Two towns, a river and two bridges: An exploration of the movement in maps

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Figure 1 Gordon, An outline map of the Firth of Tay and the coast to Fife-ness, c.1636-52 (NLS)

I have spent a lot of time looking at maps, ticking off the places and features – *"two towns, a river and two bridges"* – but, as I reflect, I realise how little time I have spent thinking of what maps tell us about *movement* and how it is this that connects us with how people experienced the landscape in the past. Maps, in this sense, are mutable at each iteration of mapping – new information from the landscape added, other pieces of information removed, while aspects of the landscape are deliberately occluded on the map in order for the viewer to discover.

I have spent a particularly long time looking at the map around Dairsie Castle and Dairsie Church in Fife and that has led to this reflection of the maps and what they tell us about how people moved in the landscape through time, and this issue of mutability.
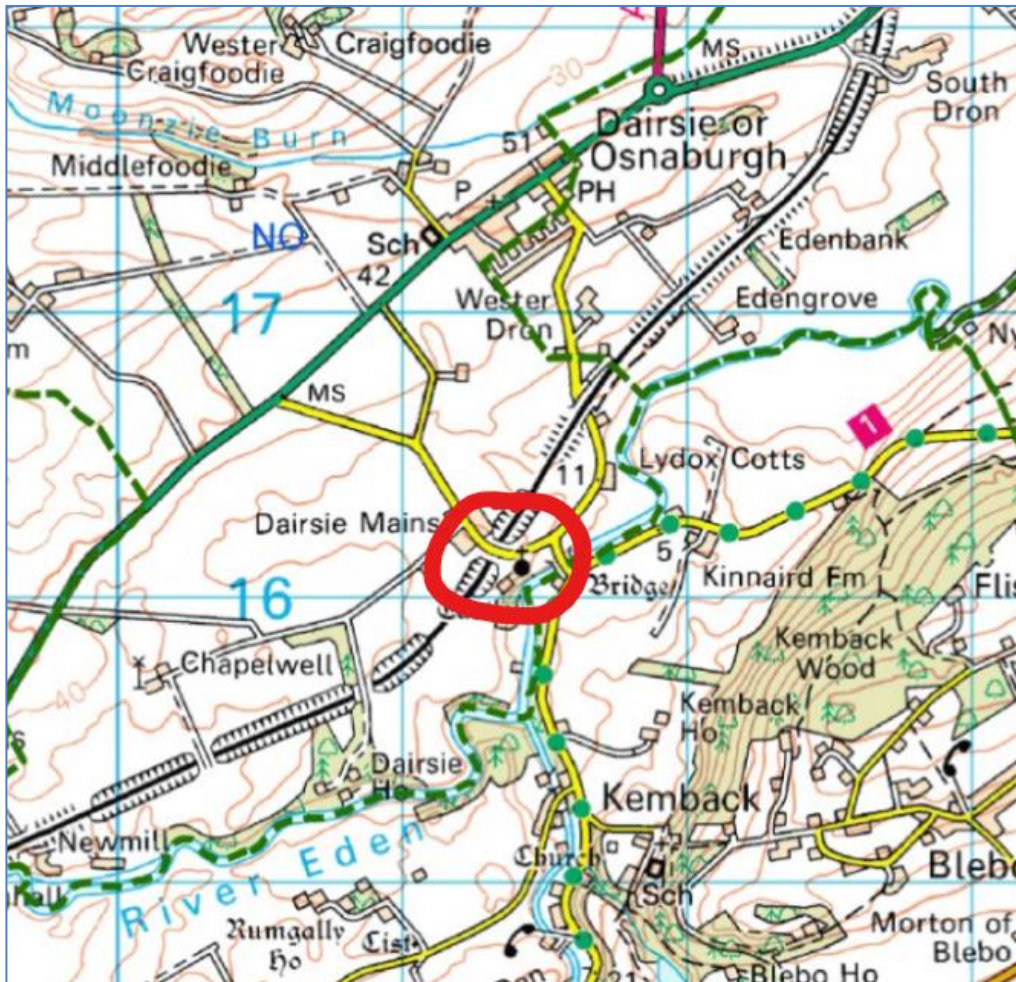

