

The archaeology of Glasgow in the 1970s and 1980s

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Celebrating Glasgow's contemporary archaeology

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Glasgow is well known for its medieval heritage, which survey and excavations have done much to cast light on, from the Cathedral to Govan. But over the past decade, there has been an increasing application of archaeological fieldwork methods to study far more recent events, sites and places. This contemporary archaeology activity is based on the premise that there are a set of tools and methods we use in archaeology that are applicable to studying any aspect of the past that has a material dimension, no matter how old – or recent. The great benefit here also is that archaeologists can work with associated documentary and archive research, consult photos and videos, and even speak to people, parallel to more traditional fieldwork. In this article I will introduce three of my own contemporary archaeology projects in Glasgow to showcase what is possible.

In chronological order, the earliest, oldest site is Kelvingrove Park's 'Kelvin Wheelies' skatepark, a state-of-the-art concrete skateboarding park built and managed by Glasgow Council in 1977, opened in 1978, abandoned in 1982,



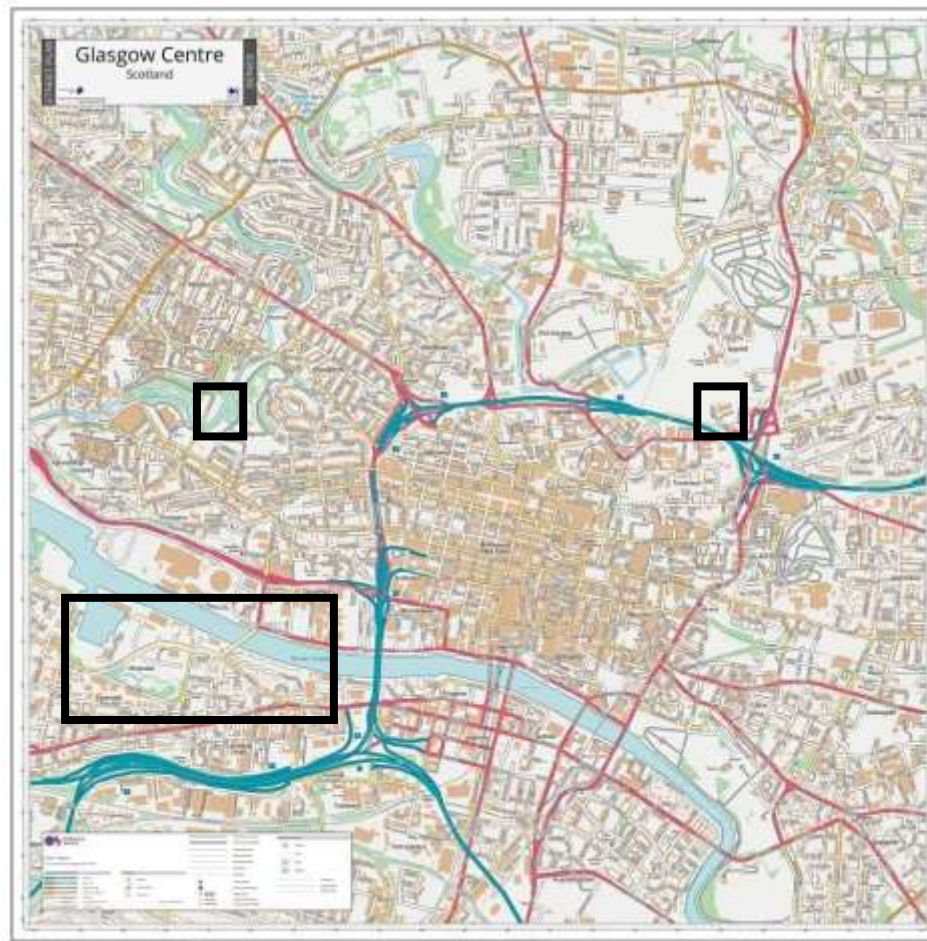
Drone photo of GGF Trench 4 excavations.
Photo: Aris Palyvos

before finally being buried and put beyond use in 1983. This remarkably short arc was very much representative of concrete skateparks internationally, with dozens built across the world from the mid-1970s onwards, before most fell out of use as fashions changed towards BMX and street skating a decade later. This substantial leisure feature is now barely visible in the park and few park users know about it.

Soon after this skatepark was built, in 1979 an astronomically aligned stone circle was built in Sighthill Park, overlooking the M8 and city centre to the south, also under the aegis of the Glasgow Parks Department. This educational resource was designed by broadcaster and astronomer Duncan Lunan,

This evening!

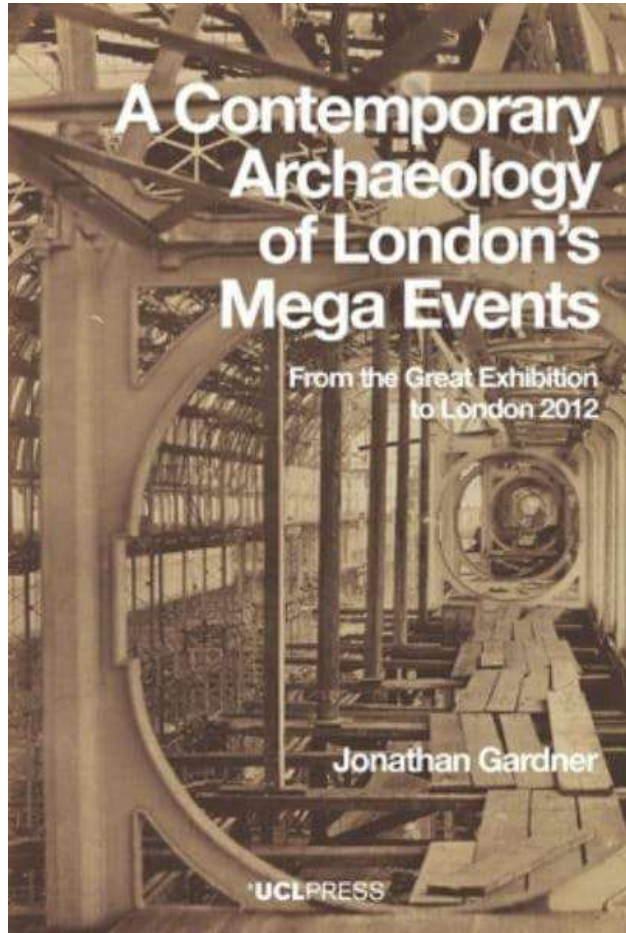
- Sighthill stone circles (1978 – 2016, 2019 – present day)
- Glasgow Garden Festival (1988)
- Kelvingrove Skatepark (1978 – 1983)



Sighthill stone circle during survey work in 2022



What has any of this got to do with archaeology??



Gardner 2022



Figure 2.2 Scraps of a mega event: the socketed base of one of the Crystal Palace's cast-iron columns at Sydenham today. Source: Photograph by the author.

Bailey, G, Newland, C, Nilsson, A & Schofield, J, Davis, S & Myers, A 2009 Transit, transition: excavating J641 VUJ. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 19.1, 1-28.

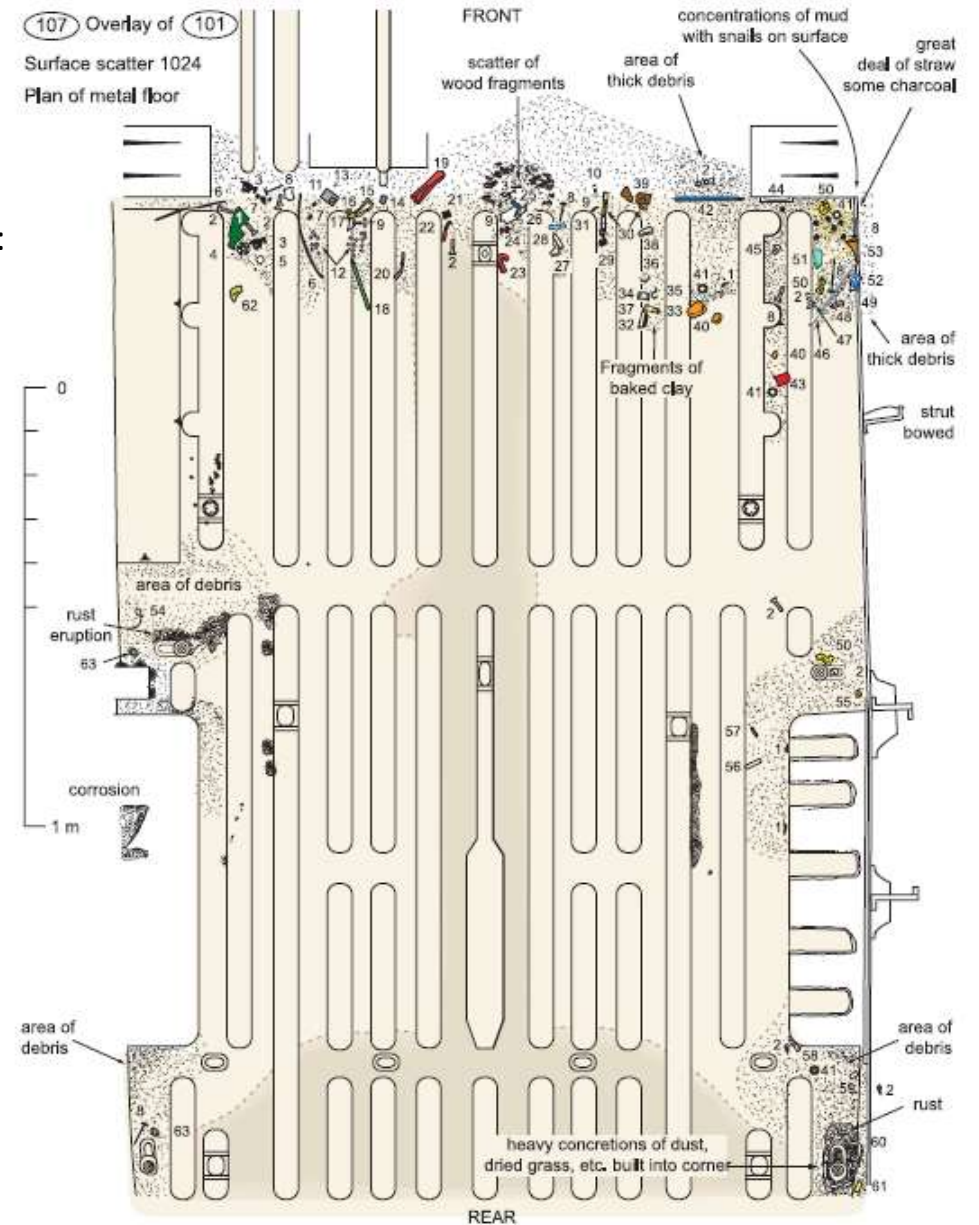


Figure 4. Finds scatter in the rear of the van. (Drawn by Anne Leaver.)

