

PAS Newsletter

Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

April 2025

All That Glitters Is Not Always Gold - Strat Halliday explores mining connections between Australia and Scotland

Dinosaurs, Dodos and a Democracy of Things - Gillian Brown revisits the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford

The Baths of Caracalla in Rome - Piers Dixon takes the plunge

Qasr Al-Hallabat - Denys Pringle describes a Roman Fort in Jordan

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AGM on April 17th

PAS Programme + Other Events

Welcome

Colin McLean, Newsletter Editor

One of the things I particularly enjoy about editing this publication is the sheer variety of contributions that arrive in my inbox. Now that we have firmly broken the mould of only being about things in Peeblesshire (though I'm not sure that was ever really the case) there seems to be no limit to our international ambitions and coverage. In this issue our reach extends to Australia, Oxford, Rome and Jordan, courtesy of the generous efforts of our contributors.

I have been out and about with my camera as always, and though archaeology has not featured recently, I did photograph Hawthornden Castle for Ben Tindall

Architects, who have just completed an extensive conservation project to this relatively unknown Midlothian Castle.

The photograph shows the remnants of the C15 keep, to which has been added a C17 wing with an extension and amendments from the late C20.

It was bought by the Heinz family in 1982 and transferred to the Hawthornden Foundation, which operates it as a writers' retreat; the promotion of writing being one of actress, socialite and philanthropist Drew Heinz's (1915-2018) passions. The building is not open to the public, and access to the wonderful interiors was a privilege. The castle's strategic location on a rocky bluff above the river rendered the availability of a drone invaluable. ■



HAWTHORNDEN CASTLE, MIDLOTHIAN © COLIN McLEAN

All That Glitters Is Not Always Gold

Strat Halliday

The lure of gold has always captured the imagination in the human condition; here in Scotland no less than in other regions of the world. A month in 1852 saw several thousand labourers trying their luck in the Lomond Hills, while in 1869 the Strath of Kildonan in Sutherland saw another brief gold rush. The Kildonan gold rush was stimulated by Robert Gilchrist, returning to his native Sutherland from prospecting in Australia and New Zealand. As emerged in the course of a survey in the strath in 1991 (RCAHMS 1993, 17), the surface traces of the workings along the Kildonan Burn are hardly impressive and there is not much to show for the shanty town, Baile an Òr, that sprang up, and the 500 prospectors thought to have been there in April 1869. A contemporary glass-plate photograph shows a bleak row of shacks, which more recently has been investigated by excavation (Callender and Reeson 2008). I was reflecting on these contrasting fates last month standing on the streets of Ballarat, in Victoria, Australia. Here was a small city that was founded on gold in the middle of nowhere, with architecture to match its ambition, glimpsed in this façade streetscape with the grand Mining Exchange in the foreground (Fig. 1).

FIGURE 1: LYDIARD STREET, BALLARAT, THE MINING EXCHANGE



Had the deposits along the Kildonan Burn been commensurate, it might have changed the landscape

FIGURE 2: BALLARAT CEMETERY, THE MEMORIAL OF JOHN McDONALD FROM ROSS-SHIRE



of that lovely Sutherland strath forever, so at least there is something to be grateful for in the failure of the deposits.

In the New World the lure of gold brought people from far and wide, as reflected in the arrangement of Ballarat cemetery, where its 25,000 inmates are divided up between different religious denominations drawn from all corners. There are plenty of

Scots to be found amongst them, their tombstones often proclaiming the wealth that they had amassed one way or the other in the town, such as John McDonald, whose granite pillar surmounted by a draped urn (Fig. 2) would perhaps have been unattainable had he remained in his native Ross-shire. Another stone erected in 1871 by members of the Ballarat Fire Brigade to their late Captain, Charles Dunn (Fig. 3), brings us slightly



FIGURE 3: BALLARAT CEMETERY, THE MEMORIAL OF CHARLES DUNN FROM ABERLADY

closer to home; he was born in 1832 in Aberlady, and represents other contributions to the settler community. Doubtless a thorough search would have revealed plenty of Borderers, and it certainly included 39 Hallidays.

