



PAST

Peeblesshire Archaeological Society Times
Spring issue / April 2018

Annual Report 2017-2018

Lecture summaries

As usual, the arrival of Spring means we have come to the end of our programme of talks. As in previous years, this issue of the newsletter provides an opportunity to recall the wide range of topics that have been covered by our guest speakers.

Back in September, the lecture programme was given an excellent start with a talk by **Dr Margaret Maitland** (National Museums Scotland) which took us from the north of Scotland to the sands of the Nile. In her presentation, '**Pioneering Scottish Archaeologist Alexander Henry Rhind and The Tomb at the National Museum of Scotland**', Margaret traced the story of Rhind from his early life and his ground-breaking excavation of a broch at Kettleburn in his native Caithness to his investigations of an undisturbed ancient tomb at Thebes near modern Luxor.

Sadly Rhind developed TB while still a young man, and decided to go to Egypt in the hope of a more suitable climate. He corresponded with eminent Egyptologists of the time, learned quickly and soon obtained permission to dig. In Scotland, Rhind had pioneered a systematic approach to excavation and he brought this to bear in his work in Egypt, in particular in his investigation of the tomb at Thebes.



Portrait of Alexander Henry Rhind by Alexander S Mackay
© Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

The focus of a recent, hugely successful temporary exhibition in the National Museum, the tomb in question was originally built for a Chief of Police and his wife around 1290BC, shortly after the reign of Tutankhamun and around the height of the ancient Egyptian empire. Over the following centuries it was looted and reused several times, leaving behind a collection of beautiful objects from various eras. In her talk, Margaret showed how these and objects found in other tombs nearby give a vivid sense of how burial in ancient Egypt changed over time.

The Tomb's final use occurred around 9BC, shortly after the Roman conquest of Egypt, when it was sealed intact following the burial of an entire family whose names were still identifiable from rare funerary papyri full of family information. Even their family tree could be constructed! The tomb then lay undisturbed until it was excavated by Rhind. He died only a few years later at the age of only 29.

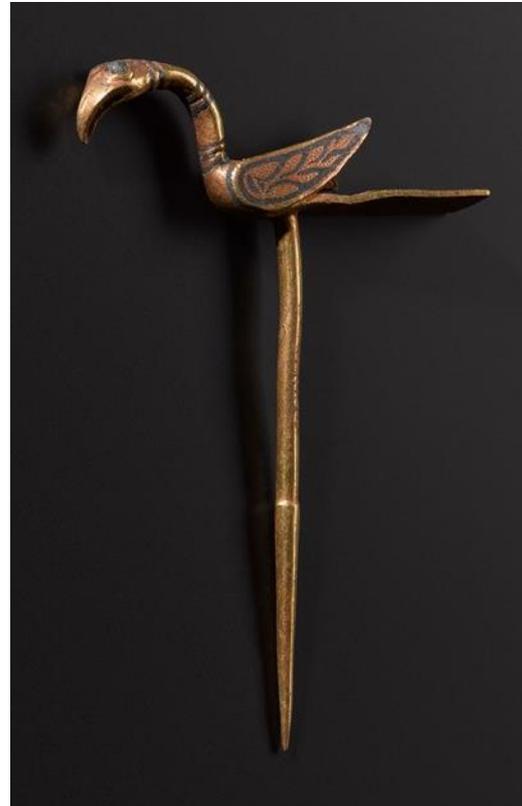
The speaker for our October meeting was **Andrew Nicholson** (Dumfries & Galloway Council) on the subject of '**Excavating the Galloway Hoard**'. A full house heard an enthralling talk about the discovery and excavation of the spectacular Viking Age hoard found in Galloway in September 2014.

As the Council archaeologist, Andrew was contacted after metal detectorists discovered a number of silver armrings and ingots. Circumstances were such that an immediate excavation was deemed necessary. In the event, it proved to be the largest hoard of Viking Age objects found in Scotland for over 150 years, containing over 100 items, with material from Britain, Ireland, Western Europe and beyond. It includes over 70 silver armrings and ingots, a Carolingian silver vessel, Anglo-Saxon and Irish brooches (some unique in form), a unique gold pin and a large decorated cross, as well as a very significant group of early medieval textiles which poses a particular challenge to the conservators!

Buried at the beginning of the 10th century AD, the hoard opens a fascinating window on a formative period in the story of Scotland, illustrating links to the wider world and giving a glimpse of the superlative craftsmanship of the period.

By coincidence, the date of our talk coincided with the announcement by National Museums Scotland that it had achieved its fundraising target of £1.98 million in order to acquire the hoard on behalf of the nation.

Their programme of conservation and research is sure to unlock further secrets of the hoard, and over the coming years we look forward to hearing more about this amazing find.



