



PAS Newsletter

Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

March 2026

Quiz - Fi Martynoga tests your local knowledge

The Lost & Ruined Churches of Peeblesshire - James Garry explores

PAS Lecture Programme and other events

■ The March 19th Lecture is by David Petts, Associate Professor of Archaeology at Durham University: “Lindisfarne - New Light on a British Monastery” - details on page 11



Exploring our past together

Welcome

Colin McLean, Newsletter Editor

The McLean clan has been continuing its bid for world domination with the arrival last week of my third grandchild. He is of course *the* cutest baby (other than my other two) and will be yet another call on my time. I'm resisting the temptation to include a photo...

We're approaching the end of another PAS lecture season. As Richard writes elsewhere, our February lecture by Strat Halliday was a huge success. We're following it up with Strat taking us on a guided walk to Whiteside Hillfort on Saturday April 4th - see back page for details.

Being out and about earlier this month brought my first sight of lambs; from memory a little later than some other years. It struck me that few things have had more impact on our Peeblesshire landscape than sheep farming (conifer plantations would be a close second). I have a notion to write about this phenomenon: the grass croppers and tree chompers, but it will have to wait for another time. Meanwhile, here is my photograph of the hillfort at Rachan, near Broughton.

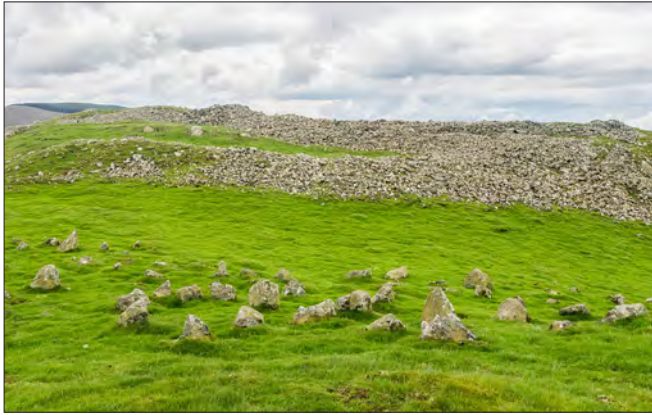
It's *your* Newsletter and you too could contribute by writing a piece and/or sending in photographs of somewhere interesting you have visited or have been reading about. ■



Quiz - Test Your Local Knowledge

Fi Martynoga

Section 1: Where is it?



1 (above) An easy one for Peebles walkers



2 A restored tower visible from a sware in Selkirkshire



3 Important in Borders history, and another view of it is visible across a river.

4 If you don't get this one (below), you walk around



looking at your toes!

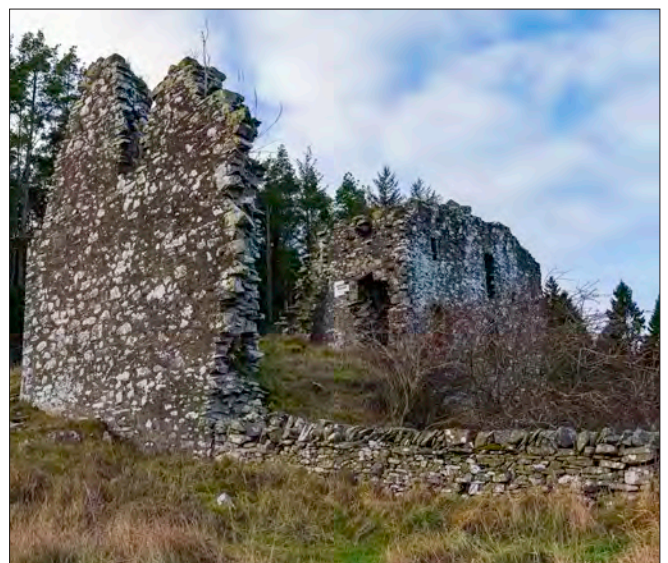
Section 2: What's the story? There is a good yarn associated with all of these sites. I have named the most obscure one to help you find it, and offer a full account in the Answer Section of another (originally from Walter Elliot) that does not appear on an internet search.



5 What is interesting about this bridge over the Tweed?



6 What story connects this place with the farm across the loch?



7 (& p5) The 17thC owner was Sir Gideon Murray. His daughter's story was commemorated across the valley, on the other side of the Tweed. What was her name?