Figure 2 Ordnance Landranger Series. Contains OS open data
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The castle sits on a low hill on the north bank, overlooking the river Eden. Just to the east is the old parish church and just below both is the medieval stone bridge. Crossing the river is clearly important to Gordon when he maps this area in the mid-17th century. When he draws his sketch (above), he only draws two towns, a river and two bridges. Gordon's sketch is sparse, yet he has included the key information needed to enable efficient movement from one burgh to the other. The towns are the two most important burghs in the area, the ancient pilgrimage and university town of St Andrews and the administrative centre Cowpar (Cupar). The river is the most significant watercourse and the two bridges are the easiest crossings of this obstacle.
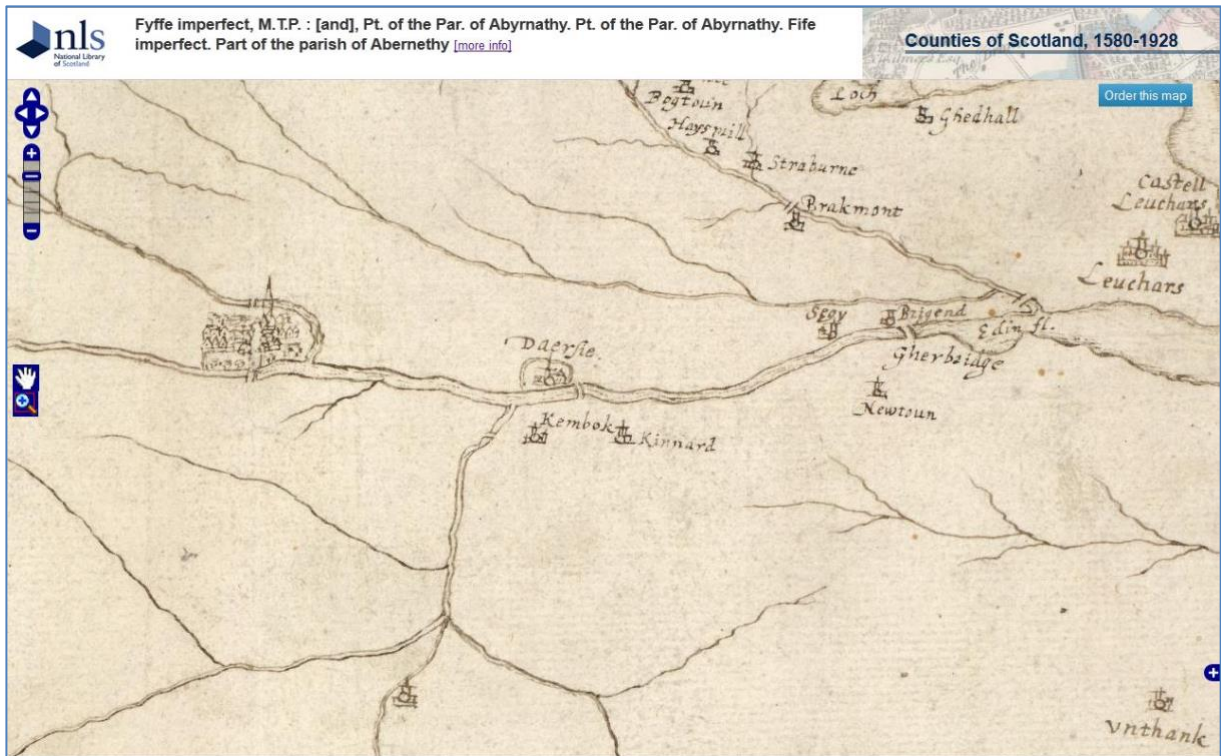
Figure 3 Gordon & Pont Fife imperfect. Part of the parish of Abernethy, c. 1636-52 (NLS)

As Gordon develops his map, he adds smaller villages - places one might want to visit - and the smaller rivers and burns - the obstacles that might impede your route.