The boom in gold extraction at Ballarat led to the establishment of other industries in the town. The demand for tools and mining machinery saw the establishment of the Phoenix Foundry in 1854, and the Union Foundry in 1865, initially using scrap and imported pig iron, the latter often brought in relatively cheaply as ballast in sailing ships. In the 1860s, however, iron ore deposits – limonite – had been discovered near Lal Lal to the south-east of Ballarat, and when global iron prices spiked in the early 1870s it proved sufficient to stimulate investment in local iron production. The first meeting of prospective shareholders in the Lal Lal Iron Co. took place in 1873 and construction of a furnace was underway by July 1874. As with so many embryonic industries, the history of production was chequered. One could make the comparison with the rather earlier ironworks at Muirkirk in Ayrshire, where the local landowner established a tarworks hoping to attract ironmasters with the enticement of cheap coke.

At Lal Lal the first operation of the furnace lasted only until the end of 1875 before broken machinery and poor communications brought production to a halt. New investment and machinery saw production resume in 1878, but by July 1880 work had begun on a new furnace designed to produce 80 tons of iron each week.

FIGURE 4: LAL LAL FURNACE



The new furnace was lit in March 1881 but operated only intermittently until June 1884. Ironically, the problems of transport and communications that had dogged earlier production had finally been solved in the April of that year with the completion of a tramroad to link the works to a railhead, but by then the global market dictated that it was still cheaper to import pig iron.

But why should we take any interest in a short-lived ironworks on the other side of the world in Australia? After all, the iron industry in Scotland played a key part in the industrial revolution and at this time led the world, exporting its products far and wide. But do we have a surviving furnace dating from the 1880s? No, because essentially a successful industrial site is in continuous development, replacing early with new as it maintains production in a competitive market. Furthermore, if the works closes, there is a tendency for widespread demolition. At Muirkirk (1787-1923), the furnace bank and the gothic-style blowing-engine house survived into the 1960s, only to fall victim to a landscaping project to create industrial units following the closure of the local colliery; the furnaces themselves, however, had all been removed long since.

FIGURE 5: LAL LAL, THE BOTTOM OF THE FURNACE



Were you to visit the ironworks at Summerlee (1836-1930) in North Lanarkshire, or Dalmellington (1848-1921) in Ayrshire, to see a furnace you would be disappointed. At Blaenavon (1788-1904), Monmouthshire, now a World Heritage Site, one furnace dating from 1788-9 survives, and two added in 1810, but the furnace built in 1860 was demolished in 1930. At Lal Lal, however, as we unwittingly discovered passing through Ballarat on a previous occasion, the furnace dating from 1880-4 is still standing to its full height (Fig. 4). This is a furnace that has its place in a common industrial history, which from the late 18th century was increasingly driven by global forces. It was a piece of technology introduced from Britain and is as illustrative of the character of late 19th century furnaces as if it had been built in Scotland or Wales. And like other short-lived production sites it provides a relatively well-preserved glimpse of a furnace in its original form.

In addition to the furnace, the remains of an ironstone pit are visible beneath the trees nearby, a length of tramroad leading down the slope, evidence

of a water-management system in what is now a very dry environment, the footings of a blacksmith's shop and several other structures with engine bases. While much of the stone cladding has been robbed from the furnace, the lining is largely intact (Fig. 5) and



FIGURE 6: LAL LAL, THE SEPARATION OF THE FURNACE LINING FROM THE MAIN STRUCTURE

reveals the separation between the lining and the main structure (Fig. 6), presumably designed to allow them to expand and contract independently under the extreme temperatures at the core of the furnace. The furnace bricks are stamped Harris & Pearson, Stourbridge



FIGURE 7: LAL LAL, THE MAKER'S STAMP ON THE FURNACE BRICKS

(Fig. 7), which in the international kaleidoscope of Australian place-names I initially assumed to be a place reasonably close at hand. Apparently not, the only Australian Stourbridge on Google Earth being a street in Brisbane, while a quick Google search lands in the English West Midlands. Peter Harris and George Pearson went into partnership in 1852 and, though the

company was bought in 1968 by Dyson Group Plc, it continued to trade independently until about 1980. Its Grade II listed offices built in 1888 in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill, have been restored by the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust. Like the pig iron, the furnace bricks probably came in as ballast, landed some 75 miles away in Melbourne to be carted up to the works by rail and wagon. This unlikely bit of fieldwork against a background of wallabies and kangaroos is as relevant to our understanding of our own history as it is to the pillaging of more distant landscapes by Western Europeans.