<https://www.digitScotland.com/what-is-contemporary-archaeology-and-why-does-it-matter/>

Case study 1: Sighthill stone circle 1.0 (1979-2016)

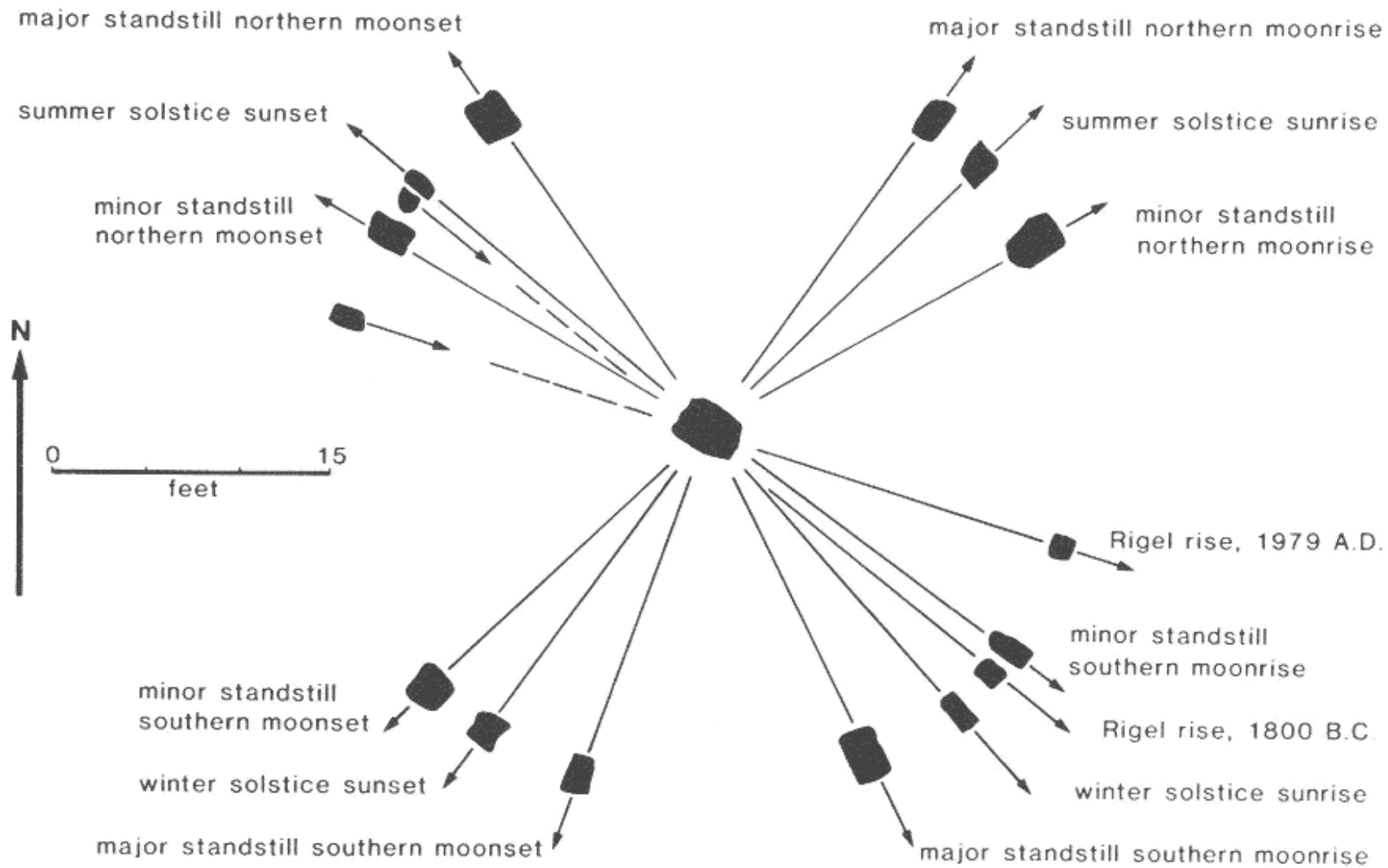


<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/archaeologyresearch/currentresearch/sighthill/>



Construction of the circle in 1979,
and Dunan Lunan (right)





SIGHTHILL, A MODERN MEGALITH
 GLASGOW
 ASTRONOMICAL ALIGNMENTS

THE SKINNY

INDEPENDENT CULTURAL JOURNALISM

FREE Scotland Issue 101 February 2014

KINGS OF THE NORTH

MOGWAI RECLAIM THE THRONE

MUSIC
 TTT
 Wild Swans
 Young Fathers
 Stephen Malkmus
 Sudden Death
 of Stars
 Crystal Antlers
 Katy B

FILM
 Glasgow Film
 Festival 2014
 Lukas Moodysson
 Jonathan Safran
 Foer
 Stefan Szurk
 Borscht Corporation

CLUBS
 Wim Sphar
 Moderat
 Kottakoti-Pan

ART
 Alex Millar
 Laura Yule
 NBA News
 Contemporary
 Rachel Maclean

BOOKS
 Mike Flores

COMEDY
 Fred Thomas
 Sports Auld

THEATRE
 Dorian Cochrane
 Cochrane



Mogwai frontman helped
 save Glasgow's 'totally
 f****d up' stone circle

URBAN REALM



TELEVISION



HUTTING

INCORPORATING PROSPERITY £3.25





Documenting use and dismantlement of the original version of the Sighthill stone circle

Sighthill stone circle 2.0 (2019 onwards)



Press event 2019

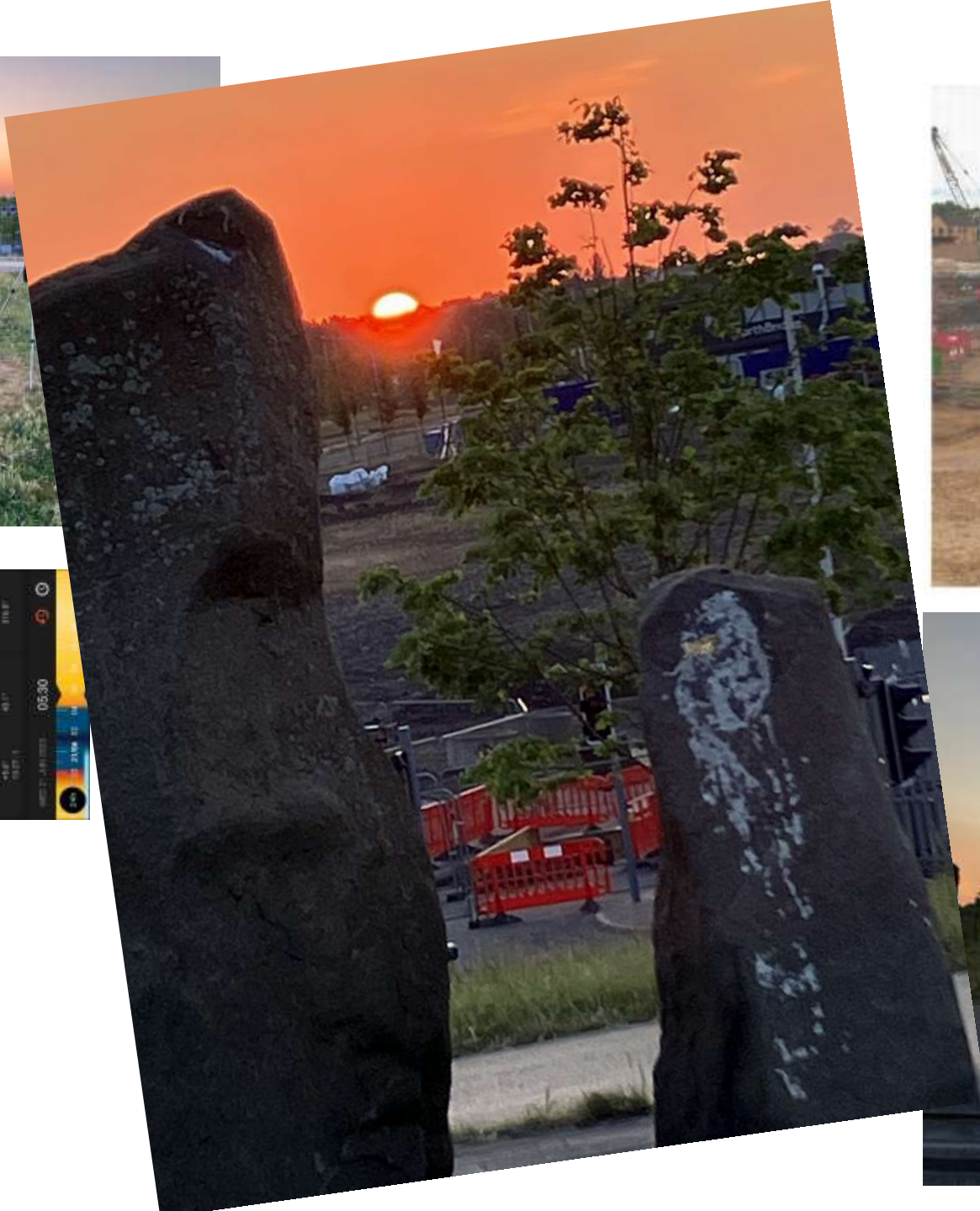


Recording the new Sighthill stone circle in 2021





Summer
solstice
2023



A new stone circle for Glasgow



ReGlasgow





Case study 2: Glasgow Garden Festival

26 April until 26 Sept
1988

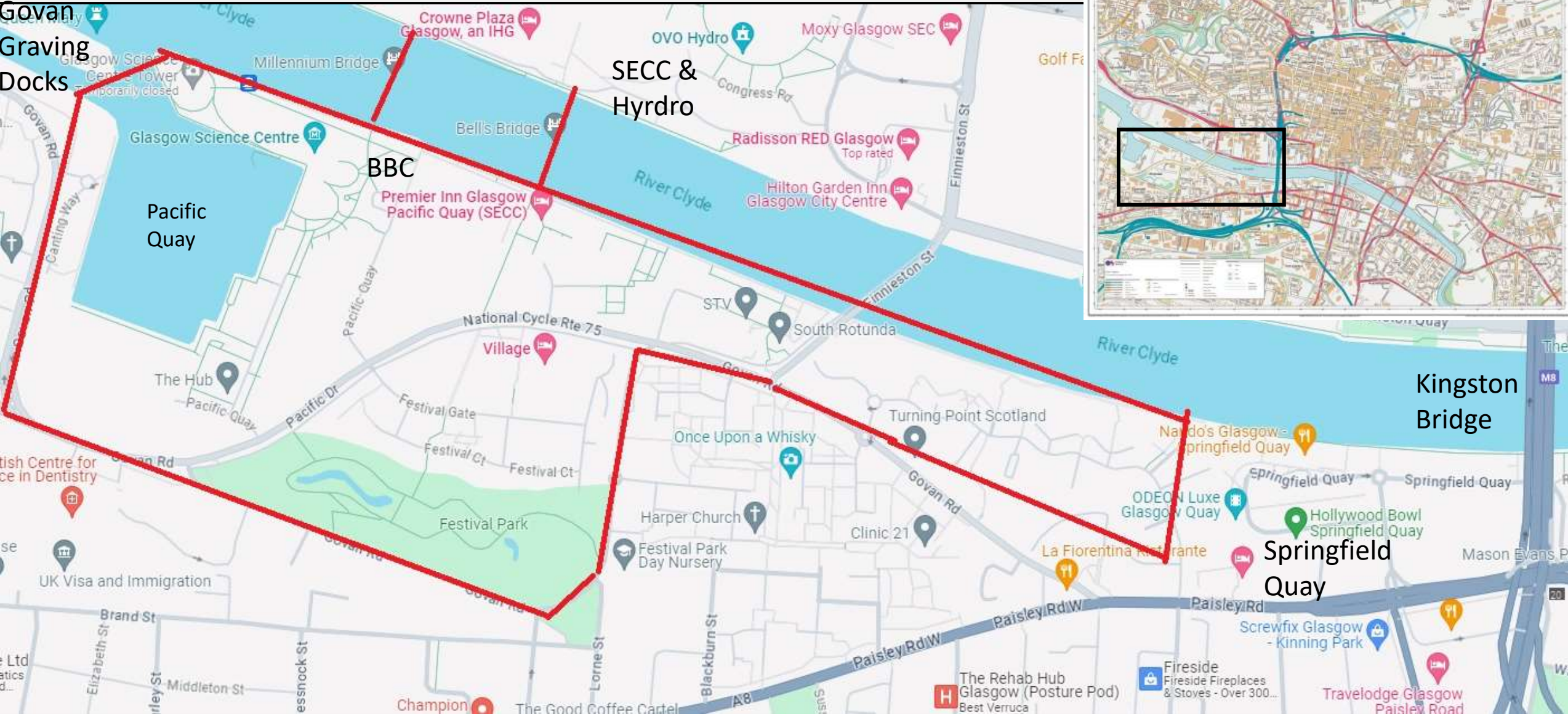
One of a series of
biannual Garden
Festivals in 1980s / 1990s
across the UK