The unique gold bird pin from the Galloway hoard © NMS

The meeting of the Tweeddale Society held on 14 November was designated as the annual joint meeting of our two societies. An excellent presentation was given by **Rosemary Hannay** (recently retired from her post as Curator of the Tweeddale Museum) on '**W & R Chambers: Sons of Peebles, National Figures**'. Rosemary charted the lives of William (1800-1883) and his brother Robert (1802-1871) from the family's early years in Peebles through to the eventual success of their publishing business in Edinburgh, which coincided with the rise of mass publishing, the growth of the self-education movement and recognition of the value of social improvement (for a fuller summary of Rosemary's talk see **PAST**, Winter Issue/February 2018, 4-6).

Later in November, many of us enjoyed an excellent talk by **Andrew Jepson** (Archaeology Scotland) on **'Stobs Camp: Past, Present and Future'**, about the ongoing project designed to explore and commemorate this internationally important military site in the Borders. At various times, from the early 20th century onwards, Stobs was used for army training, as an internment camp and to house prisoners of war. Today, it is a site of major archaeological and historical importance owing to the quality of the surviving remains.

Within Scotland, no other site exists where this variety of roles is represented in one place and none has the quality of surviving remains visible, ranging from standing buildings to the well-preserved training ground with its firing ranges and trenches. In particular, as we continue to commemorate the centenary of the First World War, Stobs is recognised as an internationally important site relating to Scotland's preparation for the war and subsequent handling of prisoners during that conflict.

In his talk, Andrew described the story of Stobs and the current multi-stranded project being carried out with the aim of promoting understanding and greater awareness of the site. After setting the scene, Andrew outlined the results so far, ranging from fieldwork to desk-based activities such as genealogical research and oral history recording.

A site visit to Stobs, led by Andrew Jepson, will form a major part of our summer field trip to be held on Sunday 1st July (see separate circular for details)

In January, we were delighted to welcome **Strat Halliday** who gave us insights into **'Forts and Fortification: regional patterns in the Scottish Iron Age'**. Strat showed how Peeblesshire has played an important part in the study of Iron Age hillforts in Scotland, being the first county to be studied at the end of the 19th century by the pioneering antiquary, Dr

David Christison. The pattern that he established in his great survey published in 1898 was to provide the cornerstone to every distribution published since, and has been only truly superseded at a national scale with the publication in 2017 of the Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland (see <https://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk/>).

Four years in the making, the Atlas is the most complete dataset on hillforts ever assembled and allows us to examine this key monument of the Iron Age landscape at both national and local scales. However, Strat noted how one of the first problems for the creators of the new Atlas was to agree the definition of a hillfort – especially when it came to ensuring that Scotland's many small forts received proper recognition! The final definition adopted was that the site had to meet two of three criteria including topographic position, scale of enclosing works, and size of the area enclosed.

The strength of the Atlas lies in its consistency, which is allowing various patterns in the data to be teased out. For example, the 5th century BC seems to be a critical time, with marked changes in the form and extent of defensive construction visible across Britain, while in Scotland a distinctive series of oblong, vitrified forts can now be dated to between 400 and 200 BC. Bringing his presentation to a close, Strat exhorted us to explore what the Atlas had to offer – especially as a starting point for exploring sites in the field.

In February, we were very pleased to welcome **Dr Graeme Cavers** (AOC Archaeology Group) to give an illustrated talk about the results of his current excavations on the prehistoric loch village at the Black Loch of Myrton. In a fascinating talk entitled **'Living on the Loch in the Iron Age'**, Graeme explained how the wet, peaty soil conditions at this site have resulted in the remarkable preservation of organic remains, providing unprecedented opportunities for understanding the structure of a 2400-year old settlement.



Drone aerial photograph of the stone-walled fort on the summit of Black Meldon
© Stephen Scott

Situated near Monreith in Dumfries & Galloway, the existence of a possible crannog at the Black Loch of Myrton had been known since the 19th century when some excavation was carried out by the local landowner, Sir Herbert Maxwell.

The site was then largely forgotten until re-discovered during modern agricultural drainage works in 2013. Several seasons of excavation have now been carried out and these have shown that rather than being a typical crannog—i.e. an artificial island with structures constructed on top—the site comprises the remains of an early Iron Age lochside settlement or loch village, dating from around the 5th century BC.

Even at an early exploratory stage, the unusual nature of the site and the quality of the survival of the archaeological evidence meant that Black Loch made national news. Later, the results of the first full excavation season featured briefly in an episode of BBC 4's *Digging for Britain* series hosted by Professor Alice Roberts and broadcast in March 2016.

Drawing on the results of a further two seasons of fieldwork, Graeme's fascinating talk provided PAS members with an opportunity to hear the very latest information about this nationally important site (for a fuller summary see forthcoming blog on PAS website).

