“An ancient alignment – the Baldernock parish boundary stones”

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An ancient alignment – the Baldernock parish boundary stones

Niall A Logan

The parish of Baldernock is in the county of East Dumbartonshire (formerly in Stirlingshire), some ten miles north of Glasgow. This contribution is a substantial revision and update of NA Logan, ‘The Baldernock parish boundary stones’, Vernacular Building, 39 (2016), pp. 81-94.

The stones of the title were discovered in connection with the exploration of some ruined buildings, because in the First Edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map consulted for that study a line of boundary stones was marked nearby, within what is now a forestry plantation. The northern part of the forest had not been harvested in recent times, and in the hope that some of the stones marked there might still survive, I went in search of them in the summer of 2014.

The parish

The original parish of Baldernock was very small – the western half, roughly speaking, of its present area – with the eastern boundary following the Branziet Burn. This burn rises near the northern boundary and runs south to the River Kelvin, which forms the southern boundary (see figure 1 inset). The church thus stood nearer to the centre of the parish than it does now, and the village of Balmore was in Campsie parish. In 1649, the Lords Commissioners for the Valuation of Teinds (tithes) disjoined all that part of the parish of Campsie that lay between Balgrochan (to the east) and the Branziet Burn and annexed it to the parish of Baldernock *quoad sacra* (ie for sacred matters only, and so without civil obligations).

Baldernock was thereby doubled in size by extension to the east, and now included the village of Balmore as its largest settlement, but the church now stood well to the west of the centre of the parish. Kilpatrick parish – which lies to the west of Baldernock – was split into New and Old (or East and West) Kilpatrick parishes by an Act of Parliament on 16 February in the same year. A history of New Kilpatrick parish stated that this change was made at the behest of the marquis of Montrose – the landowner – because for some parishioners the churches of Baldernock and Strathblane (a parish lying to the north west of Baldernock) were closer to them than their own church; Kilpatrick Church lies far to the west near the River Clyde. It seems reasonable to assume that the expansion of Baldernock was also an initiative of Montrose; especially as the new parish boundary followed a line that had been established by his family many years earlier, as described at the end of this article.

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The boundary
Going clockwise, from the northwestern corner of the parish at Craigmaddie (NS 572772), the parish boundary runs slightly north of east for 3.14km, following a wall. From NS 599770 (at the north-western corner of the area shown in figure 1), this wall forms the north side of a firebreak in Lennox Forest. At NS 603771, the boundary turns approximately 80°, across the firebreak, to run south for 1.03km. The First Edition OS six-inch and twenty-five inch maps mark a row of twenty-five boundary stones lying

Figure 1. Sketch map based on First Edition six-inch and twenty-five inch Ordnance Survey maps, and Lennox Estate maps of circa 1850, showing the line of the boundary stones, and other features mentioned in the text. Inset shows location of church (+) and Balmore (B), with the Branziet Burn passing between them.

The 2nd Edition six-inch and twenty-five inch maps (Stirlingshire Sheet XXVII.SE and Stirlingshire Sheet XXVII.16, respectively, revised 1896 and published 1899) show nineteen
along this line to the south, terminating with a stone at NS 603761, beyond the southern edge of the plantation, near a drystone wall. The boundary then follows that wall for a short distance to the southwest before turning with it to the southeast (figure 1). On viewing the terrain today it is astonishing that, in the mid-nineteenth century, most of the fields shown in figure 1 were described in estate plans as ‘arable’. Only the irregular field immediately south of the March Stone, and the two in the north by Cornhill, were listed as pasture. Nowadays most of the area around South Craigend is rough grazing, with only the southermmost fields shown in figure 1 being managed pasture. North of Cornhill, the land rises to 231m at Mount Huillie on the Clochore Ridge.