8 Known as Cockburn's Grave, where does the man buried here appear in Borders song and story?

Section 3: *What are we looking at?*



9 What were stones like these used for? How long ago?
10 (below) What and where are these? You probably drive past them frequently.



11 Where is this inscription and what is its grim message?



12 This obscure artefact belongs to more recent history than you might expect. ■





The Lost & Ruined Churches of Peeblesshire

James Garry

As spring begins to show on the hillsides and we look ahead to another season of fieldwork, it's worth pausing to remember the quieter corners of our historic landscape. Peeblesshire's ruined and long-vanished kirks (some no more than tumbled stone, others surviving only in place-names and local memory) tell us how communities worshipped, travelled, and settled across Tweeddale from medieval times onwards.

What happened to them? The usual suspects: the sweeping parish reforms of the Reformation, gradual abandonment in the uplands, and the damage done by sixteenth-century Border warfare. Even where little remains above ground, these sites still help us trace Tweeddale's connections to the wider religious world of Scotland and Northumbria. That theme connects to our upcoming March lecture on Lindisfarne.

west doorway, the surviving walls, the frame of Scots pines around it. Recent conservation work has stabilised the tower and exposed more of the masonry. These places need care, not just admiration.

And here's something worth knowing: Cross Kirk isn't entirely silent. Each year it hosts an open-air service marking the opening of Beltane week, led by local clergy and open to all denominations. The thread may be thinner than it was in 1241, but it hasn't broken.

St Gordian's Kirk, Manor Valley

Head up the secluded Manor Valley and you'll find something more elusive: the memory of St Gordian's Kirk. The saint's identity remains uncertain (possibly connected to the shadowy figure of St Gorgham), but there was definitely an early chapel here. The evidence? A medieval bell cast in 1478, now housed in the later Manor Church. Plus earthworks at the traditional site.

Local memory has kept St Gordian's alive when the stones couldn't. The annual open-air service at St Gordian's Cross keeps that thread alive, showing how spiritual associations outlast the buildings themselves.



CROSS KIRK, PEEBLES © COLIN McLEAN

Cross Kirk, Peebles

Of Peebles' ecclesiastical ruins, Cross Kirk is still the most atmospheric. Sheltered in its grove northwest of town, the church owes its thirteenth-century foundation to an event that must have set tongues wagging: on 9 May 1241, workmen reportedly uncovered a cross and stone urn believed to contain relics of St Nicholas.

Word spread fast. King Alexander III took an interest. Within a few years a Trinitarian friary had taken root, and pilgrims began arriving (some from considerable distances) to venerate the relics. An annual feast commemorated the discovery. That tradition continued into the early 1600s before the post-Reformation climate snuffed it out.