4.3 million visitors

Rebirth of the city &
intended to catalyse
growth



120-acre footprint of the Glasgow Garden Festival





Thematic zones: Science & Technology / Recreation & Sport / Water & Maritime / Plants & Food / Landscape & Scenery / Health & Wellbeing

& Scenery

DISPLAYS & GARDENS

Antonine Garden – Bearsden and Milngavie District Council with Bearsden Horticultural Society	G6.5
Ardnamurchan Almost an Island – General Accident	F3.2
Beach	E3.4
Discover Scotland's Countryside – Countryside Commission for Scotland	F4.4
Dry Meadow	F5.6
Finland Friendship Garden	G6.2
Hortus Scoticus – Glasgow & West of Scotland Horticultural Society	F3.1
Magical Forest – Forestry Commission	F2.1
New Lives, New Landscapes – Joint Council Landscape Institute	G6.1
Playdale Skytown	G5.5
Power of Peas – Scottish Agricultural Industries PLC	G6.4
Scotland/Australia Bicentennial Heather Garden	G6.6
Spirit of the Festival – Morrison Bewmore Distillers	G5.4
Welcome to the Scottish Farm – Scottish Educational Farm (1988) Ltd	G7.1
Wet Meadow	G5.1
Woodland Edge	G5.2
WHERE TO EAT	
Lochan Restaurant	G5.3
EVENTS AREA	
Forest Events Area	E1.4



Coca cola
rollercoaster
© Donald Whammell



Entertainment
/ shops /
exhibitions /
artworks /
restaurants /
trams and
mini-train /
corporate
branding /
bridges over
the Clyde



Harbour Market © Michael Gannon



Floating Tap ©
Richard East



Alamy

After the garden Festival Project....

Investigating the physical and material
legacy of the Glasgow Garden Festival

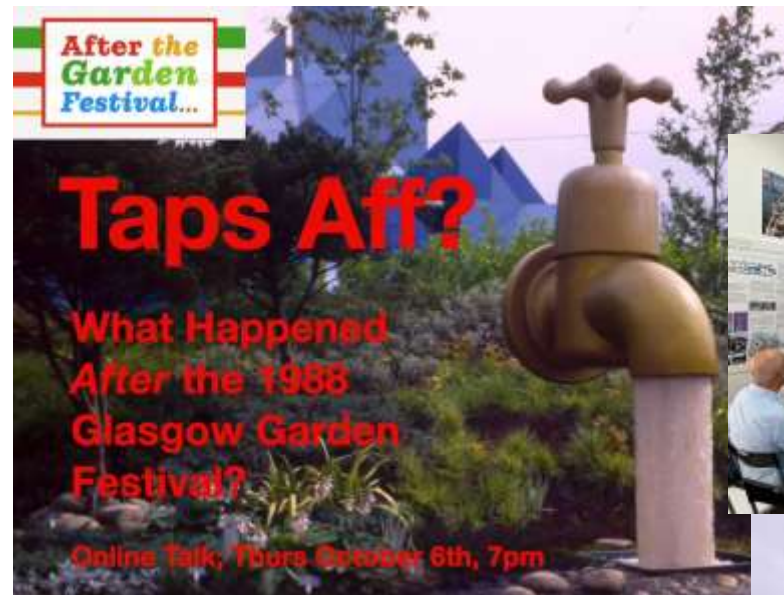
Tracking down every building,
structure & artwork from GGF via
website & citizen contributions

Understanding construction &
dismantlement of a temporary mega-
event through documentary archive
research, visitor photos & interviews

Merchandise

Archaeological component:

- Document surviving traces in landscape through survey work
- Explore hidden survival via excavation
- Research representation of archaeology at the Festival
- Filling gaps between memory & archive



...rediscovering the 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival

The 1988 Garden Festival changed how the world sees Glasgow, and how it sees itself. The buildings, objects and artworks are gone forever – or are they? Visitors remember different things – did you take a ride on the Coca-Cola Roller? It's now thrilling visitors to a Suffolk theme park. Did you see Glasgow from the top of the Clydesdale Bank Tower? It now stands by the sea in Rhyl, Wales.

Donate to us [here!](#)



Coca-Cola Roller

Zone: Science and Technology

Sponsor: Coca-Cola & Schweppes Beverages Ltd

Current situation: **known**



Clydesdale Bank Anniversary Tower

Zone: Water and Maritime
Sponsor: Clydesdale Bank PLC

Current situation: **known**



'Floating tap' fountain/exhibit

Sponsor: 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival Visual Arts Programme

Current situation: **unknown**



The Motherwell Tree (George Wyllie)

Sponsor: 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival Visual Arts Programme

Current situation: **Known**



Dalian, People's Republic of China Friendship Garden

Zone: The Rendezvous

Current situation: **known**



Man With a Fish on his Head (Stan Bonar)

Sponsor: 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival Visual Arts Programme

Current situation: **Known**

Object biographies

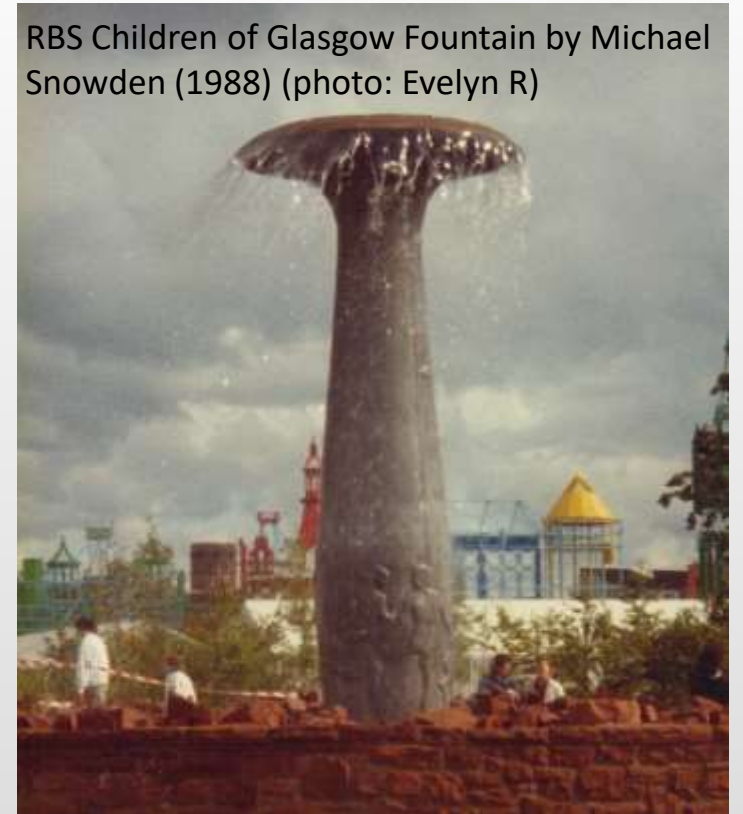


Kelvingrove
(Creative Commons /
Geograph)

Font within Church
Pavilion – Credit:
Jean Reid/New
Glasgow Society



RBS Children of Glasgow Fountain by Michael
Snowden (1988) (photo: Evelyn R)



Current status – in a
Council depot

Renfield Centre,
Bath Street

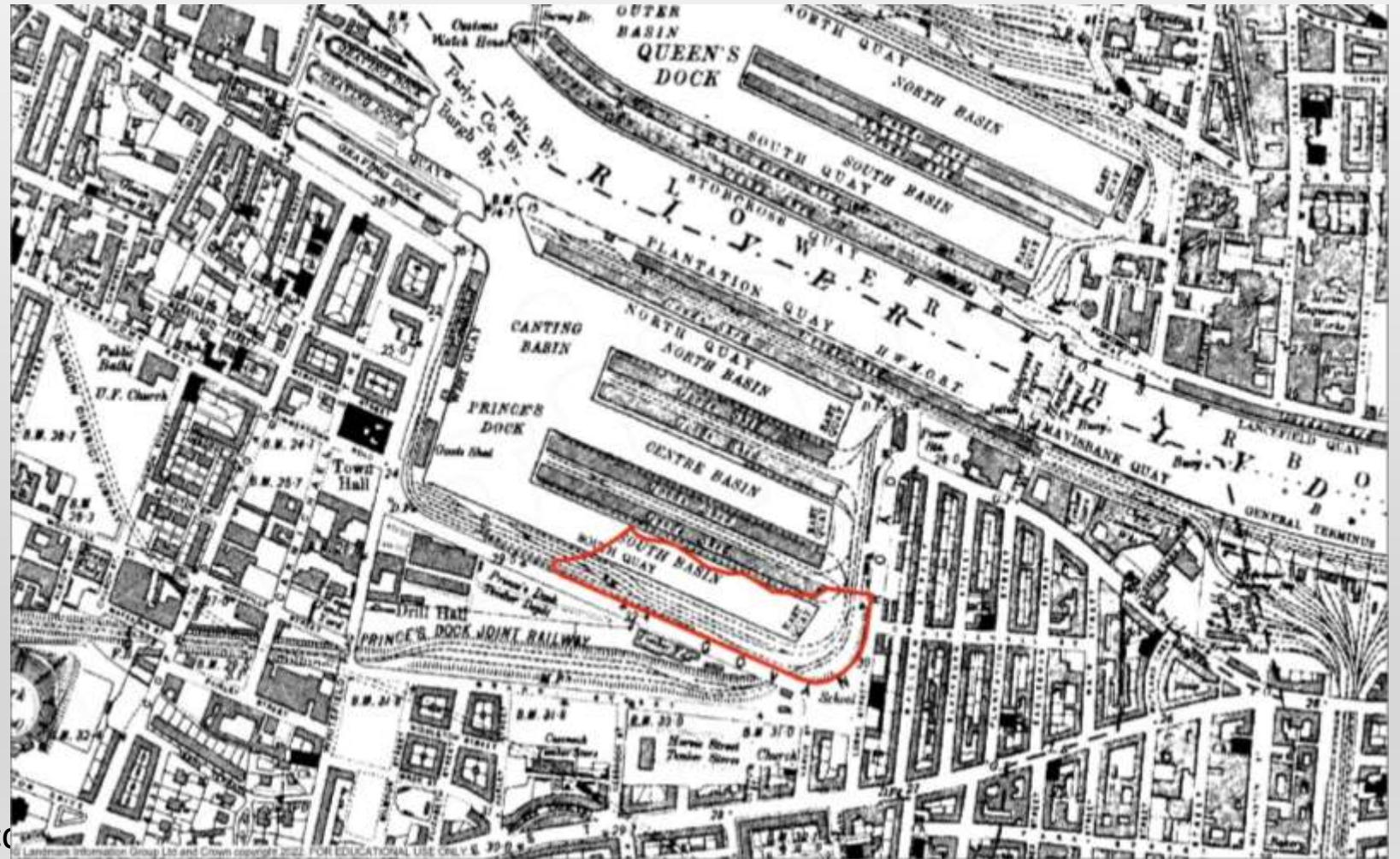
The archaeology of the Glasgow Garden Festival

Festival Park with red outline

GLASGOW GARDEN
FESTIVAL DESK BASED
ASSIGNMENT



Roy Johnson University of Glasgow
Archaeology Student



Desk-based assessment and map regression work undertaken by Becc Younger and Roy Johnson