Within the plantation, the line of stones is roughly divided into northern and southern halves by a forestry track that runs from east to west, and which then turns through 90° to run south (figure 1). This track was part of the route linking Baldernock and Campsie in the days before motor vehicles; later, the east-west leg of the track was extended further to the west, passing to the south of Cornhill. Within the northern half of the plantation the boundary line – from the wall by the firebreak down to the track – is 519m long, and the First Edition OS maps show ten boundary stones along it. Throughout this part, a grassy track runs alongside the boundary line, immediately to its west, through the forest. It is probably a leader track for vehicle access, as it is too narrow to be a firebreak. The lines followed by this track, and by the firebreak that runs to the west from its northern end, appear to have been chosen with respect for the preservation of the parish boundary. In this part of the plantation, about halfway down, the boundary line crosses a clearing; this is boggy ground and was probably not planted (figure 1).

The southern part of the boundary line runs for 459m until it meets the edge of the plantation, encompassing thirteen boundary stones in the First Edition OS maps. Most of this area was clear-felled relatively recently; the ground surface is treacherously uneven and it has a vigorous regrowth of trees, so its exploration was deferred. However, two more boundary stones are marked on the maps as lying outside the plantation (figure 1), and these were sought and discovered early on. In figure 1 and the account below the stones that have been traced have been numbered consecutively from north to south, but this does not indicate the order of their discovery.

**Initial discoveries**

First sought was the Parish March Stone, the principal marker at which boundary perambulations would start and end. A mid-nineteenth century Lennox estate map located it just south of Peathill Wood, in the east of the parish, in an area of rough grazing just south of the present forest. In dense undergrowth I found a damaged piece of sandstone at NS 603761 (Stone 13). It had clearly been made by and placed by man, and lies on the parish boundary as shown by the OS maps.

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7 Logan (2015), op. cit.
Figure 2 (top left). Stone 14, the Parish March Stone, seen from the north with the drystone boundary wall beyond it. It measures 60x60cm and stands 35cm above ground level.

Figure 3 (lower). Stones 7 and 9 viewed, after cleaning, from the north. The earth bank on which they stand can also be seen. Stone 7 is 60x40cm and stands 40cm above ground level, and 9 is 75x65cm and 25cm above ground level.

Figure 4 (top right). Stone 6, standing in the forest clearing. Although it is much weathered, the letter “B” can clearly be seen on its western face; it stands 30cm above ground level and is 25cm wide by 17cm thick.
However, its top part appeared to have broken off and it seemed too slight to be the principal boundary marker; besides, the estate map showed the ‘Parish March Stone’ somewhat south of here. Cutting back an area of undergrowth near a bend in the above-mentioned drystone wall, 17m north of it, revealed a more convincing candidate. It is a large, irregular boulder of reddish whinstone (Stone 14, figure 2) at NS 603761, lying 8.5m south of the damaged stone, with a drainage ditch running between them; part of this ditch close to the stone is shown as a circular pool in the Second Edition OS maps, with the stone itself not marked – it was probably submerged. It is in linear alignment with the damaged stone and the presumed continuation of this line to the north by three stones lying (beneath fallen trees) in the plantation nearby, running slightly west of north for 128m. The line then swings slightly east of north and runs straight for 856m, crossing the forest track, as far as the most northerly marked stone, and from there it is another 34.5m to the wall that the boundary follows to the west (figure 1). While the discovery of these stones coinciding with the parish boundary was encouraging, two points do not an alignment make!

Therefore, the northern section of forest was explored along the leader track. I soon found a moss-covered boulder at NS 603767 (Stone 9) laying at the eastern edge of the track, and then a little way to the north another mossy boulder (Stone 7) in line with the boundary. Both boulders are of whinstone, and are seen in figure 3, after they had been cleared of moss. They appear to lie atop a broad length of earth dyke, whose margins may well have been emphasized by the ploughing and wheel ruts of forestry operations; however, the boulders may have discouraged forestry workers from driving across it. The distance between the two stones seemed to match that implied by the maps. According to the OS maps there was a group of three stones in this area, but precise and accurate positions could not be determined because grid references were only introduced to OS maps after re-triangulation in the mid-twentieth century, and in any case, my hill-walker’s GPS unit was ineffective beneath the forest canopy. Pacing the same distance to the north and south did not locate a third stone, and it seemed probable that it lay beneath a stray tree growing within the leader track. Another large whinstone boulder (Stone 2) was found further up the leader track, on its eastern edge, at NS 603771. It is in line with the pair of boulders found earlier, but there was no discernible remnant of the earth dyke. No further boulders were found between here and the top of the leader track. Where the boundary crosses the firebreak and meets the wall that it follows to the west the possible line of a dyke is just discernible – a low hump that is not associated with a drainage ditch. However, as none of the stones found so far carried any markings, it might be argued that they were just random boulders – even though no other large stones had been encountered along the track.