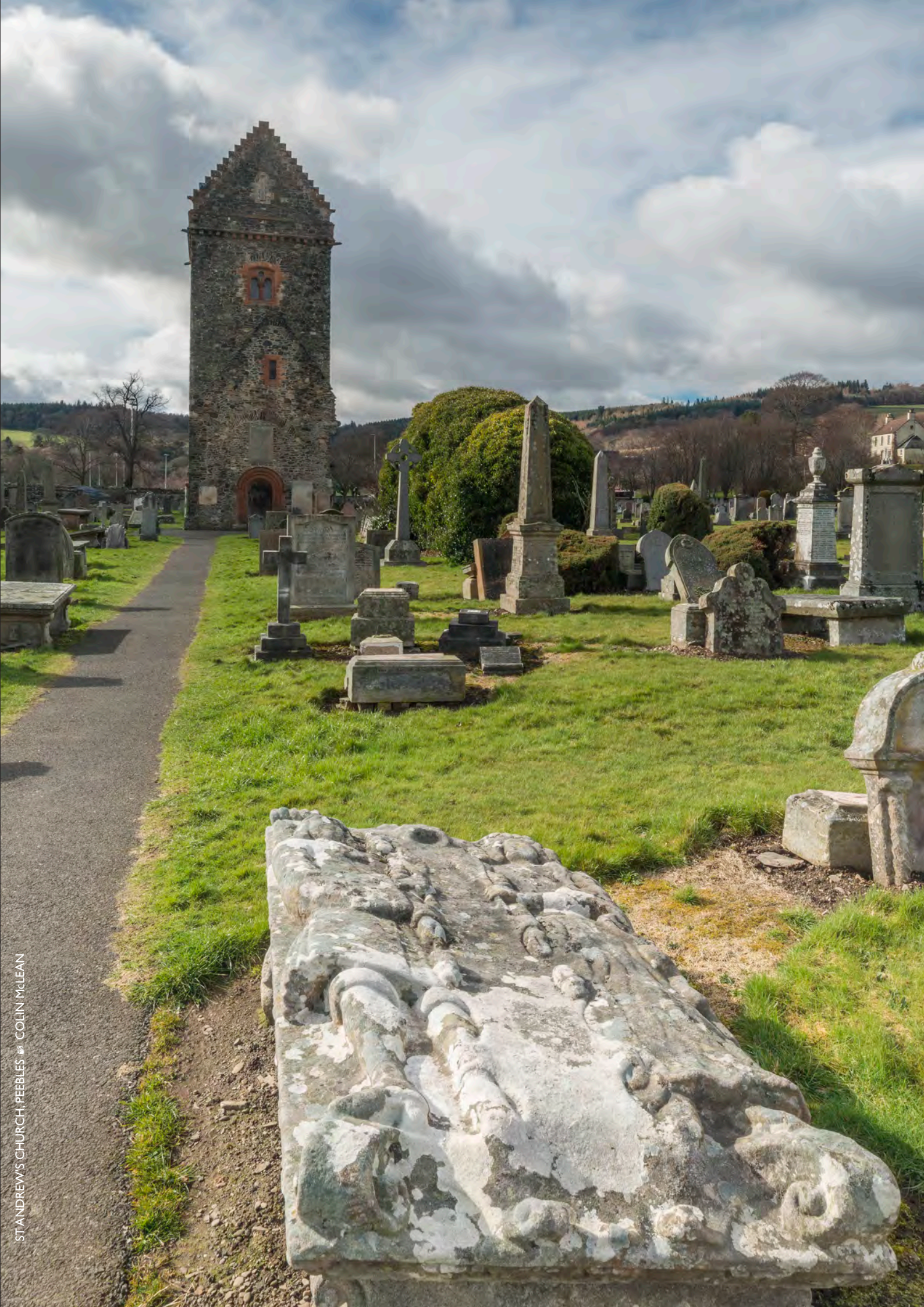
After the Reformation, Cross Kirk briefly served the reformed parish before falling out of use. But even in ruin it makes a strong impression: that finely carved

Kirkurd: A Sacred Centre That Moved

Kirkurd offers one of Tweeddale's more intriguing examples of a "shifted sacred landscape." A church stood here by 1116, belonging first to Glasgow diocese, then to Soutra Hospital, and finally to Trinity Church, Edinburgh. But the medieval church didn't stand where the current kirk is. It was located within what's now the Castle Craig estate. When the 1766 church was built,



KIRKURD KIRK © WALTER BAXTER



the old graveyard and building were simply abandoned.

Small structural remains of the medieval church survive as a subterranean vault, largely forgotten except in archaeological records. Worth remembering, though. Nearby sits the Harestanes stone circle, showing the typical Borders pattern of prehistoric ceremonial grounds later Christianised. The parish also preserves a curious later tradition: the 1828 watch-house, built when a local mort-safe society tried to keep body-snatchers away from the graveyard.

St Andrew's Church, Peebles

Long before Cross Kirk's moment in the spotlight, St Andrew's was the burgh's principal parish church. Dating from the early twelfth century, it was a substantial building until English forces destroyed it in 1548. One of the Borders' many violent episodes. Only the tower survived. Repaired and preserved, it now rises above the Old Town cemetery. One of Peebles' most recognisable landmarks.

Lyne: The "Cradle of Christianity"?

The present Lyne Kirk (rebuilt in the seventeenth century) stands on the site of a twelfth-century chapel that was dependent on Stobo. The earlier building was completely demolished, though the raised mound location hints at something older still. Perhaps even pre-Christian.

Early church historians sometimes called Lyne the "cradle of Christianity in Peeblesshire." Impossible to verify, but it speaks to strong local tradition. What's certain is that by the Middle Ages, Lyne was part of a network of small chapelries radiating out from Stobo, the mother church that once oversaw worship across a huge swathe of Tweeddale.