<https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1685660>



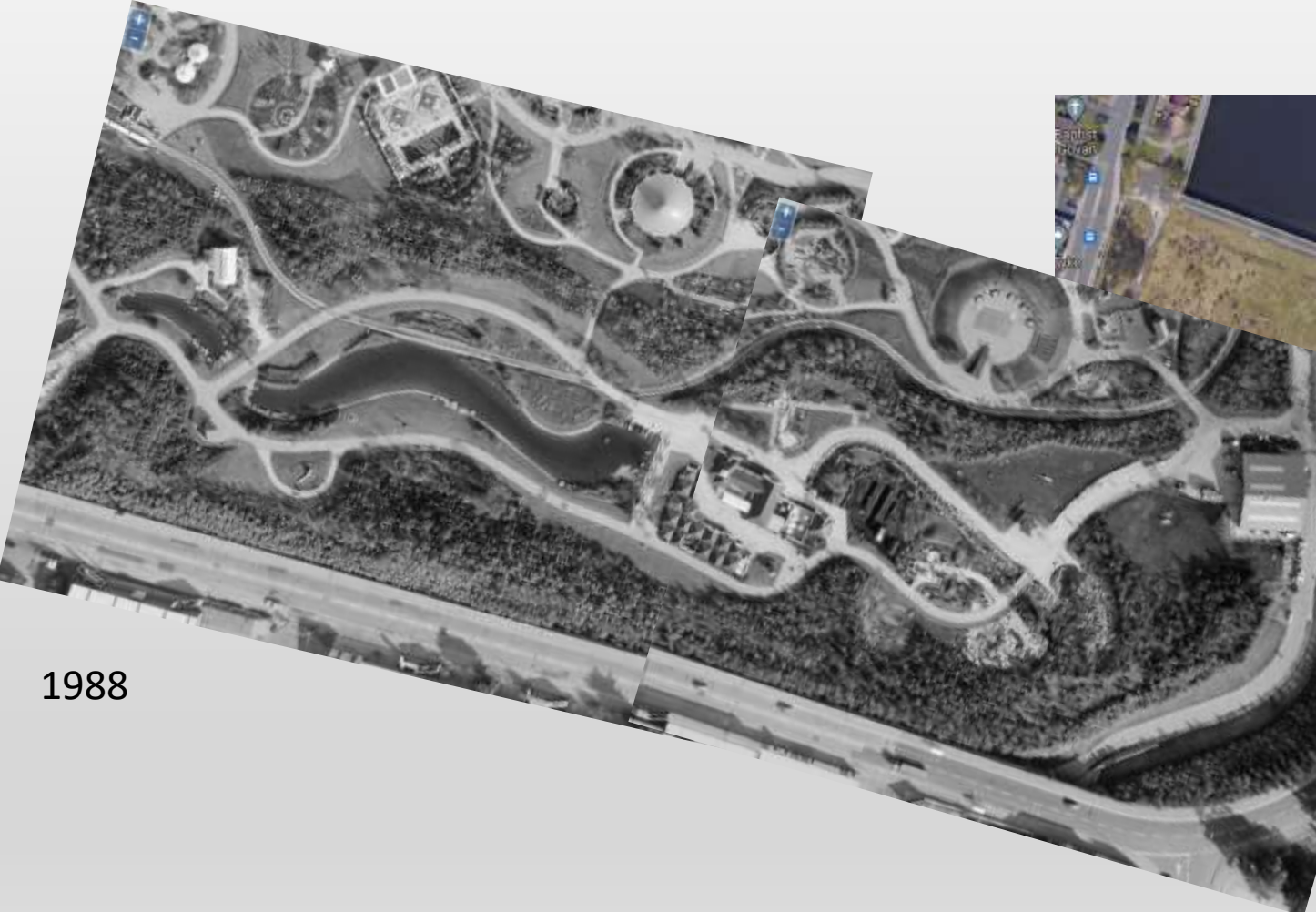
NCAP

Supplied for licensed use only by HES-NCAP
ncap.org.uk/NCAP-000-000-182-639

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/44232/glasgow-govan-garden-festival-site>

Transformation 1986-1989

Digging the Festival Phase 1 May 2022



1988



Festival Park (Google) in 2021



© Glasgow City Council

© Susan Lockyer

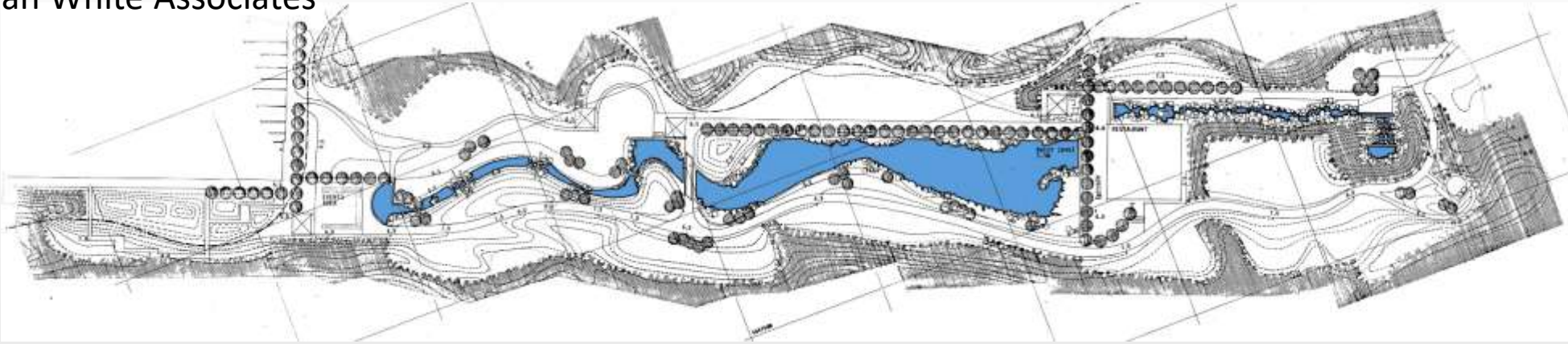


© Susan Lockyer



Feb 1988 © Glasgow City Council



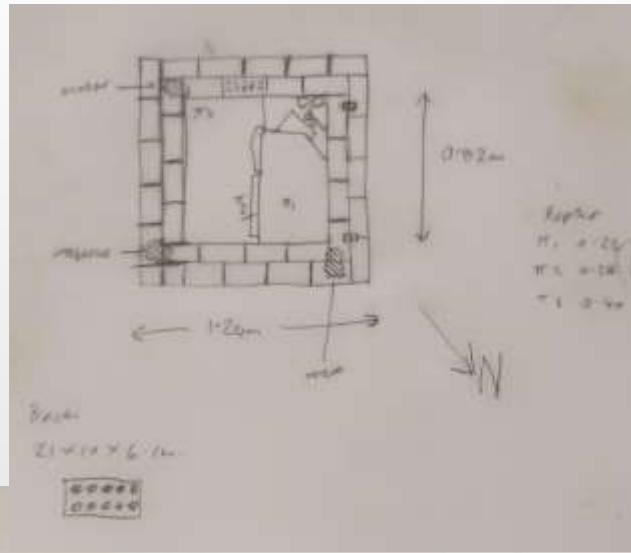


The Waterfall and water system



1987 © Glasgow City Council

The waterfall



Supplemented by interviews with architects & landscaping firms, visitor photos, and architect's drawings

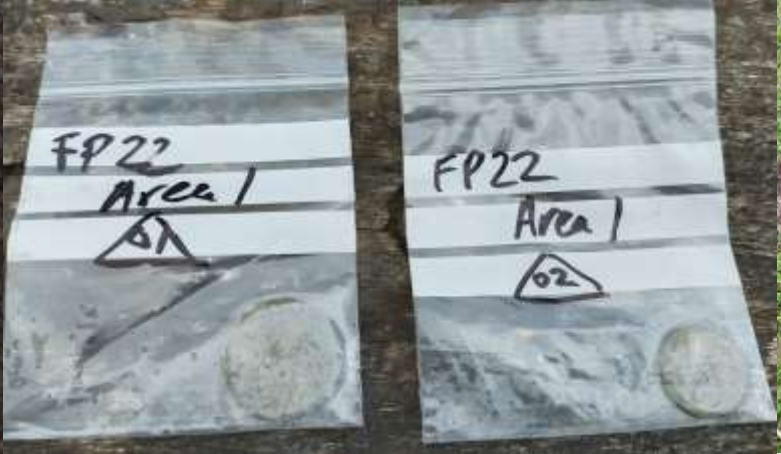
© Ian White Associates



Lochan excavations



© Ross McKay



Material culture of deposition?

Initial analysis and conservation of coins found during the excavation suggest three are from the 1970s

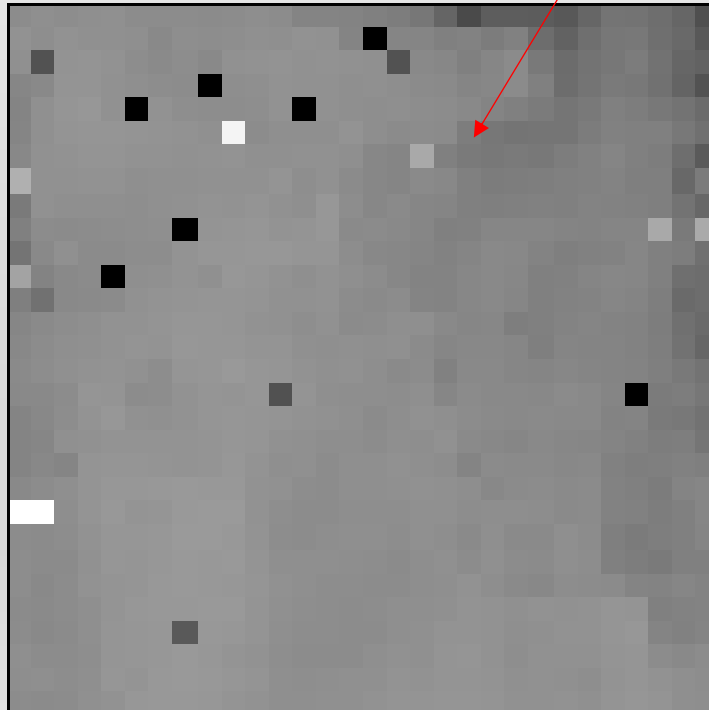
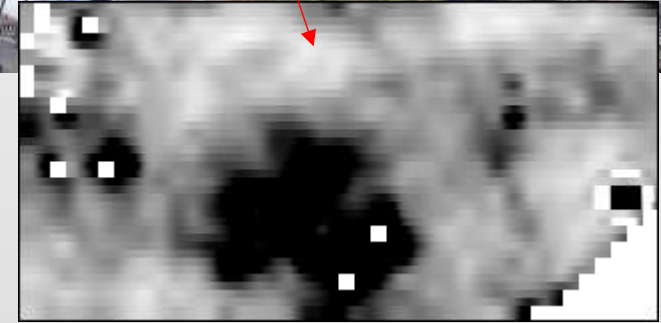
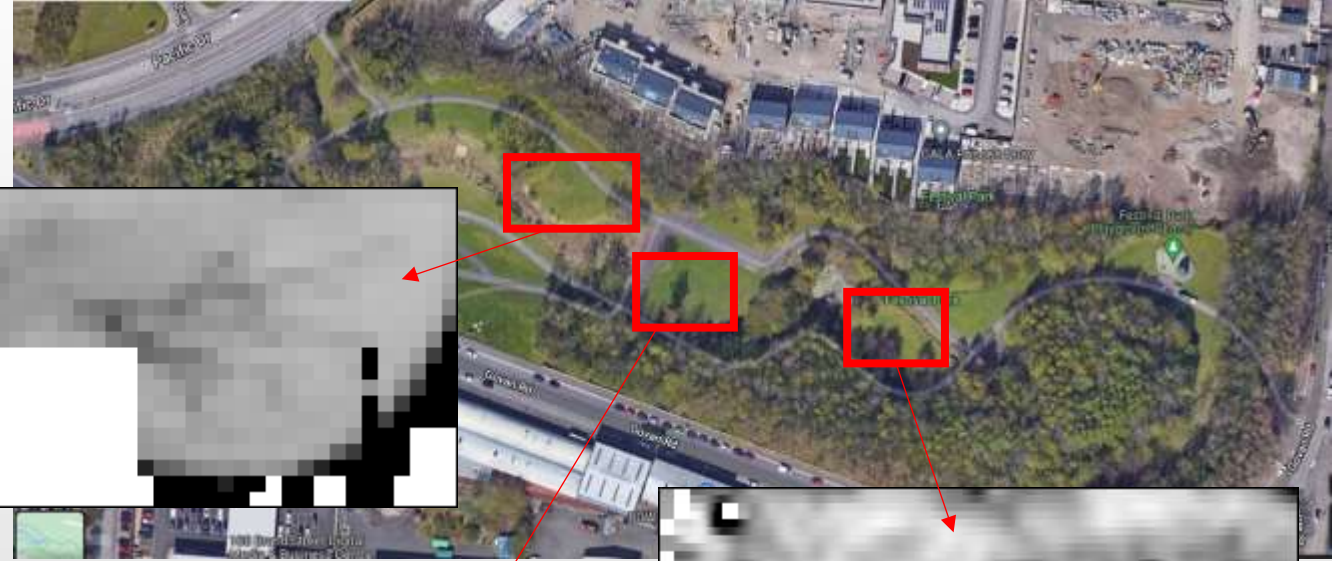


