THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SIEGE OF LEITH, 1560

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Abstract

This paper summarises the findings of two evaluations carried out in public spaces in the Leith area, both of which were specifically designed to establish the survival or otherwise of remains relating to the siege of Leith in 1560. Between 6 and 10 November 2006 a trial trenching evaluation was carried out within Pilrig Park to the south of the French citadel to ‘ground truth’ geophysical anomalies identified during a previous phase of work (Banks et al. 2006) and also to establish the character of topographic features on the ground. The main aim of the project was to establish the presence or absence of remains related to the siege fort known as Somerset’s Mount which from a map drawn in 1560 is known to have been located in the vicinity. The evaluation identified the remains of a WWII air raid shelter, the remains of a building associated with Pilrig House demolished sometime in the early to mid 19th century, and a possible ditch associated with the fort, into which several archaeological features including the foundation slot of a small building or other structure and a probable blacksmith’s forge had been cut.

The second part of this report concerns the evaluation at Leith Links, around 1 km to the north east of Pilrig Park and to east of the French citadel. A week long evaluation similar to that carried out at Pilrig took place in April 2007, the aim being to locate further evidence for siege works. Once again, attention focussed on geophysical anomalies resulting from the previous survey. The Links are traditionally associated with the siege through the presence of two mounds, which at least since the 19th century have been identified as the platforms for siege guns directed against the eastern face of the French citadel. An area between the two mounds, which are scheduled ancient monuments, was trial trenched along with an area further to the north. Only the latter produced physical remains which seem to relate to the 1560 map. These took the form of an earthen bank and possibly related ditches which run along the same alignment as a feature shown on the early map, though there is some question as to its function.

Introduction

The two projects reported here were the second and third phases of a programme of archaeological investigation geared toward the green spaces of Leith, in the first instance Pilrig Park and Leith Links (Figure 1; Pollard 2007). The programme was occasioned by the realisation that buried archaeological remains related to the siege of Leith, which took place in 1560, may survive in these localities. Overlaying the measured survey of the siegeworks drawn up in 1560 onto the modern street map indicates that various elements of
Fig. 1. Locations of areas of interest—Pilrig Park and Leith Links. Modern Ordnance Survey map overlaid with 1560 map.