Henderland Chapel and the Upland Tradition

The further you travel into the hills, the fainter the traces become. At Chapel Knowe in the Megget valley, near St Mary's Loch, the ruins of Henderland Chapel and its burial ground survive. Just. A cross-carved tombstone of the reiver Cockburn family was found there, testimony to the chapel's use by scattered hill communities.

These upland chapels served a different pattern of worship: seasonal, dispersed, tied to pastoral life rather than settled burghs. In later centuries, a small nineteenth-century chapel (the "Tin Kirk") stood elsewhere in the valley but has now vanished entirely. Submerged by reservoir works. Even the memory is fading.



THE COCKBURN TOMB ON THE SITE OF HENDERLAND CHAPEL © COLIN McLEAN

Estate Chapels: Swept Away by Improvement

Many of Tweeddale's "lost" churches disappeared not through warfare or Reformation zeal but through eighteenth and nineteenth-century estate improvements. Private chapels attached to tower houses and lairdly seats were demolished or allowed to fall into ruin as landowners rationalised parish worship and tidied up their policies.



LYNE KIRK, PEEBLES © COLIN McLEAN

The OS Name Books and old Statistical Accounts mention several of these. Small buildings serving a handful of families, now reduced to bumps in fields or absorbed into estate walls. Most don't even have names anymore.

Forgotten Devotional Practices

The buildings may be gone, but traces of older devotional life occasionally surface. Scattered across the uplands are unnamed holy wells, recorded in nineteenth-century surveys but now indistinguishable from ordinary springs. Statistical Accounts mention healing-spring visits continuing quietly into the 1700s; a post-Reformation survival that eventually withered.

Then there are the corpse roads: traditional funeral routes linking isolated settlements to the parish kirk. The survival of remote kirkyards at sites like Henderland strongly suggests these networks once extended deep into the hills. Getting the dead to consecrated ground was no small undertaking in an era before motorised transport.

Parish fairs, too, often preserve suppressed saints' day observances. Cross Kirk's annual feast is the best-known example, but other parishes likely retained patronal festivals disguised as grazing assemblies or hiring fairs. Seasonal gatherings with roots in much older devotional practice.

Before the Reformation, parishes with shrine cults like Cross Kirk would certainly have had Palm Sunday and Rogation processions (universal medieval practices). But their disappearance was early and thorough. Almost no recorded trace in Tweeddale.

Living Threads: Revival and Continuity

While many of Tweeddale's sacred sites have fallen silent, others are finding new life. Or rather, revealing that they never quite died. We've already mentioned Cross Kirk's annual Beltane service, but it's part of a larger pattern. The Peebles Beltane Festival itself, with its ceremonial ride-outs and processions, preserves something older than we might think: medieval march-riding traditions that moved communities ritually through their historic landscapes.

These aren't officially called pilgrimages, but they work in remarkably similar ways. Seasonal, processional movement across sacred geography.

St Gordian's annual open-air service follows a similar pattern; worship continuing at a site long after the stones have gone. And while the upland wells rarely see formal observance anymore, they're being woven into heritage trails and spiritual-landscape walking groups. It's a different kind of attention than medieval pilgrimage, but it's attention nonetheless.

What we're seeing is really a hybrid survival: civic-religious festival services, heritage-led remembrance through archaeology walks and local history groups, occasional parish-initiated outdoor gatherings. It's not the medieval devotional landscape, but it's not entirely divorced from it either. The thread may be thinner, but it hasn't broken.

Do You Know Something We Don't?

This is where you come in. We're always keen to hear from members. Photographs from recent walks, family stories about old kirks, memories of wells or burial



ST GORDIAN'S CROSS, MANOR VALLEY ■ COLIN MCLEAN

grounds now lost to undergrowth or ploughing. These fragments often prove invaluable.

If you've stumbled across carved stones, promising earthworks, or heard local names like "Chapel Field" or "Kirk Knowe," please get in touch with the committee. With spring arriving, there'll be chances to join recording projects following on from our surveys at Kirkurd and elsewhere.

Looking Ahead: Lindisfarne Lecture, 19 March

These themes will get proper attention at our next lecture on 19 March, when Professor David Petts speaks on: Recent Work on Lindisfarne: New Light on a Central British Monastery

The latest excavations on Holy Island have reshaped our understanding of early medieval monastic networks across northern Britain. Worth thinking about how similar patterns (routes, burial practices, devotional landscapes) might have played out here in Tweeddale.