Like all empires, these imperial possessions were taken by force from indigenous peoples and were to be exploited in the accumulation of national wealth at home. And, as has long been known, the investment of mercantile capital in the Scottish landscape was a key factor fuelling the agricultural improvements from the late 18th century (Devine 2006, 54f), shaping many aspects of the landscape that we see from our windows to this day. While this involved a human cost for the rural communities that is etched deeply into the Scottish psyche, the human cost elsewhere was written rather differently. In Australia the advocates of settlement, who included Sir Joseph Banks, contended the land was unoccupied, there for the taking, and the dispossession of Aboriginal communities was brutally implemented with a legacy that lasts to this day. To the settlers these were lands of opportunity. They were by and large practical people who would sink or swim by their own hands in an often unforgiving landscape, from which has emerged the Australian perception of national character.

This is expressed most overtly at the War Memorial in Canberra, distilled in the stained-glass windows (Fig. 8) of the Hall of Memory under the titles of Resource, Candour, Devotion, Curiosity, Independence, Comradeship, Ancestry, Patriotism, Chivalry, Loyalty, Coolness, Control, Audacity, Endurance and Decision. Ironically these were all the same qualities by which the settlers had wrested control of the land from the Aboriginal peoples, whose sacrifices in defence of their country are commemorated not here, but in the National Gallery. Titled *The Aboriginal Memorial* (Fig. 9), it is an installation of 200 hollow log ceremonial coffins created in 1987-88 in response to the bicentenary of Australia. Conceived by Djon Mundine, it came to include the work of 44 artists and represents a forest of souls, a

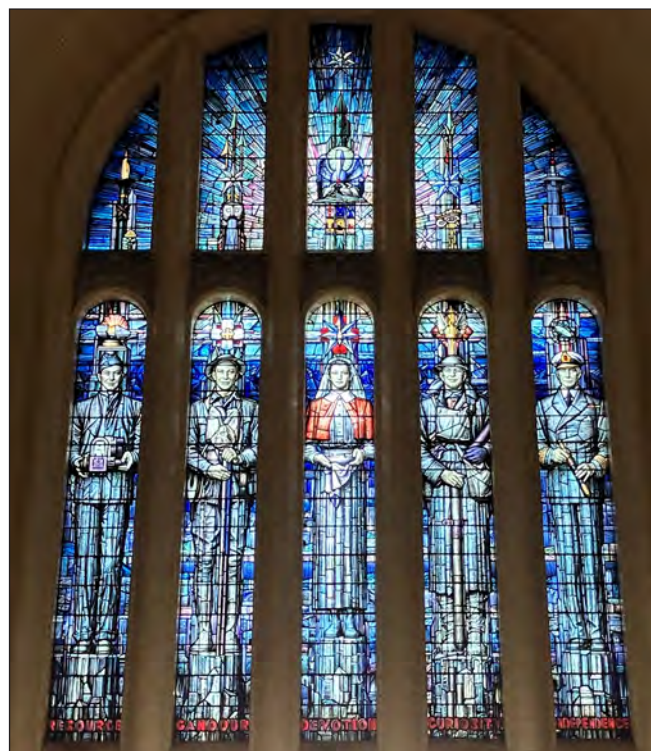


FIGURE 8: THE SOUTH WINDOW OF THE HALL OF MEMORY AT THE WAR MEMORIAL AT CANBERRA

rather different concept of a war memorial to all those Aboriginal people who died at the hands of settlers. But, as the captioning makes clear, it is more than this, and is presented as an historical statement, a testimony to the resilience of First Nations people and culture, and a legacy for future generations of Australians, who now include the children of one of my daughters, though she remains at heart a Borderer. ■

References:

Callender RM and Reeson, PF 2008. *The Scottish Gold Rush of 1869*. British Mining No. 84, Monograph of the Northern Mine Research Society.

Devine, TM 2006. *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland 1700-1900*. Edinburgh: John Donald.

RCAHMS 1993. *Strath of Kildonan: An Archaeological Landscape*. RCAHMS: Edinburgh.