In March, as our final invited guest speaker of the 2017-2018 session, we were delighted to welcome **Alan Hunter Blair** (GUARD Archaeology Ltd) to give a presentation on '**Neolithic Halls, Bronze Age roundhouses and a late Bronze Age hoard at Carnoustie, Angus**'. Alan (or simply Blair, as he is known to friends and colleagues) described the results of excavations carried out by GUARD, across an extensive area of ground in Carnoustie over a six-month period in 2016-2017.

Although there had been some previous finds in the area, nothing was known on this site. During the course of the work, no less than 14 prehistoric structures and 28 prehistoric pit groups were uncovered and a total of 1.8 hectares of topsoil was stripped.

Three clear major periods of occupation are represented, but we must await further dating and the evaluation of finds to determine the full story of the occupation of the area. The structures comprised two rectilinear timber post-built structures, one of which is likely to date to the early Neolithic period; parts of two elliptical shaped timber post-built structures; seven circular timber post-built structures, and a stone founded structure. A further two putative structures were identified, one centred around an area of heat-reddened sand and the other associated with an occupation layer containing frequent prehistoric pottery and lithic finds. Adjacent to one of the circular structures or round houses, a spectacular Late Bronze Age hoard was discovered.

However this was an excavation that kept on producing surprises. For example, at 35m in length and 9m in width, Structure 8 - the Neolithic hall - is the largest such building so far found in the UK. Blair showed examples from elsewhere in Scotland, all previously dated to between around 4000 and 3500BC.

The roundhouses on the other hand are of a form and size comparable with other Angus sites, and are likely to be Iron Age in date; again, radiocarbon dates are awaited to permit detailed interpretation.

One structure (Structure 9) is centred on an unusually large heat-reddened area of sand, possibly suggesting industrial activity such as metal working.

The most eye-catching find was the Late Bronze Age hoard, discovered during the topsoil stripping. The hoard comprises a bronze spearhead with gold decoration, laid alongside a bronze sword with a pommel, the remains of a scabbard and scabbard fittings, and a disc-headed pin, all contained in a shallow pit. Unusually, there are traces of the textiles used to wrap the spear and sword. Analysis of the gold suggests a southern Irish or southern British source for the metal.

Only a handful of other spearheads with gold decoration are known from Britain and Ireland: one of them is also from Angus – perhaps an indication of the wealth and wide-ranging contacts of Tayside's Late Bronze Age communities.

Most of the presentations on the Carnoustie excavations have so far been limited to professional gatherings and we were lucky to be among the first local archaeological societies in Scotland to hear directly about the results of the excavation. Post-excavation work is now under way and no doubt further surprises await the team working on the material recovered from this remarkable site!

Jeff Carter



**The Late Bronze Age hoard as found; the entire block of soil in which it lay was subsequently lifted to permit detailed excavation under laboratory conditions
© GUARD Archaeology Ltd**

Treasurer's report

It is encouraging that the income from both Subscriptions and Visitors has increased. While that from the Sale of Books has fallen only slightly, there will be a substantial decline in the year ahead as most of the books bequeathed to us by Jock Hooper have now been disposed of (Jock, for the information of more recent members, was a former President of our Society).

Until recently, we have been using projection equipment kindly loaned by The Bridge or by the Civic Society; in the course of the year, we decided to acquire our own lecture equipment in the form of a powerpoint projector, projection screen, laptop and associated software.

This was largely made possible by a generous grant awarded from the Peebles Common Good Fund. The new equipment has greatly improved the presentation of the lecture series.

The unusual income entry described as Bank arose as a result of receiving a cheque for £150 in compensation, following a complaint over the rejection of a direct debit on the grounds that the department responsible did not have a copy of authorised signatories on our Bank Account!

Peter Barclay
Treasurer

Analysis of Income & Expenditure | April 2017 – 31 March 2018

Income	2017		2018	
	2017	2018	2018	2017
Subscriptions	£ 690.00	£ 811.00	Insurance	259.45
Sale of Books	151.00	130.00	Speakers	150.00
Visitors	16.00	148.00	Hire of Room	80.00
Grants	1773.40	823.00	Shootinglee	103.19
Outing		150.00	Outing	127.10
Donation		5.05	Gift	25.00
Bank		150.00	Equipment	1126.33
			Refreshments	46.30
			Syllabus	32.00
			Subscriptions	48.00
			Website	38.26
			Stamps	
			Surplus Income	181.42
			Photocopying	
				3.00
	<u>£2630.40</u>	<u>£2217.05</u>		
			<u>£2217.05</u>	<u>£2630.40</u>

Balances at 1 April 2017

General Account	£1568.71
Cash Account	38.72
	<u>£1607.43</u>

Balances at 31 March 2018

General Account	£1724.12
Cash Account	64.73
	<u>£1788.85</u>

Examiner's Report

The Income and Expenditure Account and Abstract of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018 are in accordance with the Books and Vouchers presented to me and appear to give a fair and accurate position of the financial state of the Society.