- 1971 2p coin – one of 1,454,856,250 that were made
- 1975 1p coin – one of 221,604,000 (Royal Mint data)



Cleaning, conservation &
photos by Will Murray, Scottish
Conservation Studio

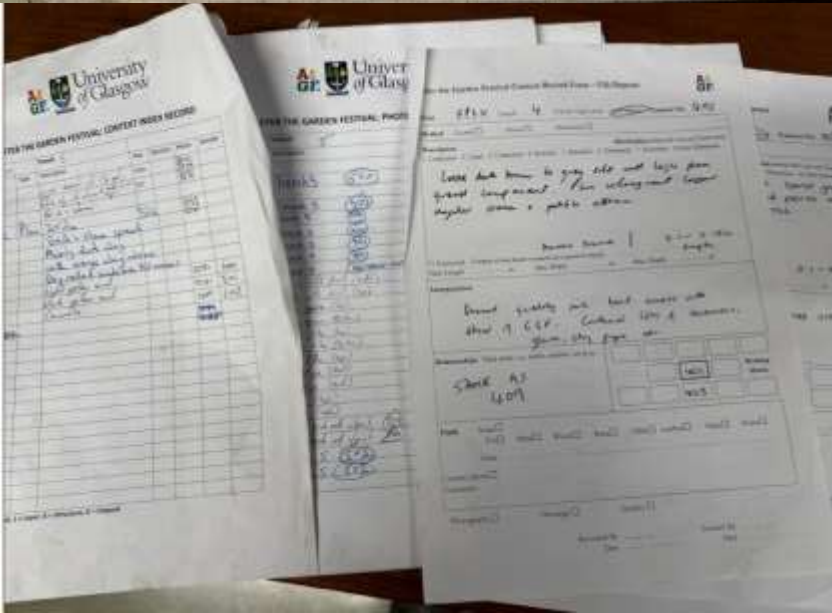
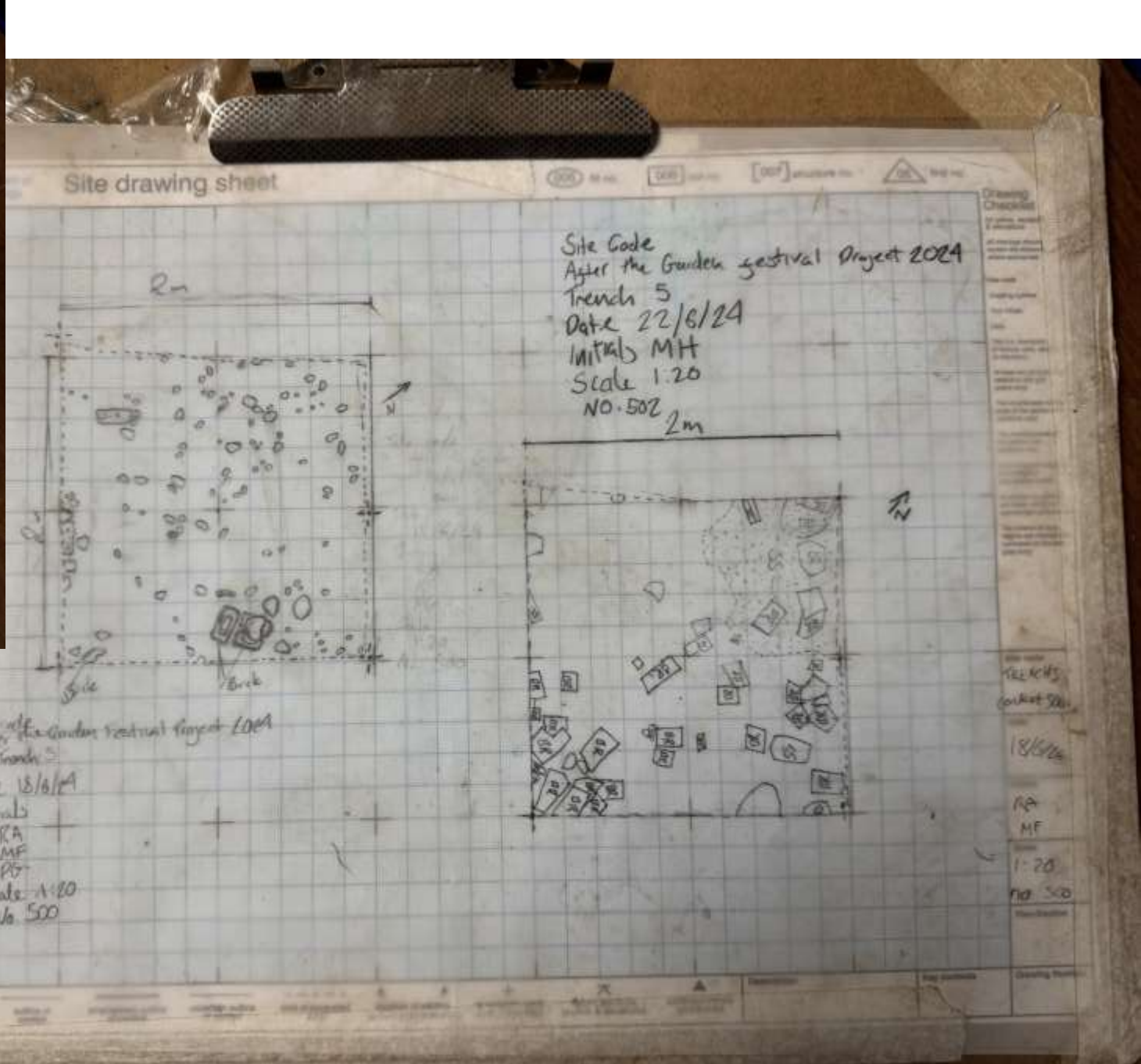
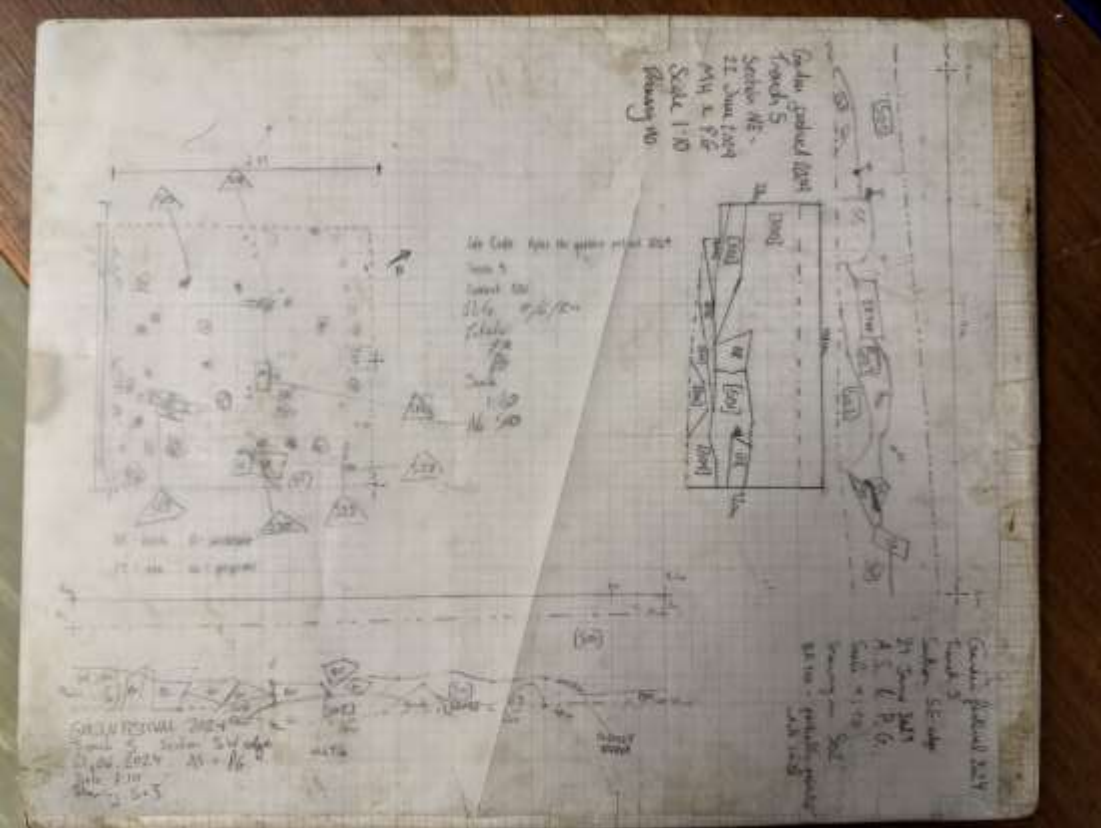
Geophysical survey



Phase 2 excavations June 2024



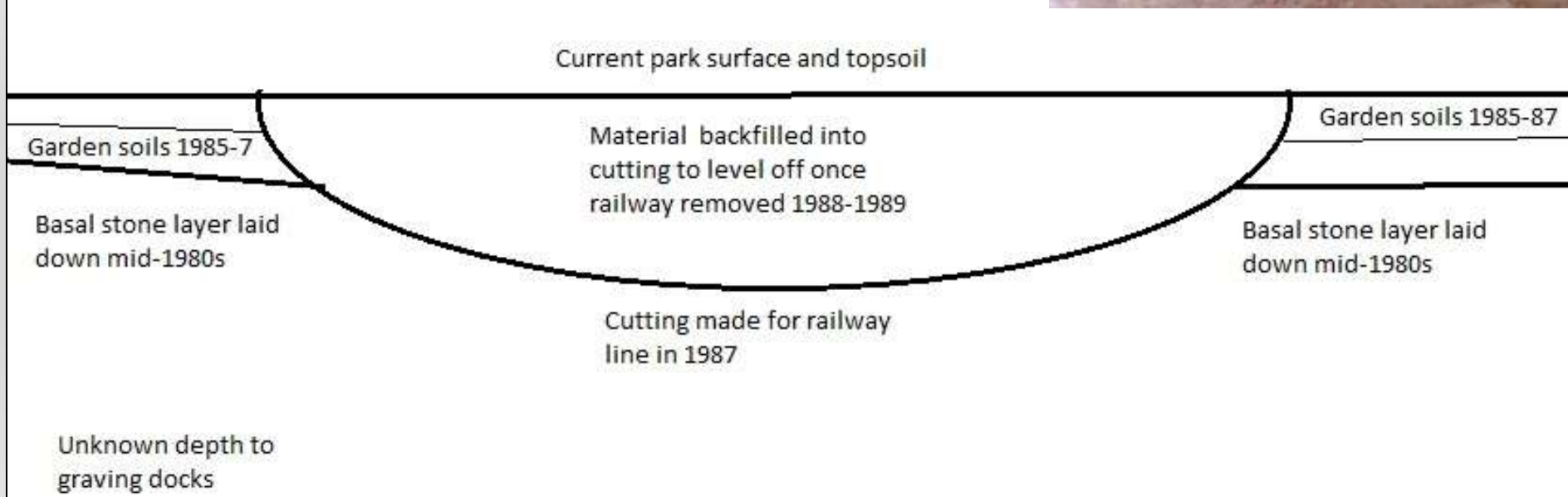
Trench 4 – mini railway line
Trench 5 – Antonine Gardens



