upon and be publicly humiliated) and other aspects. It also has a diverse collection of church communion tokens.



**Pl 26. The battlemented tower, and later bell tower (1870-71) built in similar style.**



**Pl 27. Detail of gun port on the wall heads.**



**Fig 7. The church in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> C. Note the old open-air belfry, later replaced by a small tower (see above).**



**Pl 28. South Norman style door with the joughs chain on the left.**



**Fig 8. Biggar Kirk cutty stool of repentance. Many a poor soul would have been publicly humiliated while sitting on it.**



**Pl 29. The remains of the joughs, note how close the offender's head would be against the wall by the collar fragments.**



**Pl 30. The Pre-Reformation tombstone in the Kirk porch. Note the number '3' when it was used as a door lintel.**



**Pl 31. Adam and Eve tombstone.**



**Pl 32. Did ancient Biggar people look like this?**

Among some of the many interesting features of the Kirk and cemetery are quaint tombstones dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> C. However, one stone had been re-used as a house door lintel at No 3 Howieson Square; this rare Pre-Reformation stone was thankfully returned to the church. The following description is by Rev Rutherford, former minister:

“At the bottom there is an incised square representing the Mount of the Crucifixion. From this rise two long narrow incised lines forming the shaft of the Cross and symbolising man’s redemption through the Christ of Calvary. The lines continue upwards towards the head of the stone where they end in four incised circles symbolising the resurrection into everlasting life. The circles with their never-ending line represent God the eternal Father above, without beginning and without end. The design in fact is the story of man’s salvation through Our Lord”.

#### 10. Moat Park & Gillespie Churches. Pl’s 33-34

The Moat Park was one of the two principal secession churches which disestablished themselves from the main church; the other was the Gillespie church in the town centre. The Moat Park congregation moved from their original church nearby to this building; built in 1864 to the design of Parker Kinnaird, the firm of architects whom Charles Rennie McIntosh worked for. After the congregation finally returned to the mother church in 1975 the building was acquired by Biggar Museum Trust and converted to a Heritage Centre. It is currently being converted again, this time into flats.





<b>PI 33. Moat Park United Presbyterian Church; Moat Park Heritage Centre; Moat Park Flats?</b>	<b>PI 34. Former Gillespie Church, now a visitor and community centre.</b>
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**11. Old School House. PI 35**

This building is one of the oldest houses in Biggar and was used as a parish school at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> C, when a new school, now the town hall was built to replace it.

**12. Old School and Smiddy. PI 36**

Now known as the Municipal Hall, the building replaced the older building nearby to become the new parish school. Later it became the home of Biggar Town Council and the main hall functioned for all sorts of social events as it still does today. The Council had a small but impressive collection of objects on display, many with important local history connections. Sadly, upon Regionalisation, in 1973 when the Council was replaced by Clydesdale District Council, much of the collection was dispersed. Fortunately, and thanks to the last Provost of Biggar; Brian Lambie, who also started the Biggar Museums, some very important items of local interest were retained in the town, being handed over to the newly established Museum Trust. Many of these objects are on display in the new Museum.

The village green is now a car parking area in front of the hall, and here is a memorial to James Cuthbertson (PI 41), a local engineer and inventor, it is in the shape of a snow plough.

Also on the wall of the hall is another memorial; a plaque commemorating Dr John Brown (PI 42), born in Biggar and who became an eminent medical doctor and author.

Facing the old village green was the 'smiddy' or blacksmiths workshop and house.



**PI 35. The original Parish School. At Kirkstyle.**



**PI 36. The new Parish School and later town hall. With later additions at each end.**

In 1900 a new school (PI 37) was built to replace the new parish school (the Municipal Hall) and generations of Biggar and surrounding area folk were taught here. Incredibly, and despite public protest, it was demolished in 2016 to make a small car park to serve the latest primary school built nearby! (PI's 38-39). Another example of an all too often act of typical civic planning, which pays no heed to local heritage, or feeling, by those in authority, who have no sensibility to a community's history or past. In short, they have no sense. The excellent building

could have been put to a myriad of uses to benefit the community, but it was slavishly sacrificed for the benefit of bringing yet more cars into the already congested town centre.