Much of the historical information presented here has been taken from signage and guidebooks, but the interested reader will also find much additional material by the judicious use of the names provided here in internet searches. *Photographs by Strat Halliday except where otherwise indicated.*

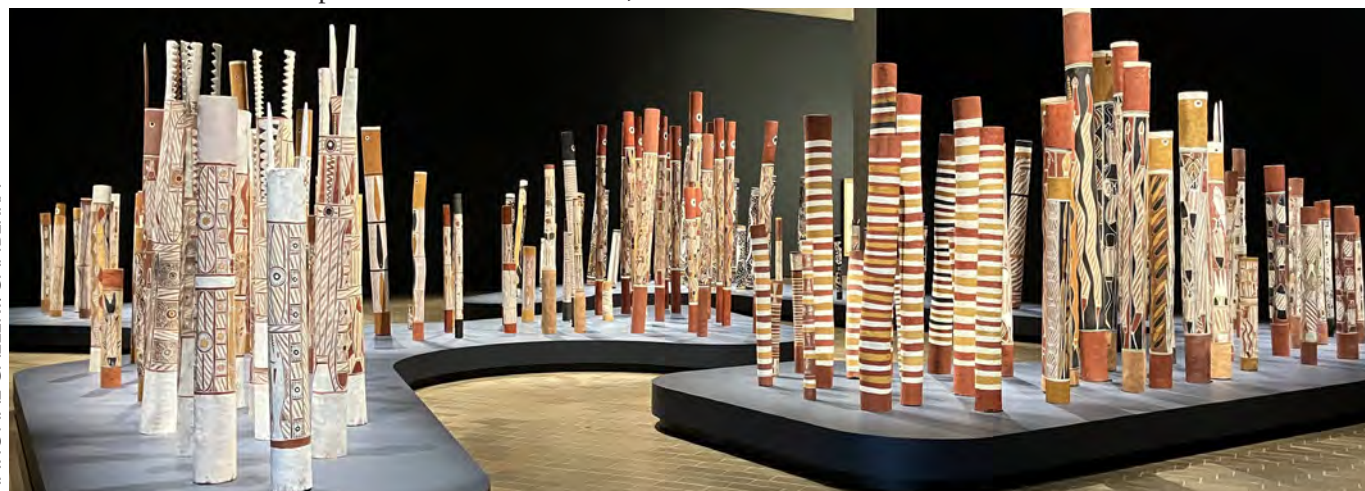


FIGURE 9: THE ABORIGINAL MEMORIAL IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY, CANBERRA

Dinosaurs, Dodos and a Democracy of Things

Gillian Brown

model: its remaining soft tissue studied elsewhere) and dodging under exact replicas of *Tyrannosaurus rex* and *Megalosaurus Bucklandii*. (see photo)

It feels like ‘a museum of a museum’, although none of the original display units still exist. In an era when

INTERIOR OF THE PITT-RIVERS MUSEUM TAKEN FROM THE LOWER GALLERY
LOOKING WEST TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE © PITT RIVERS MUSEUM,
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD 2014.28.1



What loosely connects Tsantsa, gold torcs from Moray, and Biggar Archaeology Group?

No, I don't watch that BBC quiz show either but looking for connections, parallels across cultures as well as distinctions in how humans have approached staying alive and making sense of life, is what is on display in the Pitt-Rivers Museum (PRM) in Oxford. It has a collection of over half a million archaeological and anthropological artefacts including photographs, film and manuscripts. The Museum has less than 4000 square metres of public space available so only a small percentage of its collection is on display. However, most of the collection is easily accessible online (<https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online#/search>) where, in your favourite armchair, cup of coffee to hand, you can view objects and read their biographies, look at film and photos (eg. Wilfrid Thesiger's Photographs of Arabia including his two crossings of the Empty Quarter) and listen to original field sound recordings (some recorded on wax cylinders over a century ago) that have been digitised (eg. women's songs from the rain forests of the Central African Republic).

You're wondering about my original question and I'll come back to that!

