

A sixteenth century coal mine under the sea: a new interpretation of the archaeology of the Moat Pit, and a consideration of its wider importance

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Abstract

This paper reconsiders the archaeology of the 16th century Moat Pit mining complex at Culross and offers new interpretations of that archaeology. It places the coal mine in a wide context, suggesting a pivotal role in the development of the burgh. The study emphasises the innovative nature of Sir George Bruce's coal mining. The mine is the first in Britain to have a shaft in the sea; one of the first to have two entrance shafts; employed innovative drainage techniques; and was able to ship the coal directly from the mine onto ships. The archaeologies of salt and iron manufacturing in Culross are considered along with their symbiotic relationships with coal. These industries gave impetus to the development of commerce in Culross, and the harbour and commercial buildings are considered from an archaeological perspective. A comparison between the houses of George Bruce, the owner of the mine, and his brother Edward is used to highlight changing attitudes in society. The Moat Pit is used as a case study to consider issues arising between industrial and urban archaeology in Scotland. It explores the impact of this debate upon the site's current unprotected and arguably undervalued status.