**Pl 37. Biggar High School. Old post card. From this to -----**



**Pl 38. ---- This! A clutter of street furniture – and cars.**



**Pl 39. A pathetic gesture to a destroyed heritage site.**



**Pl 40. North back Road on left, medieval crofts in centre and High Street on right.**



**Pl 41. Cuthbertson snowplough memorial.**



**Pl 42. Dr John Brown memorial.**

**13. Main Street with pends, closes and backlands (crofts and rigs). See Fig 1 and Pl's 8, 9 & 40.**

The main street of Biggar is over a mile long, the upper half of which was the ancient High Street leading away from the motte castle in typical medieval fashion, the third main component of a medieval town was of course the church. The High Street or 'Kings Highway' was the main market place of the town and was used as such into the 20<sup>th</sup> C as old picture postcards show. Few people realise that the street was even wider before the advent of early 19<sup>th</sup> C re-developments, where sides of the street has a linear façade of buildings which now block off the old burgher plots of land, which led at right angles straight from the market street. Earlier front street cottages can still be traced on the south side behind the façade of mostly Victorian buildings there. Behind both sides of the street the property layout is in strips of land leading out to the crofts or rigs, again, a pattern seen in many medieval towns, including 'back' roads to service these areas. When the new street frontage was developed, closes and pends allowed for access between the back roads and main street, again, characteristic of medieval towns which have been subsequently developed. Two of the oldest buildings are likely to be the Crown and Elphinstone hotels, the latter being a coaching inn in the days before railways. A particularly attractive building on the lower end of the town has rolled skewputs on its steep gables, often erroneously cited as the oldest house in Biggar it probably dates a decade before or after 1800 (Pl's 43-44). Also, and often commented upon, is the low street frontage doorway, it is in fact a normal sized doorway, but the pavement level has risen to give the illusion. The adjoining house has identical rolled skewputs and taken with the massive communal chimney between them, it is likely that both buildings were built at the same time. However, the house on the left has high drip mould stones on its chimneys, indicating it originally had a thatched roof, while the other was slated.



**Pl 43. Houses on Biggar Main Street.**



**Pl 44. Typical rolled moulded skewputts dating to circa 1780 -1800.**

**14. Corn Exchange and site of former market cross, tolbooth and fountain. (Pl's 45-48)**

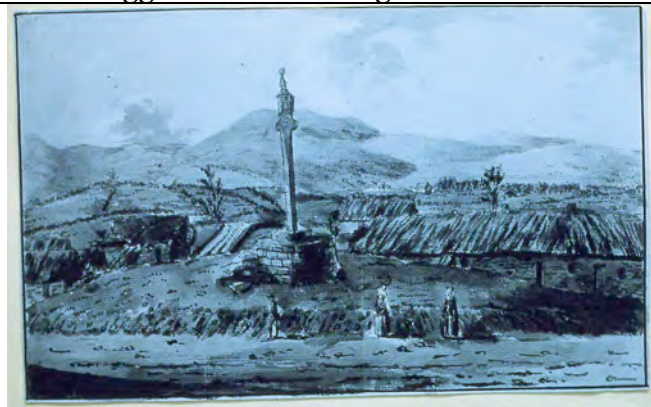
Perhaps the most imposing building on the main street is now the Corn Exchange, built in 1865 and as its name implies to sell corn and other agricultural produce. It was designed by architect David MacGibbon, who co-authored a series of volumes of castellated architecture in Scotland, a standard reference work still used today (MacGibbon & Ross 1889). The Corn Exchange replaced the old tolbooth which lay nearby and was a rat-infested building. In front lay the old market cross which stood on a prominent knoll and nearby no doubt was the tron (weighing machine), making up the principal components of a medieval market burgh. Fragments of the old cross are embedded in the south gable wall of the Corn Exchange and give the lie to the scale illustrated in the engraving of 1807, because of this artist's licence, it may be unlikely that the knoll upon which the cross stood was so large as the illustration suggests. In 1887, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, a magnificent fountain was erected on the Main Street in front of the Corn Exchange. Parts of the fountain are retained by Biggar Museum. What was, and could still have been a marvellous street attraction for Biggar was removed because the then council did not wish to maintain it, just one of many acts of official vandalism of heritage sites, and which continues to the present time.



**Pl 45. Biggar Corn Exchange.**



**Pl 46. Part of the old market cross.**



**Pl 47. Biggar Market Cross and Cross Knowe. Illustrated in 1807.**



**Pl 48. Victoria Jubilee Fountain [1887]. Formerly near the site of the Cross Knowe.**

**15. Site of a possible bastle house.**

The place name 'Langvout' is interpreted as 'long vault', and that implies a barrel-vaulted building which may have been an urban bastle house, although there is no other proof that such existed. Biggar was attacked by Border Reivers in 1600 when bastle houses were used in rural and urban landscapes as a first line protection against the outlaws.