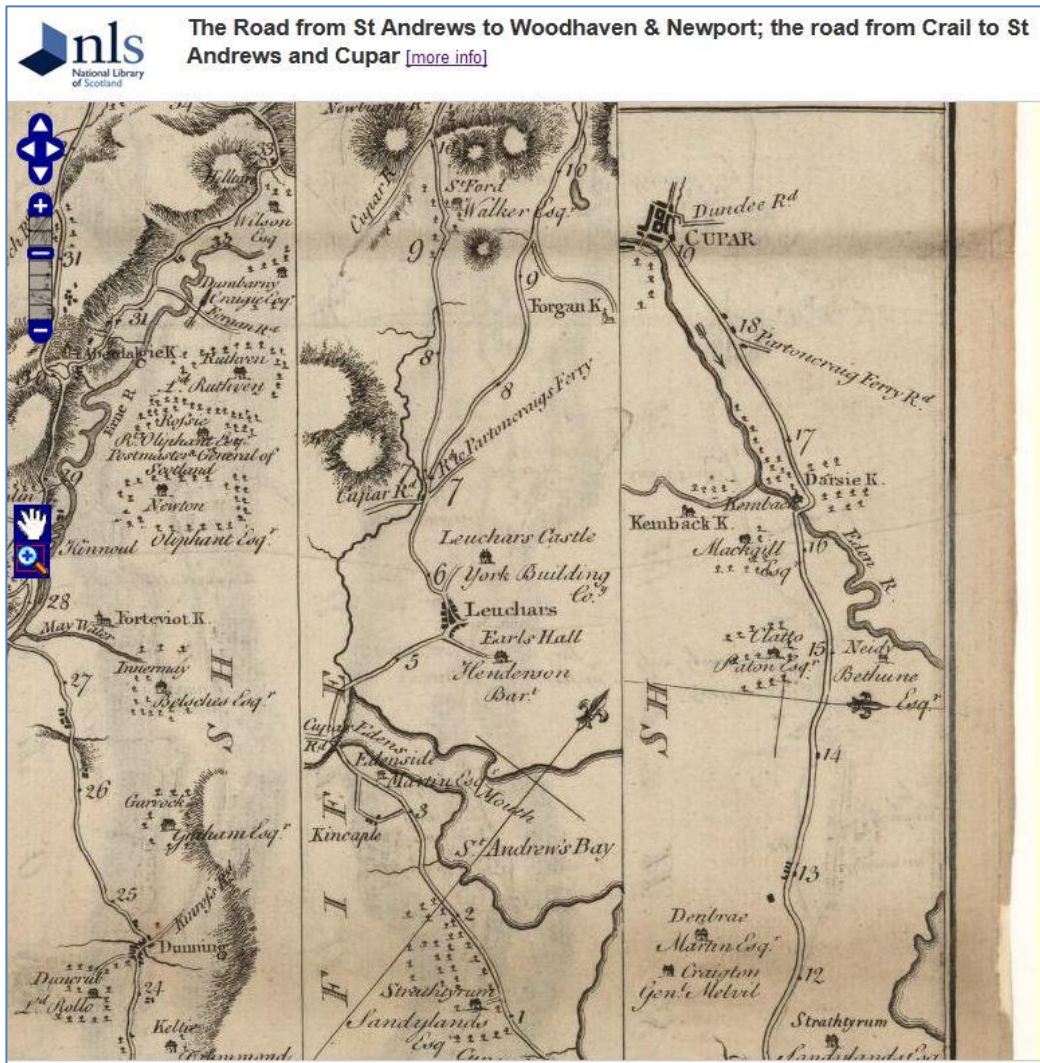Figure 4 John Adair, The East Part of Fife c.1684 (NLS)

Figure 5 Taylor and Skinner, The Road from St Andrews to Woodhaven & Newport; the road from Crail to St Andrews and Cupar. 1776 (NLS)

John Adair is the first to show the road between the two burghs. He shows high ground to the east and farms and mills along the river. Taylor and Skinner's map, nearly 100 year later, shows the road doglegging over the bridge and around the church between milestones 16 and 17. The map shows an important road – a main route bringing pilgrims to St Andrews and goods to market in Cupar. Streams of people, animals and objects moved between the two towns, with one of the few trips written down being the treasurer of James IV, recording in 1496, the giving of a sum of money, 'to a poor wife at the Bridge of Dairsie as the King rode by'.[1]

Figure 6 Roy, Military Survey of Scotland, 1747-55 (NLS)