Trench 4 – Mini railway line



Rubble extracted
from trench



Glasgow City Council archive photo of railway line construction 1987

Small finds



Photo: Donald Whannell



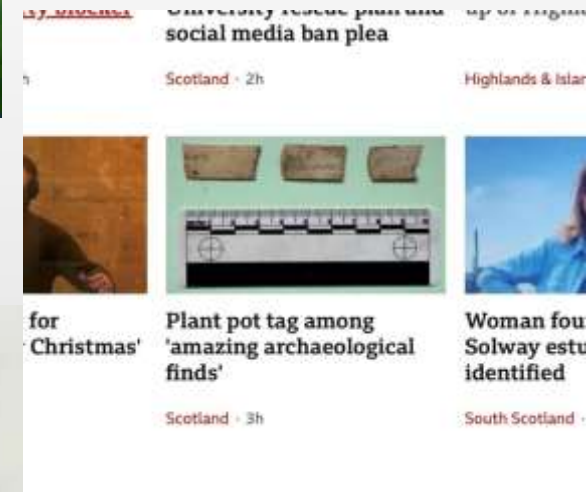
© Mark Thompson

Plant tags

1. Red Campion
2. *Silene dioica*
3. Thyme



© Woodland Trust



GGF construction photo 1987 (c) Glasgow City Council – on the right, a person with red gloves puts a plant tag into the fresh soil

Trench 5



scale 1:100 sept '87 1208/10.
Donaldson Edwards Partnership
Landscape Architects and Landscape Planning Consultants
9 Newton Terrace Glasgow G3 7PJ 041-248-4846
Also at Manchester, Liverpool, Hanley and Cumbria

Walkover survey



Case study 3: Kelvin Wheelies skatepark

- Opened in 1978, buried in 1983
- Glasgow City Council venue
- ‘Second wave’ of skateparks, concrete construction
- Culture of skateboarding in the city and sense Council wanted to get this off the streets
- Survey and excavation in summer 2025 funded by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

Monday – Friday—

Skaters	...	...	...	...	...	20p for two hours
Spectators	...	...	...	...	...	10p for two hours
Hire of pad	...	...	...	...	...	10p for two hours
Hire of helmet	...	...	...	...	...	10p for two hours
Hire of skateboard (not hired at present)						20p plus 50p deposit

Saturday and Sunday—

Skaters	...	...	...	...	...	20p for two hours
Spectators	...	...	...	...	...	10p for two hours



A sense of anticipation....

North Skate Mag

<https://www.northskatemag.com/blogs/north-latest/kelvingrove>



FIGURE 3. Carlsbad Skatepark, San Diego County, California. A: The Beginners' Area (*SkateBoarder*, August 1976, photographed by Warren Bolster; skater: Robin Logan). B: Mogul Maze (*SkateBoarder*, December 1977, photographed by Warren Bolster; skater: Dean Skipper). C: Half-buried mogol maze with the "Overhang" protruding from ground, 2004 (photographed by Dave Bergthold). D: "City of Carlsbad Skatepark and Museum" concept, 2004, by Louise Balma. E: "Save Our Skatepark" (S.O.S.) protest, 2004 (photographed by Dave Bergthold). F: Fragment of concrete retrieved from the bulldozed park curated by Smithsonian National Museum of American History (Catalogue No. 2015.3048.01).

Concrete skatepark globally (source: Quinn & Borden 2023a); Skatepark Heritage Research Group

Kelvin Wheelies skatepark



The Hauf pipe (not Half pipe) Keep of the shrubs!

Photos: Iain Urquhart, Jamie Blair, Graham Nisbet





Kenny Omand (Facebook)

Archive photos shared with me: Graham Nisbet, Isaac Walker, Brian and Allan Noonan

Demolition and burial in 1983

“There was a small band of diehards who continued to regularly skate there, but lack of maintenance resulted in some of the bowls filling up with water. This horrified the council and the decision was made to de-skateify the park. At first, large planters were placed in strategic points (but they were simply dragged aside or skated around). They then poured bricks into all the main bowls (that were painstakingly removed by the diehards) before the final mindless decision was made to bulldoze the ‘hauf pipe’ completely, smash up all the lips and permanently fill them in” (Jamie Blair North Skate Mag)



A ton of bricks cannot stop skateboarders! Photo: Blair Archive



TRAGEDY AT KELVINGROVE

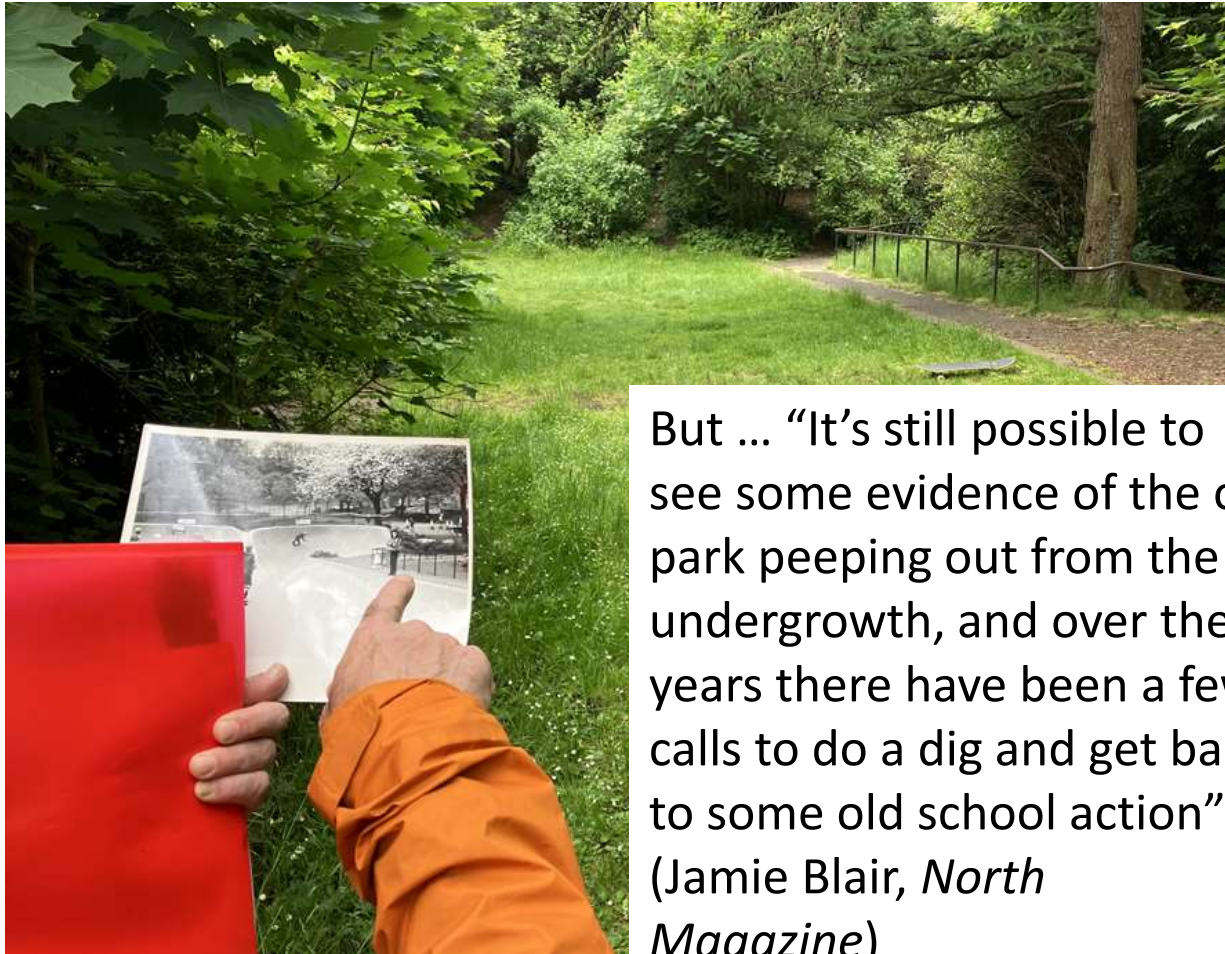
The BMX menace has hit Scotland and caused the partial closure of a skatepark! Kelvingrove in Glasgow has had its halfpipe and bowl filled in with dirt and rubble (as well as the snake run and bazooka and Torpedo runs which weren't any use to skaters anyway) to protect the safety of illicit and unprotected users on BMX bikes! Incredible though it seems and despite loud and long protests from the local skateboard club and of course letters and phone calls from the SSA to the relevant authorities the legitimate and safety gear wearing skateboarders have lost their vertical facilities because of the stupid actions of a bunch of little idiots on bikes who refuse to wear safety gear and weren't supposed to be there anyway! Fortunately at least the slalom run and freestyle areas remain so we can continue to have a presence in the city of Glasgow by staging competitions in those disciplines in the park but the principle of filling in the bowl in particular to the detriment of the skaters while intending to build new facilities elsewhere for the bikers is absolutely crazy! We intend now to back the Glasgow skaters in their call for local authority funds for alternative facilities such as a timber halfpipe.

Meanwhile across in Livingston Kamikaze kids on bikes have left a few teeth in the skatepark but are officially banned and scatter when they see a skateboarder approach as a few bikes have been "removed" from the dangers of the skatepark by the quickest method, i.e. over the climbing wall by irate skaters in the past. As most of the bikes appear to be coming to pieces after a few months or weeks use we hope that this kiddie craze will soon go the way of its forerunners - the yoyo and the hula hoop! (I enjoyed writing that bit)! Skaters are advised to remove any bikes in the vicinity of the skatepark and send their owners off to brain themselves elsewhere! New signs to back up the bike ban will be going up at Rock'n'Roll soon but everyone must help to protect the park with the fate of Kelvingrove and its officials' actions hanging over us as a warning.



The E.T. effect!!