**16. Site of a possible tower house.**

The slanted corner of walling beside the florist's shop and the thickness of the walls suggest that part of a much earlier building survives here. It may have been a town tower house of the Flemings or indeed another bastle house.

**17. Biggar & Upper Clydesdale Museum. PI's 49-50**

Completed on the site of a former garage in 2016 and opened by HRH The Princess Royal, is the Biggar and Upper Clydesdale Museum, operated by Biggar Museum Trust. The museum replaces two former buildings; Moat Park Heritage Centre and Gladstone Court Museum; the former was also opened by the Princess Royal in 1988. The new museum was professional designed and built unlike previous enterprises by the Trust, which were nearly all created by volunteers to much acclaim in the museum world. Howsoever, the present museum is made to the highest standards of both display and storage facilities, and the archaeological method of using models adopted firstly in the earlier museum has been continued, to tell of the extraordinary story of the district. This is a 'must see' museum in Scotland, what looks at first like a small shop on the street frontage, opens into an extensive 'Tardis' like space, containing extraordinary displays – don't miss it.



**PI 49. Biggar Museum.**



**PI 50. Biggar Museum.**

**18. Possible site of Edward II camp in 1310. PI 51**

Edward I possibly passed through Biggar in 1301, but later, his son Edward II certainly did, as he camped here in 1310 during one of his four main sojourns in Southern Scotland. Five small coin hoards of Edward I and II silver pennies have been found at Wandel, Thankerton (PI 52), Cross Cryne (PI 56) and Biggar Golf course, and at Logan on the Tweed. Contained in each group of coins are examples from the reign of Edward II, therefore they can only have been lost during his time. Cross Cryne (PI 51) was the route used by invading armies coming from Tweed to Clyde and it was actually declared part of the border between Scotland and England (by the English), therefore the coins from there may have been lost by soldiers en route by that pass. It is tempting to think the golf course coins may indicate where the English army was encamped in October 1310, and the other groups of coins may have been lost by soldiers on various missions throughout the territory. The coins may be seen in Biggar Museum.



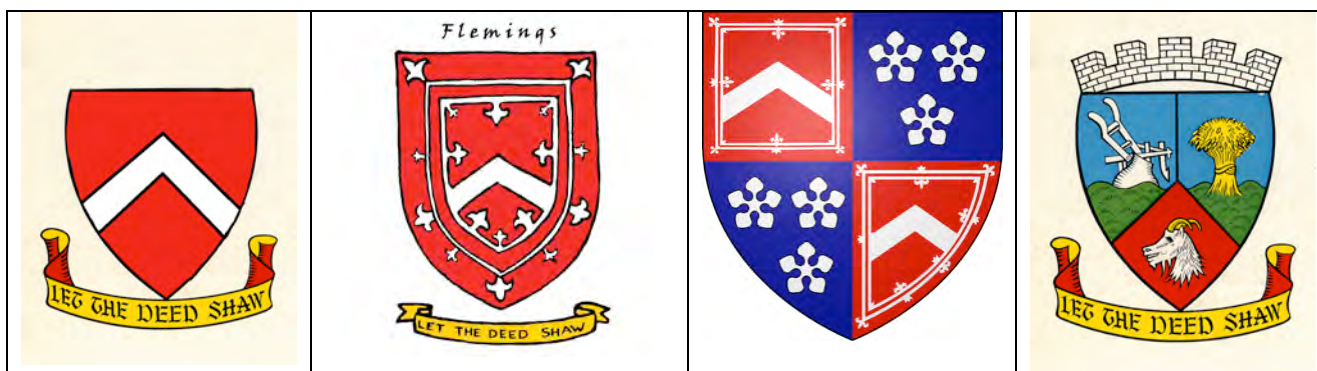
**Pl 51. Possible camp site of Edward II in 1310. A coin hoard was found here and another at Cross Cryne in the distance.**



**Pl 52. The Edward I & II silver penny coin hoard found at Thankerton. One of five in the district. In Biggar Museum.**

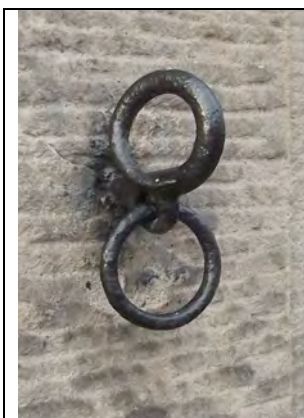
**The Flemings Heraldry. Pl 53**

In the beginning the Fleming shield was a simple white chevron against a red background with the motto 'Let the Deed Shaw'. Later it was quartered with the cinquefoils of the Fraser family of Upper Tweeddale whom they married into. Finally, the Motto was retained by Biggar Town Council for their coat of arms.