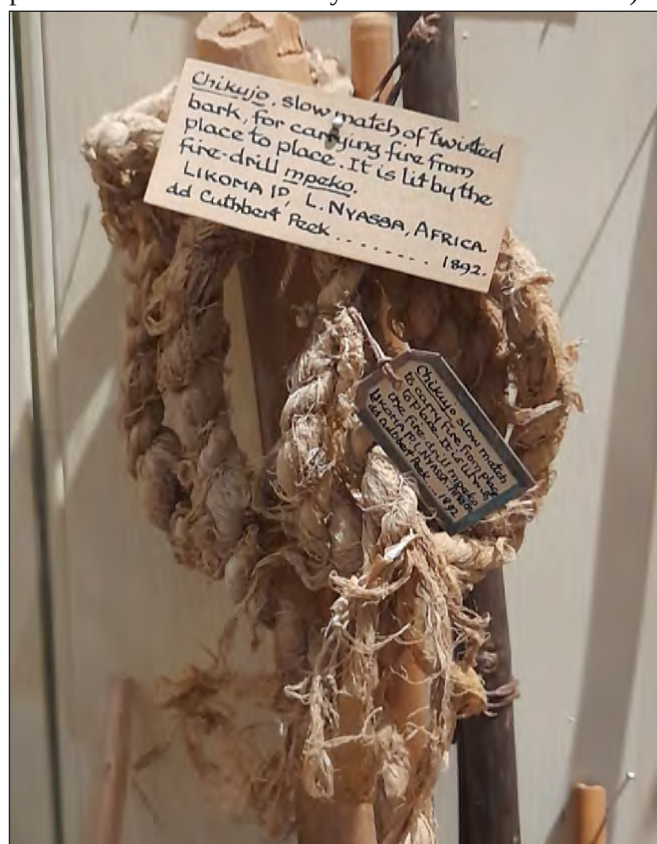
To a visitor perhaps the most distinctive and strangely compelling feature of the Museum is its layout and organisation. The main exhibition space is a large rectangular, colonnaded room with two mezzanine levels and a vaulted ceiling (see photo). You reach it by walking through the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, nodding to the Oxford Dodo (a

many museums seem to present their collections by period or geography or themes, display items carefully distanced with very short simplified descriptions of objects in uniform accessible fonts, and perhaps have



OXFORD UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY © GILLIAN BROWN

digital information panels, the PRM has continued to arrange artefacts by *type* (eg musical instruments, textiles, weapons, ways of making a fire) into a ‘*democracy of things*’. They exist on an equal footing. Artefacts are densely packed in tall glass cabinets standing to attention in serried ranks. (Well, they are part of a Collection made by a Lieutenant-General...)



SLOW MATCH OF TWISTED BARK, LAKE NYASSA, AFRICA
PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD 1892.36.2

Many objects have a detailed label attached handwritten in ink, often by the first Museum staff over a hundred years ago. The label (*see photo of the ‘chikujo’, above*) tells you its name and function, accession number, when and where it was collected or donated, and by whom (often colonial administrators and missionaries, or their wives or sisters, in the sticky outposts of Empire). The individuality of the handwriting gives a curious after life to late Victorians and Edwardians and proclaims their fascination with different cultures and beliefs about the ‘evolution’ of material culture. There is, of course, the darker side. There are concerns about the labels being derogatory, Eurocentric etc. A project, ‘Labelling Matters’, is reviewing the main galleries and there have been various display interventions since 2020 to highlight parts of the Museum’s, and Anthropology’s, more ‘problematic’ past.

This leads me, rather shamefacedly, to what I was doing in the PRM: a brief break in February to escape the chilling gales and greyness of Peeblesshire, only to experience the same in Oxford. An old friend had asked me to see whether the “shrunk heads” were still on display. I had seen



GOLD TORC, LAW FARM HOARD, MORAYSHIRE
PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD 1884.78.25

them many years ago, and at the time just marvelled at the skill and knowledge which enabled them but thought of little else. I was also keen to have another look at all the fascinating labels and some of the tools and pots. However, time was short so I consulted the diagrammatic plan of the layout of cabinets and hoped that ‘ceremonial ritual related to death’ might be their location. Right at the centre of the glass maze was the empty cabinet, its glass walls posted with notices: “Have you come to see the ‘shrunk heads?’”; “Ways Forward”. The Tsantsa had gone. Guilty as charged: I looked round nervously for witnesses to my ignominy. Audience research had apparently shown that visitors often saw displays of human remains as a testament to other cultures being ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’, that the displays reinforced racist thinking and didn’t enable understanding of other ways of being. Equally importantly, indigenous peoples have argued against the public display of their ancestors. The PRM and other museums are exploring models for virtual and physical repatriation and co-curatorship.