Returning south down the track I almost tripped over another stone, hidden among blaeberry undergrowth in the boggy clearing. It stands at NS 603768 (Stone 6, figure 4), in line with the other stones so far found, but is a shaped, dressed stone whose upper part has been dressed and cut to give a curved top, so that it looks like a gravestone for a dog. It has carvings upon it: a much weathered and indecipherable set of marks on the top, a ‘B’ – presumably for Baldernock – on its western face, and a ‘C’ – presumably for Campsie – on the eastern one. It was upright and exposed when found, although set rather low; it may have sunk somewhat in the boggy ground. The lateral dimensions are not so very different to those of the first, damaged stone that was found (Stone 13), and

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Figure 5 (above). Stone 1 seen from the west, after re-erection and cleaning; the archaeologist’s trowel gives an idea of scale. It measures 42cm above ground level, 25cm wide by 18cm thick at the top. The letter “B” measures 10cm high and 6.5cm wide, and the other side bears the letter “C” which measures 9cm high and 7.5cm wide.

Figure 6 (top right). Stone 10 following excavation. It measures 28cm wide by 16.5cm thick at the top and 30.5cm by 18cm at the bottom of the dressed part. It is 58.5cm in overall length, the undressed base being 18cm long and the dressed, exposed top 40.5cm long. The letter “C” is 9cm high and the same wide.

Figure 7 (middle right). Stone 10, showing the date “1817” carved on its top, viewed from the east. The figures are 7.5cm high and together they span 18cm).

Figure 8. Profile of excavated boundary dyke, showing Stone 7 on top of the clay ridge, with U-shaped depressions at either side. The dimensions are: a-b 51cm; c-d 122cm.
so it is probable that the missing part of that stone also carried carvings. The First Edition OS maps indicated a line of three stones at this location, but pacing the distances implied did not lead to any further discoveries.

**Further finds**

A diagram was then prepared from the six-inch First Edition OS map, showing distances between the stones, converted to paces north of the forestry track. Pacing a straight line was rarely possible, owing to obstacles such as drainage ditches, low branches and fallen trees, so the exercise was rather challenging. However, two buried stones (Stones 1 and 10) were located by plunging an archaeologist’s trowel into the ground around locations indicated by the pacing. They are both pieces of sandstone that are similar in their shapes, sizes and marks to the carved stone in the clearing (Stone 6). I pause here to pay tribute to the remarkable accuracy of the early OS surveyors.

*Figure 5* shows the northernmost stone (Stone 1) of the line at NS 603771. It lay fallen and buried beside a forestry drainage ditch, and was excavated, set upright and cleaned. The lower part, set in the ground, is undressed, the side that would probably have faced west is carved with the letter ‘B’, and the other side bears the letter ‘C’. As with Stone 6, the carving on the top is not legible; when viewed from the east, the right-hand side of the top has been defaced, but on the left-hand side the figure ‘1’ is clear, and just to the right of it part of a rounded numeral such as 6 or 8 can be made out.