The skatepark today



But ... “It’s still possible to see some evidence of the old park peeping out from the undergrowth, and over the years there have been a few calls to do a dig and get back to some old school action” (Jamie Blair, *North Magazine*)

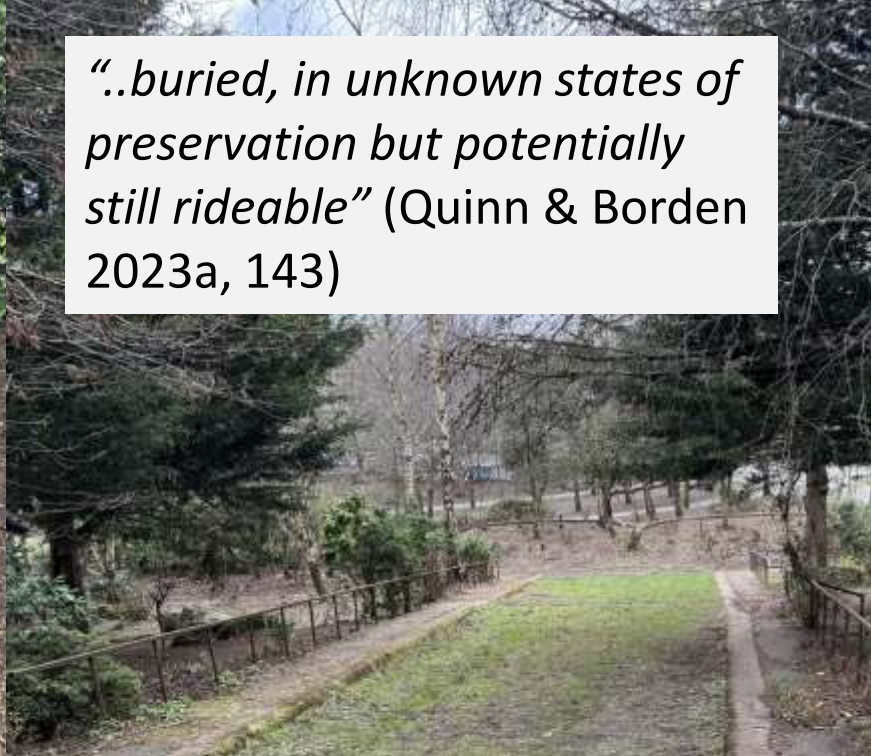
Main slalom run, the last part of the skatepark to remain open



“The original park is still there if in spirit only” (Jamie Blair, interview with Lorna Cummings (2025))



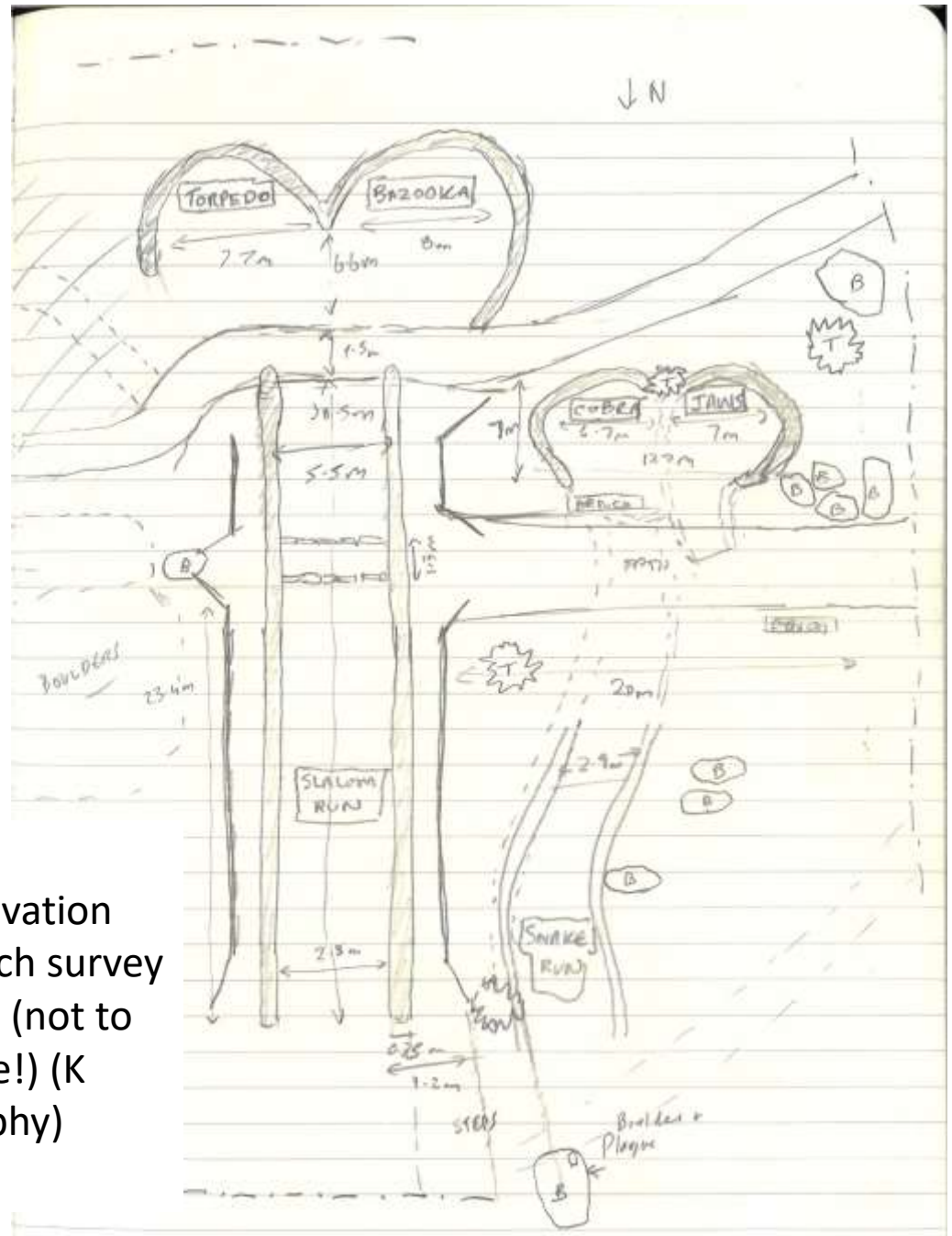
"..buried, in unknown states of preservation but potentially still rideable" (Quinn & Borden 2023a, 143)



Location and survey



Google

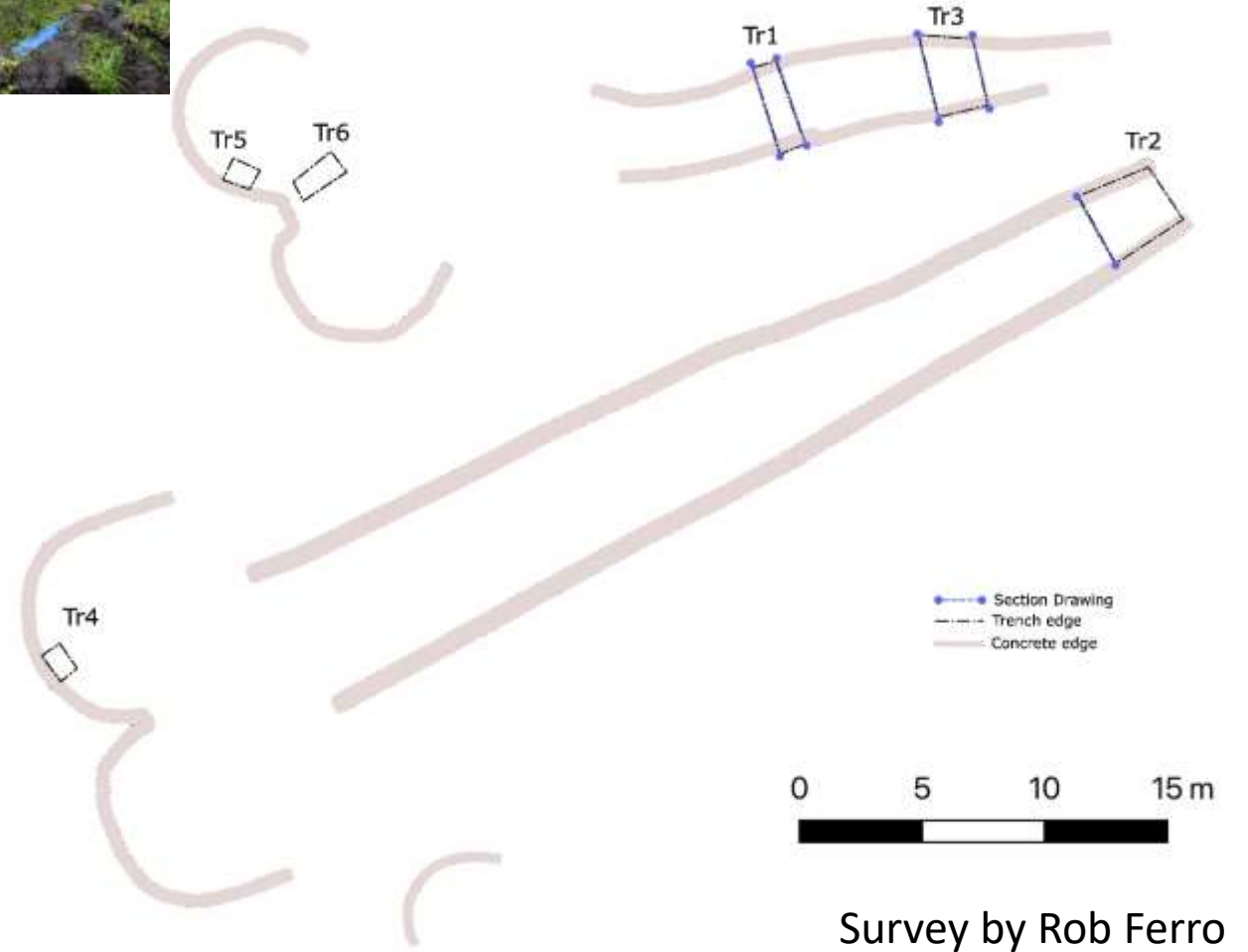


Pre-excitation sketch survey plan (not to scale!) (K Brophy)

Excavation



North 



Survey by Rob Ferro

Snake run



Photo: Brian and Allan Noonan



Trench 1
slot



Trench 3
slot

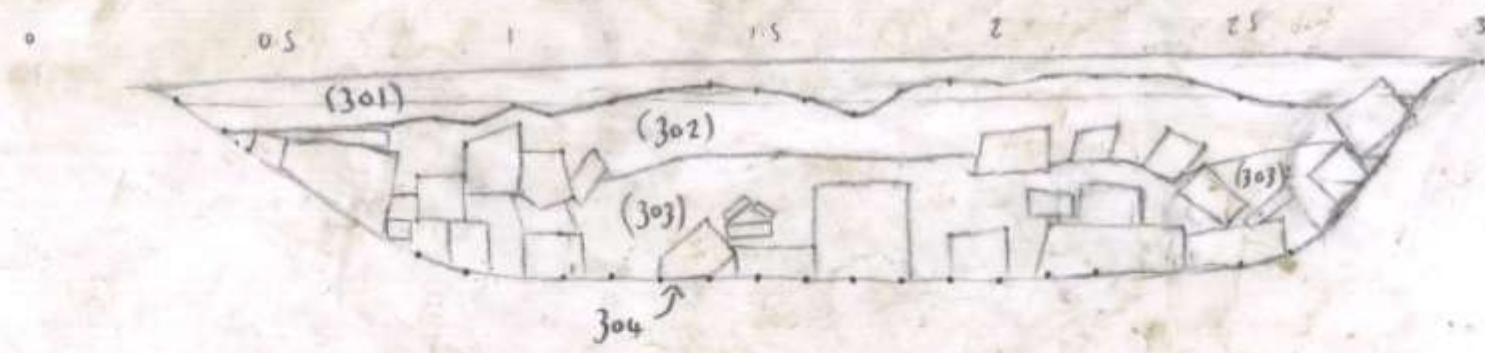
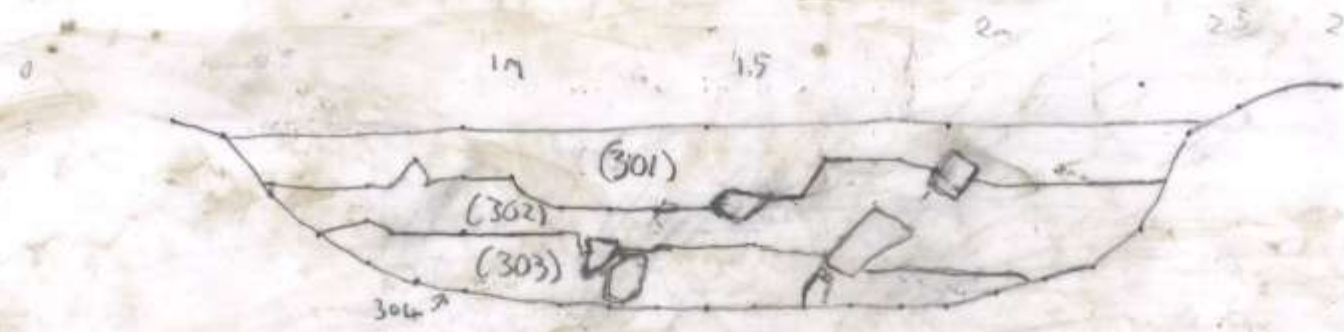
Section drawings from
Trench 3, Snake run