The Shuar people of the Ecuadorian rain forest created tsantsa (‘shrunk heads’) until the first half of the 20th century but very few remain with the community. Hundreds, it is said, sit in museums and private homes around the world. Europeans noticed the ritual practice when they arrived in the 1500s. By the late 19th century tsantsa had become a valuable trade item: ‘guns-for-heads’. Conversations are now being held with Shuar and Achuar community delegates about how they would like to see their heritage cared for and a major comparative genetic study within the Tsantsa Project is underway in Ecuador at the Guayaquil Municipal Museum and elsewhere.

‘Repatriation’ or ‘rematriation’ (the return of ancestral remains or cultural objects to a nation or state from museum collections) and restitution (return of the same to communities or individuals) are newsworthy and controversial eg. the Benin Bronzes, the Elgin/Parthenon Marbles. (Think of the history of the Dunkeld Lectern and the Stone of Scone.) The British Museum (BM) has over 8 million objects of which 650,000 come from England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, including the Lewis Chessmen. (11 of the 93 are on display in the National Museum of Scotland but the rest are kept in the BM.) Which brings me to the gold torcs from Moray, Scotland.

The PRM has two gold torcs (*see photo, left*) from the Law Farm Hoard, found during spring ploughing in 1857. Their sizes suggest they were worn around the arm or wrist. It’s estimated that there were at least 36 torcs in the hoard, sometimes described as the ‘richest gold find from Bronze Age Scotland’. Seven are held in the British Museum and ten are held in museums in Scotland, the rest long dispersed. How did the PRM acquire theirs? They formed part of the **Founding Collection** in 1884 when General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers gave more than 26,000 objects to the University of Oxford on condition they built a museum to house them, appointed a lecturer to teach about the collection, and maintained a general mode of display. It was opened to visitors in 1887.



So who was the General (*photo, above*)? He was born in Wetherby, Yorkshire in 1827. The youngest son of a youngest son, part of the landed aristocracy and educated privately, of which he wrote scornfully: “so little was eye-training practised that even geography was often taught without a map, and men almost lost the use of their eyes for any other purpose than reading” (**Pitt-Rivers, 1884, ‘Opening of Dorset County Museum, Inaugural Address’ p.9*). He served in the Grenadier Guards from 1845 in Malta, Crimea, England, Canada and Ireland until retirement in 1882. Early in his career he worked in the testing and development of rifles. This led to a focus on the historical development of firearms and motivated his collection of weaponry and then other kinds of artefact. He was interested in working out and experimenting with the technologies which had been used to create particular tools so that he could establish their place in an evolutionary scale, borrowing by analogy from the work of Charles Darwin (‘natural selection’) and Herbert Spencer (‘survival of the fittest’). Pitt-Rivers believed that material culture (spears, baskets etc) and technologies evolved over time like biological species. He organised his collection of artefacts to exemplify ‘series’ or ‘types’ (as set out in the PRM), rather than seeing objects as examples of different ways that humans have solved the same problem.

In 1880 General A.H. Lane Fox, as he then was, unexpectedly inherited from a great uncle, a vast fortune, an extensive estate in Dorset and Wiltshire, and a title (Lord Rivers). At which point Pitt-Rivers was formally added to his family name. His collecting amplified until it could no longer be contained in his many properties. He formed a second collection on a similarly large scale to his first, and subsequently displayed it, organised in ‘types’ and ‘series’, in a private museum at Farnham, Dorset. (This was closed in the 1960’s and the collection sold and dispersed.)

What did he collect? Ethnographic artefacts (typically objects in everyday use from different parts of the world); archaeological artefacts from the pre-industrial era; and models or replicas (he called them “facsimiles”). What were his sources? Exhibitions, field

collections (his own, but mostly others), donations (215 stone tools from Patagonia were given to him by the author, William Henry Hudson; the explorer, Richard Burton, gave him 36 stone tools from West Africa), auction houses and dealers (the source of about a third of his collection).