At last there was the discovery of an undamaged, carved stone (Stone 10), at the other end of the leader track, near the southern edge of this part of the forest (NS 603766). When located it was lying as shown in *figure 6*, but completely buried under mud and moss. It is a block of dressed sandstone with a curved top, like stones 1 and 6. The lower part, to be placed in the ground, has been left rough. When exposed it was lying flat, bearing a letter ‘C’ on the upper face, and carving of letters or numbers on the curved end. A pit was dug to receive the bottom end, and it was set back upright, and cleaned. The top is carved with ‘1817’ (*figure 7*), which presumably marks the year of erection; the ‘8’ is cut with less clarity and depth than the other figures. As with stones 1 and 6, the face that would have looked west is carved with the letter ‘B’, and the face to the east with the letter ‘C’. The letter ‘B’ is carved smaller and with less assurance than the letter ‘C’ – which is neatly finished with serifs. Perhaps ‘B’ was cut by a different hand to ‘C’ and ‘1817’, maybe at a later time; whatever the reason, it seems possible that this and the other carved stones were commissioned by Campsie parish, perhaps with less effort being spent on cutting the letter ‘B’. So far six of the ten stones in the northern part of the plantation had been located, but the remainder were elusive.

**Threat and safeguard**

In late November 2014 I learnt that harvesting operations were imminent, and so contacted Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to see if the stones could be protected. I received a very positive response, and a few days later met the FCS Environment and Heritage Manager for the Scottish Lowlands Forest District, Yvonne Grieve, at the site. FCS policy is to define a five-metre protection zone around features of archaeological interest, and to mark them in the digital maps that the forest workers use. The boundary stone locations indicated on the nineteenth-century OS maps had already been transferred to the digital map, and using the power and accuracy of Yvonne’s GPS we located a further stone at NS 603769 (Stone 3). It is a large whinstone boulder lying
close to a drain at the north edge of the clearing. As with Stone 2, it lies directly upon the boundary line, but there is no detectable remnant of an earth dyke.

I was now determined to trace the remaining stones that were marked on the maps in groups of three: two remained to be discovered in the clearing by Stone 6, and one by the first pair of boulders found (Stones 7 and 9). By probing thoroughly in line with Stone 6 in the clearing, the missing stones (Stones 4 and 5) were soon located; they sit just a few paces apart (figure 10). The intervals between their centres – working from the north – are 1.3m and 1.5m, which are much smaller than those implied by the maps; the symbols had evidently been printed so as not to overlie each other, and their placement did not indicate the actual distances. They are relatively small whinstone boulders with their tops lying just below the present ground level, among dense vegetation. As with Stone 6, it seemed possible that they were larger than they appeared, but had subsided in the soft ground. In the Second Edition OS maps, only two of these three stones are marked.

Given that the intervals between Stones 4, 5 and 6 were smaller than those implied by the maps, I probed between Stones 7 and 9 and found a large boulder (Stone 8) buried midway between them; it did not, after all, lie under the accidental tree! It is of sandstone, has a fragmented upper surface, and lies just beneath ground level, so that substantial excavation would be required to determine its dimensions. It may have been of greater height originally, the top part having been lost. As with Stones 4, 5 and 6 these stones are sited closer together than implied by the map, but are equidistant, with intervals between their centres of 5.5m, and again their symbols were presumably placed this way so as to avoid them overlying each other in the printed map. As mentioned above, notwithstanding the disturbance caused by forestry operations, it was believed that these three boulders lay atop a low earth bank or dyke. Excavations of this feature are described in ‘An ancient alignment’ below.

Although exploration of the southern, clear-felled area was not attempted during the early part of the project, a fifth carved stone was traced (Stone 11) at NS 603766, immediately to the south of the forestry track, just outside the harvested area. It was found by carefully extrapolating a line from the alignment of stones in the north, and then probing along it from the edge of the track towards the south. It was largely buried and covered by rough grasses. As it lies close to the track, it would be vulnerable to damage or theft if left exposed, and so after photography it was covered again; in fact, I have been unable to locate it since! Only the ‘C’ was visible, and the carving on top is defaced. The damaged or weathered marks on the tops of Stones 1, 6 and 11 are quite consistent with the ‘1817’ on Stone 10, but the significance of that year is unknown.