Roy's map seems to show more detail, with the church at the centre of a circular road. At first sight this looks incongruous, but it is possible this is a stylised representation of the roads and tracks – the movement - around the church and castle.
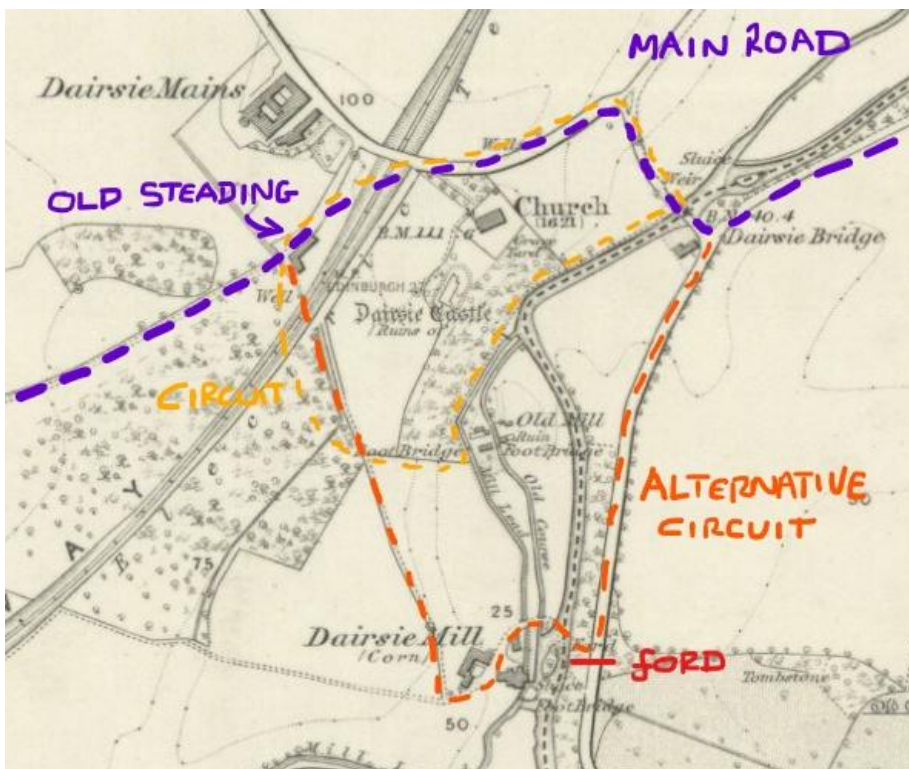

Figure 7. 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map of Fife showing possible old ways of movement around Dairsie Castle. (Map courtesy of the NLS: Fife and Kinross Sheet VIII. SW, Sheet 11 (surveyed 1854, published 1856)) (NLS)

A look at the Ordnance Survey 1st edition shows a track running along the river, from the north end of the bridge to the old mill. This could easily have joined on to the track running from Dairsie Mill to the old steading, which is just south of Dairsie Mains farm. Cropmarks (in brown – in the image below – with interpreted continuation in blue) may also hint that this route was once more curved – as Roy saw it perhaps? An alternative option could be a 'circle' from the ford at Dairsie Mill, up to the steading and back down to the bridge.
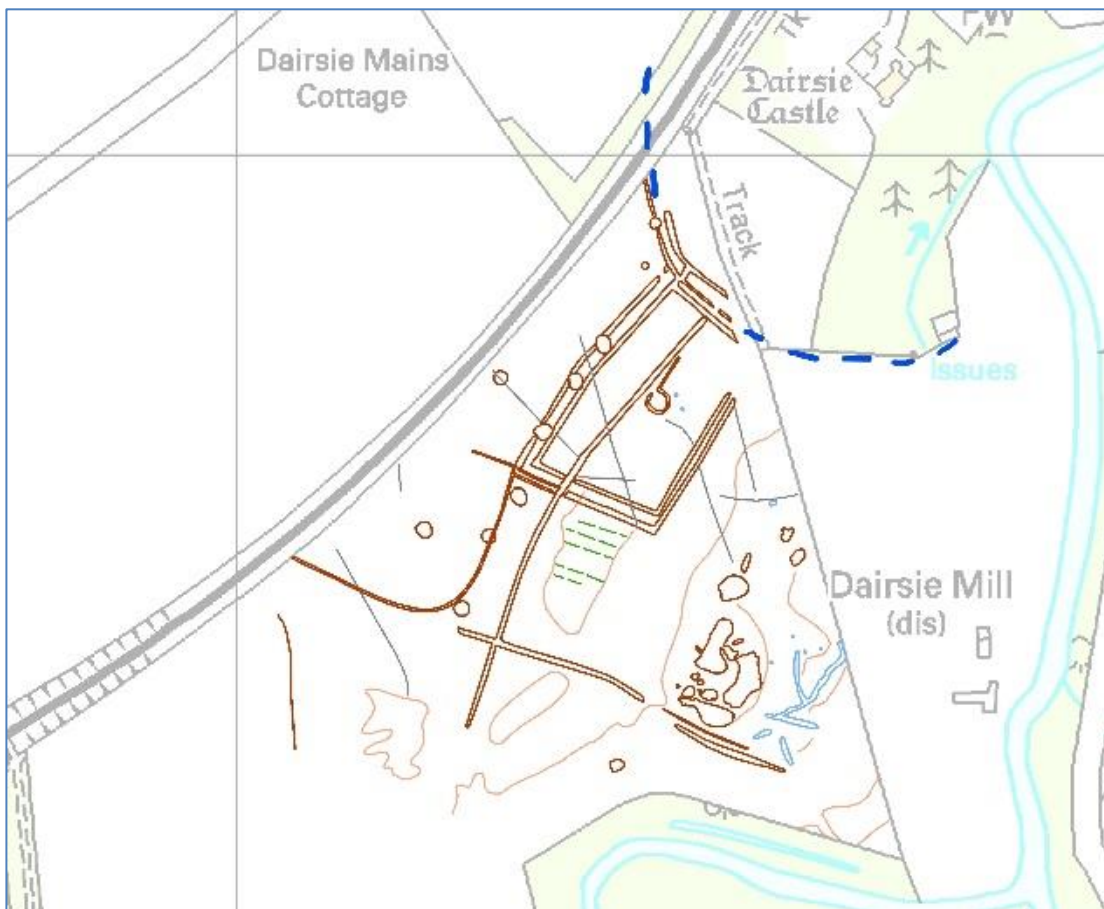