Pitt-Rivers died in 1900 at 73. What is his significance? In 1882, he was made the first Inspector of Monuments in Britain, a post he held until 1890, after which he was made an Honorary Inspector. In the course of his work, he travelled widely around Britain with a small skilled team carrying out surveys. He undertook many excavations in the south and west of England between 1866-1897. One of his views was that private landowners in England had a responsibility to examine their estates archaeologically rather than destroy evidence through agricultural operations. He stressed, in privately published records of his own excavations, that not recording the results carefully would be “mischievous”, while noting that recording each excavation took five times as long as the actual digging. His writing up in detail has been seen as a permanent influence on archaeological excavations.

So, finally, to the third Pitt-Rivers link. In 1996 Biggar Archaeology Group won the Pitt-Rivers Award for outstanding voluntary projects in archaeology, given by the British Archaeology Awards (now renamed Archaeological Achievement Awards), for their ‘*Glenochar Bastle House and Ferm Toun Project*’. They were given the same award in 2008 for their ‘*Archaeological Survey of Upper Tweeddale*’.

Why go to the Museum when the website can provide a stimulating virtual visit? It’s unique, intriguing, free (donations encouraged). It’s in a small space, so less ‘*museum-leg fatigue*’, no ‘*listless wandering*’ as Pitt-Rivers observed of visitors in larger museums. And in February there was a pop-up café on a mezzanine providing one of the attractive “inducements” that Pitt-Rivers felt was crucial to the appeal of any museum. You can always nod to the Dodo on the way in. ■

Notes:

*I am grateful to the Pitt-Rivers Museum for their extensive website which has facilitated my exploration of Pitt-Rivers’ life. Any inaccuracies in the article are entirely my own.

Further Reading.

Bowden, M. 1984. [reprinted 1990] *General Pitt-Rivers “the father of scientific archaeology”*, Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum

Bowden, M. 1991. *Pitt-Rivers: The Life and Archaeological Work of Lieutenant-General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

‘Colonial histories and legacies in our museum’: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/collections/colonial-histories-and-legacies>

If you are interested in reading more about Tsantsa see the online article ‘Facing the Past’ by Kata Karath in Science. vol. 387, no.6737, 27 February 2025 at www.science.org/. Enter ‘Tsantsa’ on the Search prompt.