Fergus Brown
Account Examiner

Fieldwork

Shootinglee Project: an update

Shootinglee, just two miles south of Traquair, was a forest stead or farmstead within Ettrick Forest and as such it is the first to be investigated archaeologically. The Project is now in its 7th year.

In the 1970s, before the recognition of the site and its significance, the area had been overplanted with conifers.

At the very start of 2017, a number of the trees were felled by Scottish Woodland, work made possible by a generous grant from Forestry Commission Scotland, secured for us through the good offices of David Kennedy of their South Scotland Conservancy Area.

The excavation season resumed at the end of March, though most of the next three months were spent removing the tree stumps! However the pay-off for all this hard work has been a larger excavation area free of obstacles, which has permitted us to uncover the ground plan of Building 2 in its entirety and made understanding of the building sequence easier.

The south end of Building 2 had been badly robbed in the past; however, it is now possible to demonstrate that the substantial N-S running drain, first revealed in 2016, turned a right angle to run E-W under what would have been the south wall of the building.



Shootinglee: excavations in progress © Joyce Durham



View of Building 2 from the south © Joyce Durham

To the north of this, at a higher level and covering the northern half of the building, there was an occupation layer of dark silty material with evidence of burning and small patches of yellow clay-silt. Overlying this on its eastern half was a layer of grey coloured clay. The occupation layer had a heat-cracked flat stone set centrally, presumably a hearth, as well as further hearths on two levels with a surround of paving in the NE corner.

Finds of early clay pipe bowls and stems from this layer indicate that the building was occupied in the 17th century prior to abandonment.

At its southern end, an extension had been built against the building at some stage, with a curved SE corner and narrower walls, a paved floor and a hearth set against the south wall.

An impression of the extent of the excavation trench and the dimensions of Building 2 can be gained from the accompanying photographs.

Building 2 itself is interpreted as a 16th century peel house similar to Slack's Tower and Mervinslaw, in Roxburghshire, which both have clay-bonded walls still surviving to their full height.



Slack's Tower © Joyce Durham

However, this is by no means the end of the story for we know from documentary evidence and pottery finds that there was earlier activity at Shootinglee site during the medieval period: the 2018 season has just started and the hunt for earlier structural evidence is now on!

Joyce Durham

Outreach

Autumn work party at Lyne Kirk

Having consulted with a few kind souls regarding their availability, a working party was organised in early November to undertake some essential maintenance of our 'adopted' monuments at Lyne.

On a day that was chilly but dry, six of us set to work to repair the wooden revetment and banking shoring up the summit of the Abbey Knowe and to cut back the vegetation in and around the area of the Early Christian cists.

The opportunity was also taken to clean the interpretation panel on the knoll and the protective glass panels around the Adam & Eve stone at Lyne Kirk.

Further work parties are planned for this spring at Lyne and at Harehope Cairn.

Gillian Brown



Above:
Abbey Knowe
work party

Left
a) repairing the
existing revetment

b) The Adam & Eve
stone following
cleaning of its
protective glass
case

Photos T Cowie

Some dates for your Diary!

Archaeological Research in Progress

Date: May 26 2018

Venue: The Engine Shed, Stirling

This annual one-day conference gives its audience the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts of recent and ongoing archaeological projects across Scotland.

This conference is supported by Historic Environment Scotland and is delivered in partnership with Archaeology Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.



For full details of the programme and booking of tickets see

<https://www.socantscot.org/event/archaeological-research-in-progress-2018/>

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Rhind Lectures

'Drystone technologies: Neolithic tensions and Iron Age compressions'

Dr John Barber MA, BA, FSA, FSA Scot, MCIfA

Date: June 22 - June 24 2018

Venue: National Museum of Scotland

Sponsored by Tomatin Distillers

A series of free lectures exploring the extraordinary technological and design achievements of builders in drystone, from Neolithic chambered cairns to Iron Age brochs.



For full details of the lectures and to book tickets see

<https://www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2018/>

PAS lecture programme 2018-2019

Our own autumn/winter lecture series will commence on **Thursday 27 September**.

What promises to be another bumper crop of high-quality talks by invited guest speakers has been assembled by programme organiser Neil Crawford. Further details will be circulated in due course but we can look forward to a varied syllabus, with topics ranging from highland shielings to maritime archaeology.

Look out for details in Peebles Life, the Peeblesshire News and on our own PAS website <http://www.peeblesarchsoc.org.uk/>