Yet more finds
In 2017, the clear-felled area south of the forestry track was explored, but accurate pacing was not possible across the rough terrain, with its new growth. It was much disturbed by modern timber-harvesting machinery and was rather dangerous going, with many deep and hidden trenches and hollows. Only one boulder that was almost certainly a boundary stone was encountered (Stone 12), perhaps surviving because it stands at the intersection of two deep drains; owing to these, it was not possible to approach closely to measure it. It is one of four in the vicinity that were marked on the First Edition OS maps, though only two were shown in the Second Edition sheets.

The sites of other stones have either been obliterated by harvesting and replanting operations, or were inaccessible owing to the dense growth of young trees. The area that contained three stones – in the lower part of the line west of the track – lay under
fallen trees until recently, but within the last two years harvesting operations and subsequent fire have so damaged the area that in 2019 a careful search for these stones proved fruitless. Even without that damage the chance of finding any stones here was slim; the Second Edition OS maps marked only the southernmost one.

However, this is a site that keeps on giving. During the writing of this article, when revisiting the stones with an interested guest, I noticed a hummock just north of Stone 3. Dense, low branches and extensive overgrowth of moss had previously concealed it but, following nearby felling and the dry summer of 2018, it was now quite conspicuous and proved to be a fifteenth boulder, not shown in the OS maps. It is marked ‘15’ in figure 1.

An ancient alignment

The harvesting work on the northern part of the forest – encompassing stones 4 to 10 – was completed in late 2015, and the site could not be revisited until late 2016, once the timber had been removed. The stones had indeed been protected during forestry operations, all was well, and I explored the alignment further, having come across the following record related by Cameron in 1892:

There is an extant agreement, of date 1587, between the then ‘Erle of Montrose and John Lennox of Woodheid’, settling the boundaries of their respective estates, which they had defined by the erection of an earthen ridge. This archaic march “dyke” may still be seen stretching across the Clochoore [sic] Moor, sometimes in a straight line, sometimes in a crooked one. In one place there is a rectangular diversion, intended to exclude what had apparently been a hut. This ridge is about four feet wide by two feet high, and in it there is inserted at intervals large stones. It can be seen best between Newlands or Cock-ma-lane farm and Mount Hooly [sic], immediately overlooking Clochoore.’ The contract Cameron refers to is dated 10 November 1587 and with a few hours effort it was transcribed. It refers to “merches betwid the Landis of lechad and cul--athrik (there is a hole in the document in the middle of this word) … the said noble lord is content to set in tak (lease) … for maill and Bounteth (rent and gratuity) to the said johnhe Levenox of wodheid all & haill the saids lords part of his lands of the hill of lechad … for all the dayis & terms of the said johnes lyftimis … [for] four pundis maill”. Lecket Hill (NS 644812) is about 3.5 miles north west of Stone 1. ‘Cul--athrik’ is undoubtedly a spelling variant of ‘Culphatrick’, which appears to be an archaic name for the estate of Craigbarnet (NS 594791), west of Lechad. A line extrapolated to the

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10 J. Cameron, *Parish of Campsie*, D. MacLeod, Kirkintilloch (1892), p 204.
11 National Records of Scotland (NRS) GD220/1/A5/2/4.
north from the boundary alignment would pass between Craigbarnet and Lecket Hill but
after about a mile it would meet the Finglen Burn, which rises in the north west and
runs to the south east, and which might well have been used to mark the continuing
boundary between them.

Clochore and Mount Hoolie lie to the north of the point where the boundary stone
line appears to run as a hump across the firebreak to meet the east-west wall. The
construction of the earth dyke was presumably necessary because there were no natural
or man-made features available to mark the boundary between the two landowners as it
ran across featureless moorland. It is not known how much further north from the
firebreak wall the march dyke may have run, and there are no traces to be seen on the
ploughed-up forest floor immediately north of there. Neither in the OS maps nor upon
the ground nowadays is there any sign, on the line of the boundary, of the rectangular
diversion to which Cameron refers (above); however, 63m to the east along the wall –
so lying well within Campsie parish and distant from the boundary – there is a dog-leg
5.5m to the south, after which the wall continues eastwards (figure 1).