**Pl 53. The armorial legacy of the Flemings of Biggar and the town of Biggar.**

There are many other points of interest within the town, look out for date stones above doorways, the rings (Pl 54) attached to street frontage walls where horses were tied while the owners visited shops or houses, and other features (e.g. Pl 55), make sure to explore the closes leading to the back lands.



**Pl 54. One of several rings on street walls for tying up horses by their reins.**



**Pl 55. A garden gateway on South Back Road with 17<sup>th</sup> century rolled moulding. Almost certainly removed from Boghall Castle.**

### Discussion and conclusions.

The paucity of archaeological evidence within and around the town, other than Boghall Castle site and perhaps the Edward II coin hoards, is rather perplexing, and disappointing, given what is known of the past in this area and the surviving aspects of the town itself. Certainly, the opened ground has been inspected in many locations on the street frontage by the writer, with no results, nor has any archaeological investigations shown much of interest, other than negative evidence, which seems to contradict what is known from other sources.

The few chance finds in gardens (e.g. Pl 57) and around the town do not alter the pessimistic narrative in any meaningful way.



**Pl 56. Cross Cryne, Edward I & II coin hoard. In Biggar Museum.**



**Pl 57. Fine Bronze Age arrowhead found in a garden at Westercrofts. In Biggar Museum.**

The significance of the surrounding pre-historic evidence is given in numerous reports by both BAG [ [www.biggararchaeology.org.uk](http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk) ] and others and is testament to that nationally important aspect of the ancient past of the district. The Roman advance northwards into Scotland, and through the area in both the first and second centuries AD is equally acknowledged in the archaeological records, but practically no objects have been found here, although a coin of Emperor Vespasian was found in Biggar in the 19<sup>th</sup> C (now lost!). Biggar area has long been suspected as being the possible location of a Roman fort protecting north/south and east/west routes, but if it existed, it has never been found.

The town has no claim to sites or finds between the Roman period and the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> C. There is the later but still pre-reformation gravestone which is preserved in the porch of the kirk (Pl 30) (above). However, a church, or rather it's pastor is recorded in 1164, and Biggar history really begins from that date. Little artefactual evidence has been found despite the ancient sites of castle and church - and the townscape itself which is clearly medieval in origin.

Sadly, over the years some early reported finds have disappeared, but thanks to the Biggar Museum, the town has a repository for any future discoveries. Biggar Museum does have an important collection of the material culture of Scotland dating to all pre-historic periods in Scotland and, taken with collections from later periods and an equally impressive archive of local history, it is unsurpassed by any small town in Scotland.

This article has been produced merely as a 'taster' of what is available to local residents and visitors to the area, the town and district has so much more to offer



in terms of antiquarian interest. For those who wish to discover and know more, visit the museum ([www.bigfarmuseumtrust.co.uk](http://www.bigfarmuseumtrust.co.uk)) or log on to [www.biggararchaeology.org.uk](http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk).

The town has a vibrant annual programme of events and festivals; notably Biggar Hogmanay Bonfire, Albion Vintage Vehicle Rally, Gala Day with March Riding, Puppet Theatre and Theatre Workshop productions.

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Biggar Archaeology Group [www.biggararchaeology.org.uk](http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk)

Biggar Museum Trust [www.bigfarmuseumtrust.co.uk](http://www.bigfarmuseumtrust.co.uk)

### Appendix I

#### Catalogue of finds

#### BIGGAR URBAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT CATALOGUE OF OBJECTS

##### TOWNHEAD TRENCH 1

BU/T1/1	3 of	17C-18C Green glaze sherds, 1 of base
BU/T1/2	5 of	17C-18C Window glass
BU/T1/3	2 of	18C Staffordshire ware sherds
BU/T1/4	6 of	Victorian? crockery
BU/T1/5	5 of	Clay pipes, unknown age