Snake run
section drawing

KW25

TR3

DS AC



Photogrammetry
of Trench 1, Rob
Ferro

Graffiti



Facebook



Brian and Allan Noonan



Rolling into Jaws bowl. Photo: Blair Archive

1979 UK Championship Programme



Graffiti stratigraphy (c1982)



Trench 3, Cobra
run graffiti

Trench 6, Cobra
and Jaws bowls
junction



Trench 4, Jaws bowl

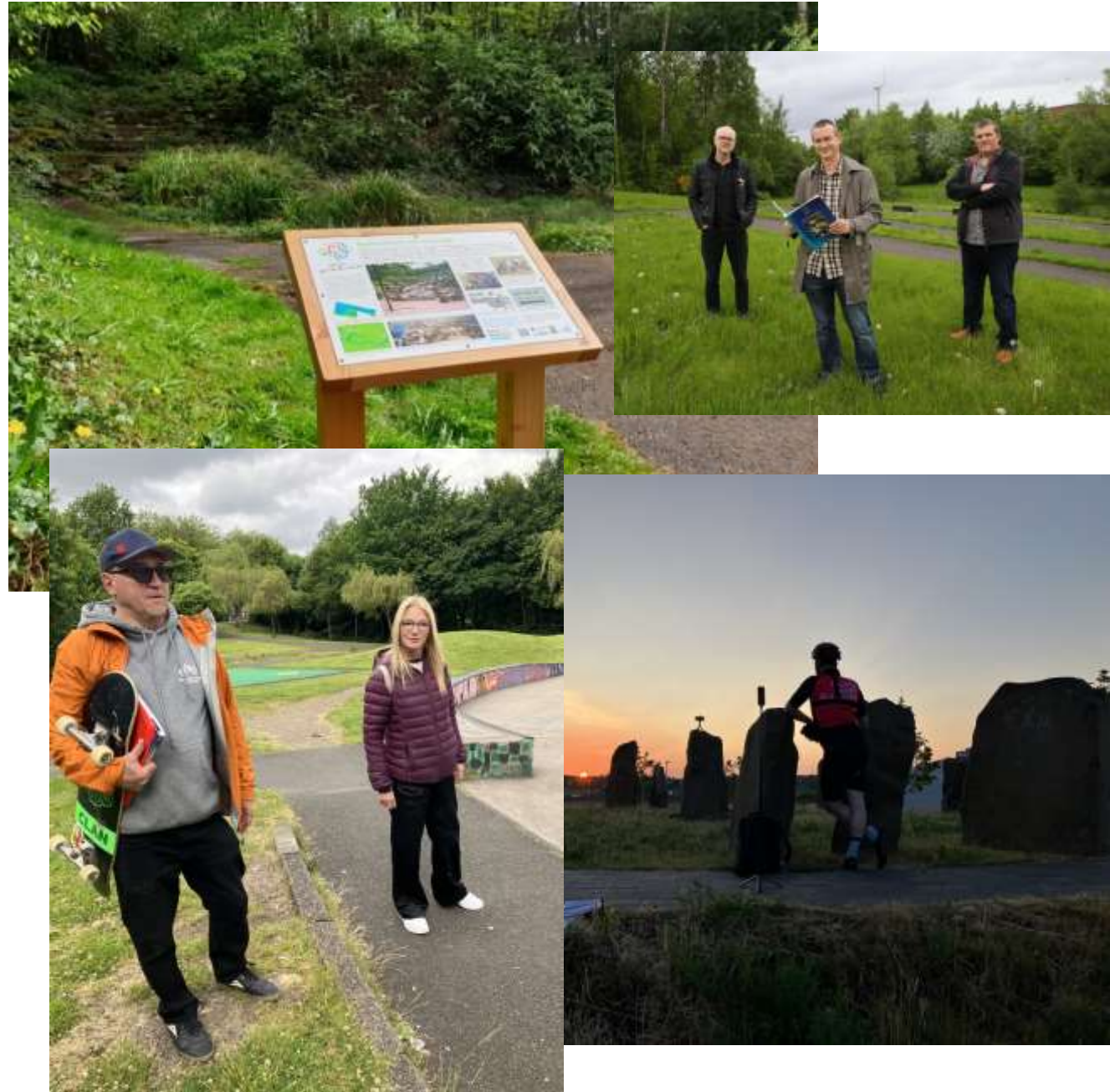
Stuff!



Find out more!
Excavation report should be published Open Access in *Antiquity* journal in the latter part of 2026

Conclusions!

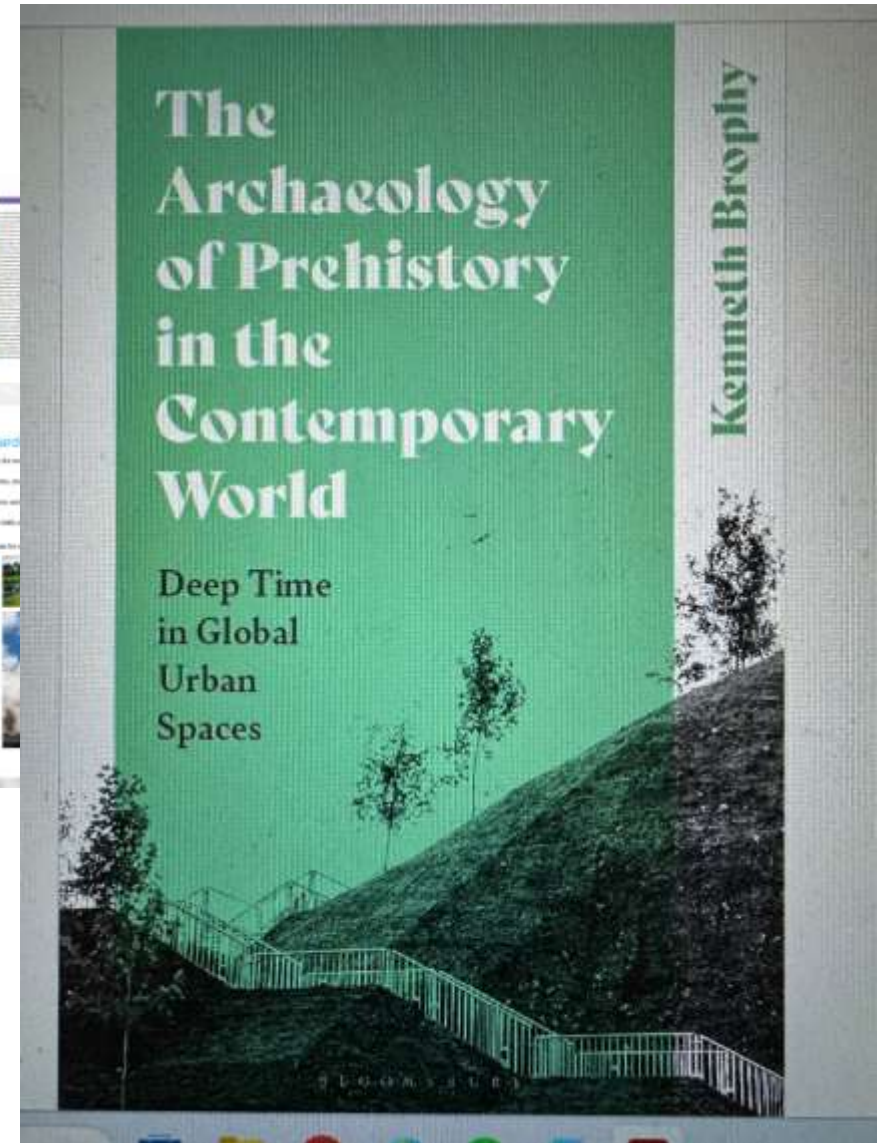
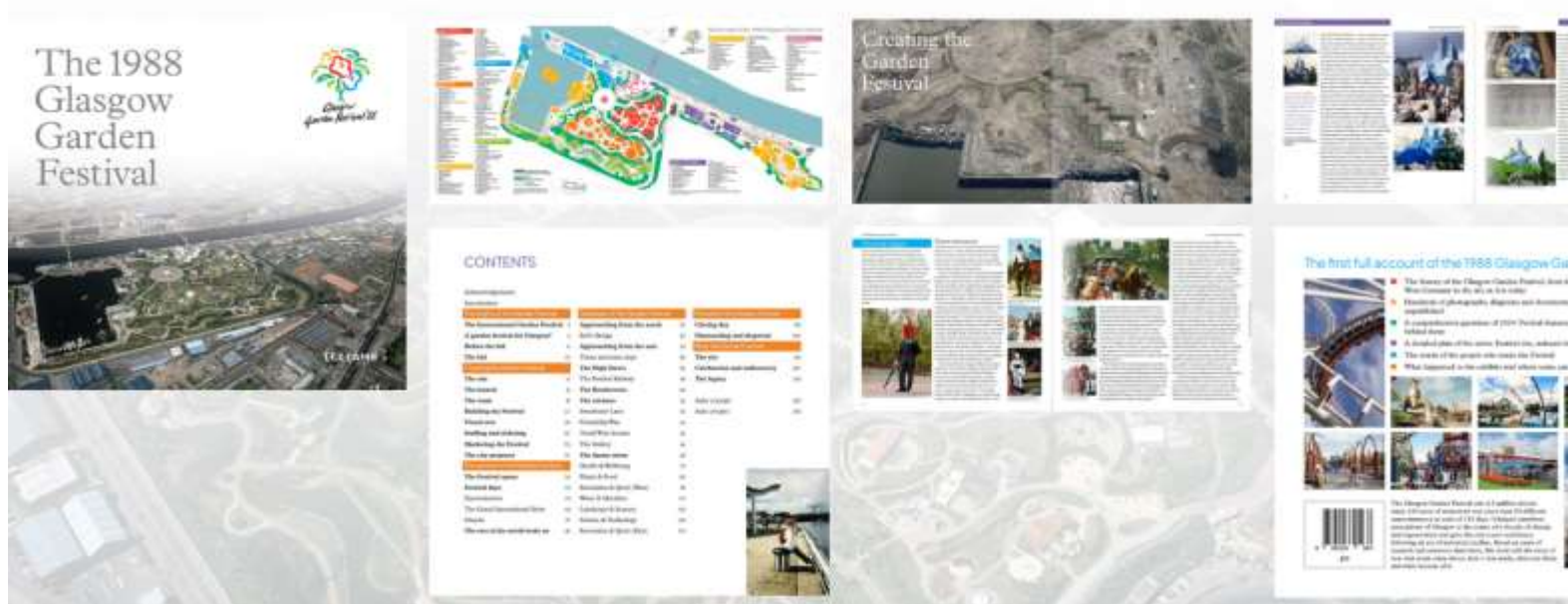
- Archaeological methods and contemporary archaeology can help shed light on aspects of the recent past especially where things have not been recorded properly (or at all)
- But it is very easy for our recent built heritage to be damaged, altered and removed – in ways that older structures are less vulnerable to
- Passionate interest groups can save these places! But what do we do with them?



Glasgow Festival Book by Lex Lamb!

<https://gardenfestivalbook.com/>

Pre-orders being taken now he tells me



Or you can pre-order my forthcoming new book (in the USA only just now!!) but it will be coming out in December 2026 in the UK

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/archaeology-of-prehistory-in-the-contemporary-world-9781350413061/>

Thanks for listening!



<https://theurbanprehistorian.wordpress.com/category/prehistoric-glasgow/>

@urbanprehisto on X

@urbanprehistorian.bsky.social



<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/archaeologyresearch/currentresearch/kelvinwheelies/>

**After the
Garden
Festival...**



<https://www.glasgowgardenfestival.org/>

@AtGF1988 on twitter / X

@glasgowgardenfestival.org.bsky.social