For independent exploration, the Trove database and Historic Environment Scotland's online records are excellent places to start. By combining archival research, fieldwork, and the knowledge held within our community, we can keep even the faintest traces of Peeblesshire's sacred landscape from slipping away entirely. ■

Quiz Answers

Fi Martynoga

Where?

- 1 Cademuir West cheveaux de frise
- 2 Kirkhope Tower, Ettrick Bridge
- 3 Newark Castle – an original stronghold of the Buccleuch.
- 4 Peebles Town Wall

What's the Story?

Identify the place or object and discover the story associated with it.

5 Ashiestiel Bridge

At the time of building, it was the largest single span ever constructed from whinstone rubble.

6 St Mary's Kirkyard

The story here connects the kirkyard with Bowerhope, the farm across the water. In the late 19thC the farmer there was a pious man, given to reading his bible. One July day, when haymaking on the meadow in front of the farmhouse, he looked across to the kirkyard, where he saw a white shape arise above a grave, followed by another. "The Last Trump has sounded and we have not heard it. Away inside all of you and on your knees to pray that we may not be overlooked!" he shouted to his haymakers. His family dutifully trooped indoors to pray but two farm lads slipped away to the loch and rowed across towards the spectacle. As they went, they saw more white forms appear in the kirkyard. Beaching their boat on the north shore, they rushed up to the kirkyard wall. There they found a damp pedlar. He had got drunk in Tibbie Shiel's Inn the night before, fallen in the loch, and was now drying out his pack of nightshirts on the gravestones and the branches of the trees. The story, dubbed 'The Bowerhope Resurrection' was told locally for years, and the farmer never lived it down. (from Walter Elliot).

7 Elibank Castle, home of 'Muckle-Mou'd Meg', the daughter of Sir Gideon Murray. Meg was known to be ugly, possibly because she had a hare lip, and no one wanted to marry her. One night her father apprehended William Scott, the son of his neighbour and rival, Wat of Harden. He was in the act of stealing Murray's cattle so they threw him into the cellar, saying they would hang him in the morning unless he would consent to marry Meg. "I'd rather dee" was his response. But in the morning, when they were preparing the noose, Meg wept and demanded his release, so he changed his mind, was spared and the couple made a long, happy and fruitful marriage.

8 Cockburn's Grave. Cockburn of Henderland was one of a family of notorious reivers who was apprehended and hanged in his own doorway. His wife fled to the nearby Dow Linn, so that she could not hear her husband's execution over the sounds of the rushing water. Sir Walter Scott uses this tale and it is also commemorated in the song The Border Widow's Lament

What is it?

9 Knocking stone, Traquair manse. Used up until the

agricultural improvements as the principal way of bruising barley for broth and bannocks.

10 Walkerburn cultivation terraces, probably prehistoric.

11 Dawyck Mortuary Chapel inscription, 'Today it's me. Tomorrow it's your turn' (approx!)

12 Ultreia 'stone' is made of fibreglass. Installed on the Southern Upland Way south of Traquair in 2002, it was one of the kists in the *Waymarks* project, and originally contained a hoard of hand-struck tokens (the marks) which people following the walk were welcome to help themselves to. It was made by Brunton Hunter, in imitation of the so-called 'Runic Stone' found in Innerleithen, which is actually a much earlier cup and ring marked stone.

Photo-credits

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12 Ronald Turnbull

5, 8, 9 10 Fi Martynoga

7, 11 & below Colin McLean



NEWARK CASTLE, BOWHILL ESTATE

March Lecture

Richard Welander

What a great turn out for Strat's talk last month! There were 63 in the audience - the best so far this session. I'd like to think that it was the excellent new poster designed by Colin McLean (great drone shot of Traprain Law), but I suspect the real reason is that Strat's reputation went before him and his fans turned out in force! If you missed it or would just like to watch again, here's the link to the [PAS YouTube channel](#)

We are planning to produce a poster for each talk from now on, distribute it around Peebles and further afield and e-mail it to you a week or so before the talk. It's meant to be a useful reminder of the forthcoming lecture and hopefully an encouragement to guests and potential new members to attend. In our efforts to try and attract new audiences, I had a bit of a panic after Strat's talk when Brian mentioned to me that he thought the hall's capacity was limited to 50 for insurance purposes. Fortunately, he'd been misinformed and I'm grateful to Neil for checking with St Joseph's. Apparently, there's no limit on numbers but, as we discovered, there are only 65 chairs available! So, if you want a seat, turn up early!