##### TOWNHEAD TRENCH 2

BU/T2/1	2 of	18C Bottle glass
BU/T2/2	3 of	Staffordshire ware sherds
BU/T2/3	14 of	Pottery green glaze sherds, 2 of stem handle, 2 of base
BU/T2/4	1 of	4-hole weaving tablet
BU/T2/5	7 of	Crockery, possibly C18-19C, blue & white
BU/T2/6	1 of	18C Window glass
BU/T2/7	1 of	Whetstone
BU/T2/8	4 of	Late 19C - early 20C bottle necks, dark green
BU/T2/9	5 of	Late 19C - early 20C bottle glass, dark green, 3 of base, 1 possible vase base, 1 light blue bottle neck

BU/T2/10 1 of 18C bottle glass, dark green base  
 BU/T2/11 1 of 18C bottle glass, dark green base  
 BU/T2/12 1 of Large worked sand stone

#### TOWNHEAD TRENCH 3

BU/T3/1 2 of Victorian coins, 1 penny dated 1862, 1 half penny dated 1902  
 BU/T3/2 2 of 19C Clay marbles, deteriorated  
 BU/T3/3 1 of 20C Glass marble, modern  
 BU/T3/4 2 of 18C Window glass  
 BU/T3/5 1 of 18C Bottle glass, base sherd, dark green, some oxidation  
 BU/T3/6 2 of Battery electrodes, graphite  
 BU/T3/7 1 of Slate pencil  
 BU/T3/8 1 of Greywacke pebble- 3 faceted sides

#### MOAT PARK TRENCH 4

BU/T4/1 Misc. modern ...  
 BU/T4/2 1 of S. Glass. 18 C. bottle sherd.  
 BU/T4/3 Pottery. Salt glaze 17C.  
 BU/T4/4 3 of Clay pipe stem.  
 BU/T4/5 Pipe bowl. White. Pottery.  
 BU/T4/6 R.  
 BU/T4/7 R Green glaze  
 BU/T4/8 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/9 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/10 Pottery  
 BU/T4/11 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/12 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/13 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/14 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/15 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/16 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/17 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/18 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/19 Pottery white  
 BU/T4/20 Pottery. Decorated.  
 BU/T4/21 Lead, poss' seal  
 BU/T4/22 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/23 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/24 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/25 Green glaze  
 BU/T4/26 Pottery  
 BU/T4/27 Pottery  
 BU/T4/28 Pottery  
 BU/T4/29 Pottery  
 BU/T4/30 Pottery  
 BU/T4/31 Pottery  
 BU/T4/32 Pottery  
 BU/T4/33 Pottery  
 BU/T4/34 Pottery

BU/T4/35	Pottery
BU/T4/36	Pottery white
BU/T4/37	R. Pottery
BU/T4/38	R. Green glaze
BU/T4/39	B. Green glaze
BU/T4/40	Green glaze
BU/T4/41	Green glaze
BU/T4/42	Green glaze
BU/T4/43	Green glaze
BU/T4/44	Green glaze
BU/T4/45	Green glaze
BU/T4/46	Green glaze
BU/T4/47	Green glaze
BU/T4/48	Green glaze
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BU/T4/58	Pottery
BU/T4/59	Pottery
BU/T4/60	Pottery
BU/T4/61	Pottery
BU/T4/62	Pottery
BU/T4/63	Pottery, white
BU/T4/64	Pottery, white
BU/T4/65	Pottery, white
BU/T4/66	Clay-pipe stem
BU/T4/67	Bone burnt
BU/T4/68	Bone burnt
BU/T4/69	Flint - scraper.

#### MOAT PARK TRENCH 5

BU/T5/1	4 of	Pipe stems
BU/T5/2	1 of	Glass frag. Greenish/clear.
BU/T5/3	1 of	Pot base. Green glaze.
BU/T5/4	2 of	Pot frags. Green glaze.
BU/T5/5	6 of	Pot frags. Unglazed.
BU/T5/6	3 of	Pot frags. Unglazed.
BU/T5/7	1 of	Lith. Round frag. 1 side slight patination.

#### MOAT PARK TRENCH 6 all finds from context 003

BU/T6/1	4 of	Pipe stems
BU/T6/2	1 of	Slate pot lid 6cm diam.
BU/T6/3	2 of	Glass bottle frags
BU/T6/4	1 of	Green glaze strap handle

BU/T6/5	1 of	Green glaze base frag
BU/T6/6	1 of	Pot frag no glaze
BU/T6/7	11 of	Green glaze frags
BU/T6/8	5 of	Misc. frags
BU/T6/9	2 of	Bone frags