The hump running across the firebreak, and the bank associated with Stones 7, 8
and 9, appear to be remnants of the sixteenth-century dyke, or restorations of it, and it
seems quite possible that other boulders originally set upon the top of that dyke now
lie below the soil surface, so that they were not observed by the nineteenth-century
map surveyors; we have already seen that some of the boundary stones marked in the
First Edition maps were not shown in the Second Edition revisions. In 2017, I obtained
permission from FCS to carry out some limited excavation of the dyke, in order to
explore its structure and to seek further stones. It was a very wet summer that year,
which made investigation difficult.

A slot was cut across the dyke beside the south side of Stone 7. The thin,
superficial, organic layer of blackish peaty material and tree roots was removed from
the heavy clay beneath, and the cross-section revealed two shallow, U-shaped
depressions either side of a mound of grey and yellowish clay, upon which stood the
boulder. Such a profile is consistent with the earthen ridge described by Cameron and
the dimensions he gave (figure 8), and the clay appeared to lie not as an unstructured
mound, but as large lumps or clods, such as may have been cast up by spade or shovel
from the ditches either side; it had not been penetrated by roots. The site was revisited
in 2019 and further excavation was made of the dyke at its west side immediately north
of Stone 9, to see if the observations made at Stone 7 could be replicated. Overlying
tree roots restricted the work, but the appearance of the small area exposed was indeed
very similar to that seen in the slot cut beside Stone 7 (figure 9), and it may be
concluded that the putative dyke is indeed a man-made feature, and not just an artefact
created by the ploughing and wheel ruts of forestry operations. It is tempting to believe
that the profile observed dates from construction of the dyke in 1587, especially as
some of the exposed clods of clay actually underlie the large and heavy boulders.
However, as the line of the dyke apparently only survives along the parish boundary,
with no traces evident elsewhere, it is quite possible that the excavated features reflect
restoration works done at a later date.

Also in 2017, and 2019, some excavation was carried out at Stones 4, 5 and 6. The
objective was to see if, despite the soft ground, a profile similar to that seen at Stone 7
could be uncovered. However, rather than providing further clarification, this work
served only to confuse. Instead of the hoped-for evidence of a bank lying between two
ditches, with boulders set upon its top, six further stones were found lying a little
deeper: four in line with Stones 4 and 5, and two lying immediately to the west. A dense tangle of blaeberry and other roots made clear exposure very difficult, so the features are shown diagrammatically in figure 10. In the context of the rest of the boundary alignment, these stones are anomalous and hard to explain; they are labelled a to f in figure 10 to distinguish them from the previously found ones. Although most of them are arranged in line and almost touching each other, Stone b lies a little out of line to the west, and Stone c appears to have been displaced to a greater extent – although it might fit comfortably into the gap between Stones b and 4. Stone e cannot be explained so easily. Stones 4, 5 and a-f are all appreciably smaller than Stones 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 12, and of fairly uniform size – mainly 58-69cm long by 30-43cm. The further excavation of Stones 4 and 5 at this time showed that they were in fact no larger than they appeared to be at the time of their discovery in 2014.

Cameron further recorded that in 1630 the Earl of Montrose feu’d (perpetually leased) the Eleven Ploughlands of Balgrochan to local proprietors in Campsie parish, with the farmlands of Newlands (or ‘Cock-ma-lane’) and Glenwynd (figure 1) representing the westernmost two of these. Their western boundaries also appear to follow the 1587 boundary line closely. South of the March Stone, the parish boundary has an irregular route that follows the western margin of Glenwynd, as set in 1630; however, it appears that the 1587 dyke and its boulders were adopted in 1649 to mark the new parish boundary as it ran north of here.

By macabre coincidence, the years 1587 and 1649 respectively saw the beheadings of Mary Stuart and her grandson Charles I.

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14 Cameron, op. cit., pp. 205-207.