Figure 8 Aerial photographic transcriptions based on cropmarks SW of Dairsie Castle (©HES)
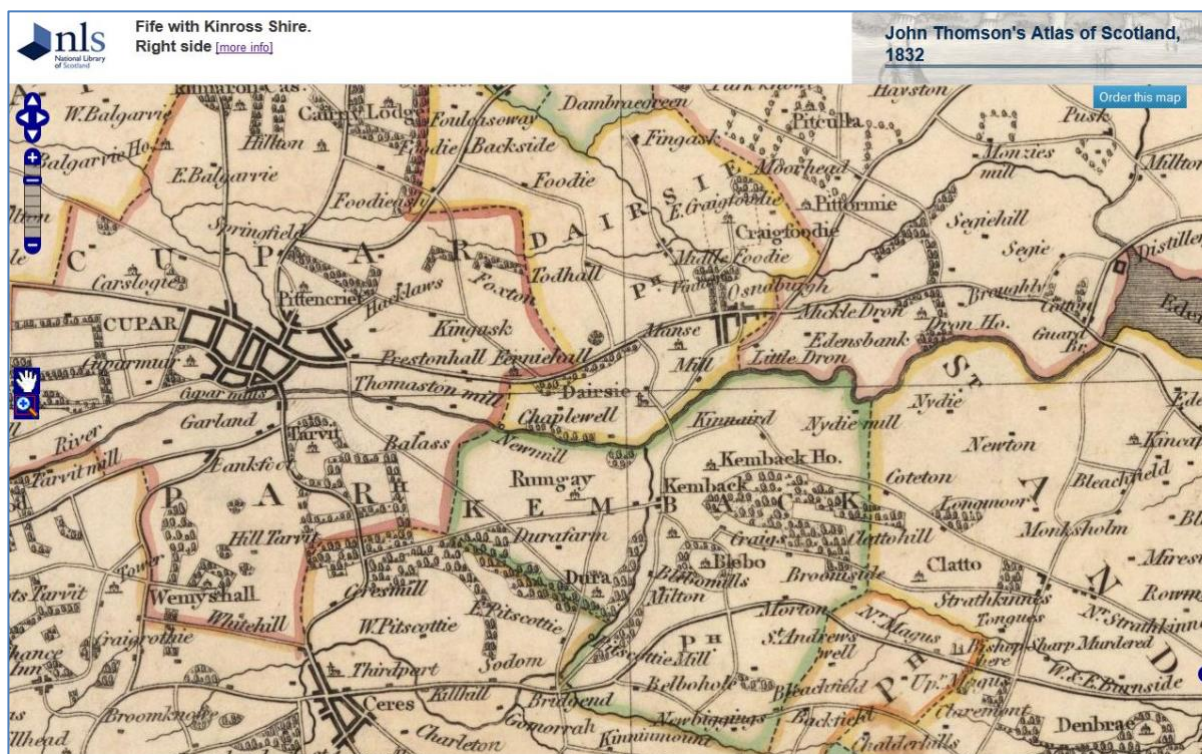
Figure 9. John Thompson, Fife with Kinross Shire. 1827 (NLS)