Our final talk of this session is being given by Dr David Petts, associate professor at the Department of Archaeology at Durham University. David has been excavating on Lindisfarne for several years on the site of the early medieval monastery and, introducing his talk 'Recent Work on Lindisfarne: New Light on a Central British Monastery', David explains:

"The tidal island of Lindisfarne is perhaps best known as the site of one of the most important early medieval monasteries in Britain. It became home to the relics of St Cuthbert and was where the Lindisfarne Gospels were created. It was also infamous as the site of one of the first Viking attacks on Britain. Despite its historic importance, Lindisfarne, had, until recently, seen relatively little archaeological research on the site of the monastery itself. However, over the last decade a team from Durham University and DigVentures has been carrying out a campaign of archaeological



DAVID PETTS

fieldwork that sheds important light on life and death in the early monastery, as well as challenging long received historical narratives about the island. Although the main fieldwork stage of this project is now over, we are now moving into the all-important post-excavation stage, as the team analyses and assesses the wide range of material we have recovered, from human remains to early medieval sculpture. This talk takes the opportunity to reflect on what has been discovered so far and looks forward to the exciting plans in place for further work by the project team."

Come and join us on Thursday 19th March at St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre at 7.30pm. Why not bring a friend or family member?

Following on from his February talk, Strat has kindly agreed to do a guided walk to Whiteside Fort on Saturday 4th April. See the back page for more details. Spaces are limited - only a handful of tickets remaining.

Finally, an early reminder that the Society's AGM and Members' Evening will be held on Thursday 16th April. Arrangements for the evening are still being made but this is your opportunity as PAS members to offer a short presentation (15-20 minutes) on any topic that you think might be of interest to fellow members. Have a think about it and let me know if you're interested - email me at richard.welander@gmail.com. ■

EVENTS

PAS Lectures: Unless otherwise indicated, all lectures start at 7.30pm, and are held in St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre, Rosetta Road, Peebles.

March 19th 2026: Recent Work on Lindisfarne: New Light on a Central British Monastery – Professor David Petts, University of Durham

April 4th 2026: Guided walk to Whiteside Hillfort, with Strat Halliday - see back page for details.

April 16th 2026: Annual General Meeting & Members' Evening.

Other Events: The Stone of Destiny: Rethinking Medieval Kingship, Heritage and Education Perth Art Gallery **March 14th 2026**, 9:00am - 6:00pm. £25 (£22.50 for Historic Scotland members). Booking essential. Symposium to mark the display of the Stone of Scone in Perth Museum. Details and booking [here](#).

Join PAS

If you're not yet a member of the Society, then do join us: it costs only £25 pa (£35 for couples).

- We have monthly lectures from September until March
- We organise site visits and outings
- We run local projects and digs
- We produce this newsletter
- And we're a friendly bunch!

To join, visit our web site at www.peeblesarchsoc.org.uk and go to the Membership page.

The PAS Newsletter is produced and distributed by Peeblesshire Archaeological Society - <http://www.peeblesarchsoc.org.uk>. We are always keen to publish members' news, articles or letters. Please send them to the Editor, Colin McLean: PASEditor@icloud.com

GUIDED WALK TO WHITESIDE HILLFORT Saturday April 4th 2026

Following the excellent talk he gave to the Society in February, Strat Halliday has very kindly agreed to lead a walk for members to Whiteside Hillfort, which you can read about [here](#).

The walk will take place on Saturday April 4th, and we'll meet at Newlands Kirk car park on the B7059, approximately one mile south of Romanno Bridge, or 2.5 miles north of the B7059 junction with the A72. Car parking is limited so please try to arrange car-sharing. It's a rough walk up a relatively steep hill, so come suitably shod and prepared for all weathers. Satisfy yourself that you are fit for such a walk and undertake it at your own risk. Bring water and a picnic lunch which we can enjoy in the glorious April sunshine.

Meet at Newlands Kirk car park for **11.00am** ready to depart promptly. There are no facilities in the vicinity!

TICKETS - We've agreed with the farmer that places are strictly limited to 20, on a first-come first-served basis, so book your ticket (free to members) early through Eventbrite - [click here](#).



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