By the time John Thompson maps the area in the early 19th century the old road has been replaced by a new turnpike between Cupar and Guardbridge and the movement of people around Dairsie Castle and church has changed. After the insertion of the railway in the 1830s/40s there is a rapid reorganisation of the land leading to sections of the 'old' road being abandoned. The road from the church to Cupar via Prestonhall has mostly gone. A new road curves up from the church to the turnpike. The farm of Chapelwell – to the west of Dairsie - has become marooned and the old highroad between Dairsie bride and St Andrews has lost its status. What village there was around the castle and church is replaced by a new, planned weaver's village – then called Osnaburgh, later to be rechristened Dairsie, and the area of the church and castle is itself rechristened back to Diarise Mains.

I say back to, as the earliest historical reference to Dairsie is a charter dated around 1160-62 giving the church and one ploughgate (an area of land which could be ploughed in one year by a team of eight oxen - equivalent to 104 acres) to Thane Ewen MacMaldoven.[2] The charter states that the gift should be, 'from his demesne', a demesne being the land of the local lord, and interestingly a term identified by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as the origin of the Lowland Scots Gaelic corruption *Mains* meaning the main building on the farm.[3] It is likely that Dairsie Mains is an example of this corruption.

To walk in this landscape now is to move along new roads and small fragments of the old main road. The old roads and tracks have been subsumed back in to the fields. By the Ordnance Survey 3rd edition in 1900 many are no longer shown on the map. Thus, it is not only the mutability of the map at each iteration, but that the landscape itself is changeable. Mapworking on two fronts. The old ways have been lost in the landscape, but some survive, in the old maps waiting for us to find them and to walk along them again.
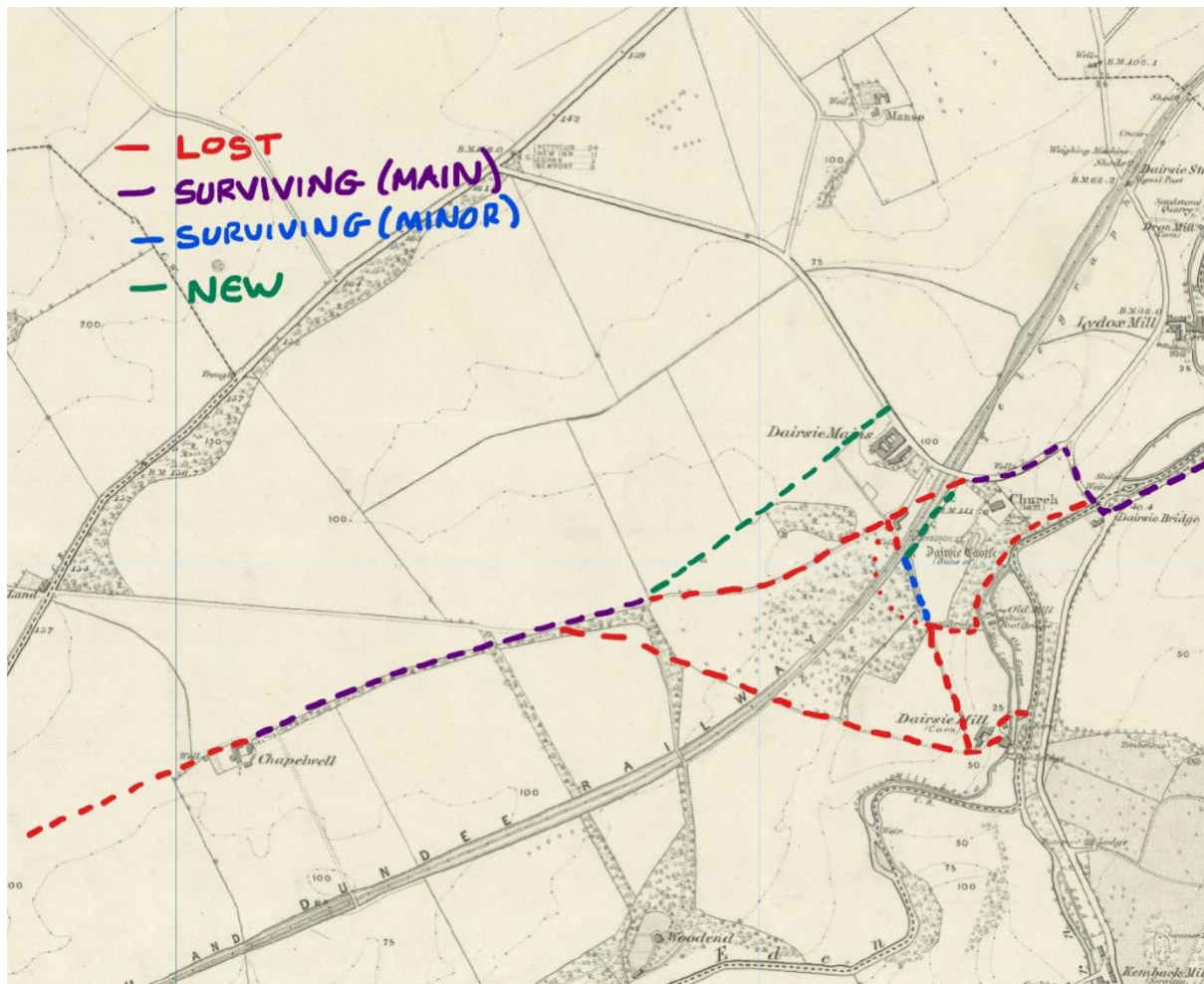
Figure 10. 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map of Fife showing the lost ways to move around Dairsie. (Map courtesy of the NLS: Fife and Kinross Sheet VIII. SW, Sheet 11 (surveyed 1854, published 1856)) (NLS)

Endnotes

[1] *'Annual Excursion: Saturday 3rd June 1893',* Trans Edinburgh Architect Ass, 2: 132-5

[2] *People of Medieval Scotland*, Doc: 2/10/35 (SEA, i, no. 154)
http://www.poms.ac.uk/db/record/source/1273/# [Accessed 23 January 2018]

[3] *People of Medieval Scotland*, Doc 2/47/1; 'Mains', *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 2007

Maps

Adair, John, (c. 1650-1722), The East Part of Fife
http://maps.nls.uk/view/00001009#zoom=5&lat=3328&lon=3217&layers=BT

Thomson, J, and Johnson, W, (1827), Fife with Kinross Shire.
http://maps.nls.uk/view/74400166#zoom=5&lat=7652&lon=3617&layers=BT

Robert & James Gordon, (c.1636-1652), An outline map of the Firth of Tay and the coast to Fife-ness
http://maps.nls.uk/view/00000668#zoom=4&lat=1358&lon=4591&layers=BT

Gordon, Robert, (c. 1636-52) & Pont, Timothy, (1560?-1614), Fife imperfect. Part of the parish of Abernethy
http://maps.nls.uk/view/00000675#zoom=4&lat=2427&lon=4530&layers=BT

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6 inch map of Fife and Kinross Sheet VIII. SW, Sheet 11 (surveyed 1854, published 1856))
http://maps.nls.uk/view/74426828#zoom=6&lat=8163&lon=9154&layers=BT

Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 6 inch map of Fife and Kinross Sheet VIII.SW (1893, Published 1895)
http://maps.nls.uk/view/75530947#zoom=5&lat=3211&lon=4839&layers=BT

Roy Military Survey of Scotland, (1747-1755), British Library Maps C.9.b 18/2f
http://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/index.cfm#zoom=14&lat=56.3470&lon=-2.9461&layers=roy-highlands

G Taylor and A Skinner's Survey and maps of the roads of North Britain or Scotland, (1776), The Road from St Andrews to Woodhaven & Newport; the road from Crail to St Andrews and Cupar.
http://maps.nls.uk/view/74400403#zoom=5&lat=6145&lon=2463&layers=BT

Links

https://canmore.org.uk/site/32943/dairsie-bridge

https://canmore.org.uk/site/32942/dairsie-castle

https://canmore.org.uk/site/32904/dairsie-old-church