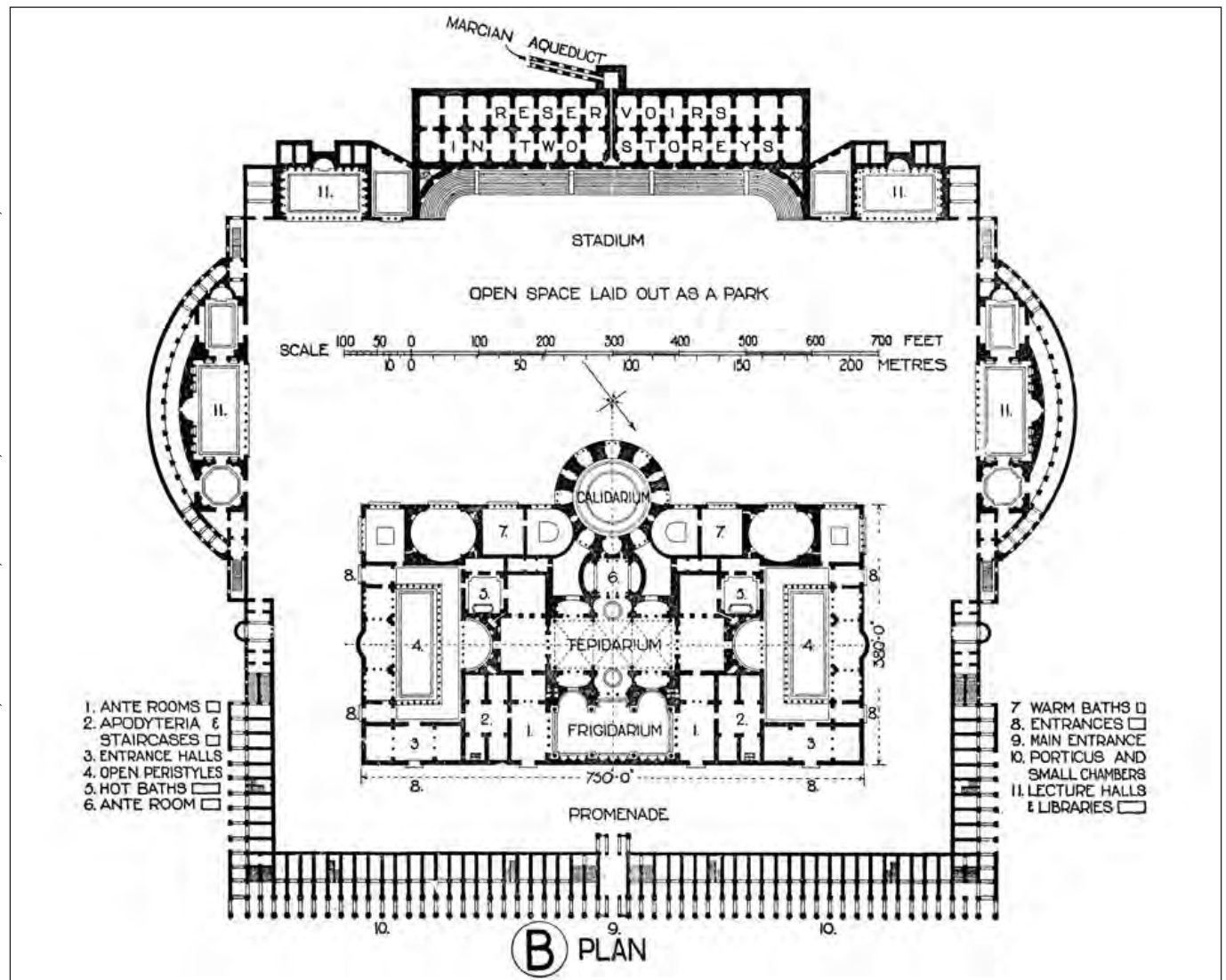
The Baths of Caracalla

Piers Dixon

A visit to the Baths of Caracalla on my family holiday in March was a delight after the mobbed Colosseum and consequently was much easier to appreciate.

There were upper floor halls, for functions perhaps, but not over the main three bath chambers, and the stairs can still be seen (Figure 2). There were atria in the large halls to either end with rooms opening off, and the main halls and atria were decorated with large statues such as a 10m high sculpture of Hercules (Figure 3)

FIGURE 1. PLAN OF THE BATHS OF CARACALLA. SOURCE: FLETCHER, BANNISTER, A HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE ON THE COMPARATIVE METHOD, SIXTH EDITION, NEW YORK, CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, 1921



The sheer scale of the baths of Caracalla is phenomenal. The Baths building itself is about 220m in length by 110m in breadth (see plan, Figure 1) and stands on a raised terrace covering 10 hectares and could manage 10,000 people at any one time, with cisterns taking up to 8.2 million litres. The swimming pool, natatio, was Olympic sized, and the circular hot room, caldarium, was an innovation.

Built 211-216 by the eponymous emperor, with Roman concrete, comprising layers of lime, volcanic sand and stone aggregate, was faced with brick, marble and granite. It continued in use until the aqueduct from the Alban hills was cut by Totila's men during the wars between Justinian and the Goths in 537.

The plan of the Bath House (Figure 1) shows that the circular Caldarium or hot room was domed like the Pantheon, but without the central hole and though only $\frac{3}{4}$ of its size was just as high at 35m using the same layered concrete construction, and surprisingly its six hot plunge pools were lit by sheet glass windows!

and the Farnese Bull, now preserved in the Naples Archaeological Museum.

The floors were covered with geometric mosaic designs that appear surprisingly modern and there were niches with smaller statues, all now gone, rather like a baroque church. The baths were heated by furnaces incorporated into the basement of the built terrace via hypocausts under the floors and in the walls.

The surrounding terrace included a Mithraeum, a grain mill driven by the same water supply and shops along its front for the complete day out! It was the largest but by no means the only Baths in town, with those of Diocletian partly incorporated into a church designed by Michelangelo, the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri. This also stands to full height, making two of the hundreds of public baths known in the city (according to Wikipedia). ■

Further reading: *Rome (Oxford Archaeological Guide)* by Amanda Claridge

FIGURE 2. THE GEOMETRIC MOZAICS AND THE STAIRS TO THE UPPER FLOOR HALLS ■ PERS DIXON



FIGURE 4 VIEW FROM ONE ATRIUM TO THE OTHER, GIVING AN IDEA OF THE SHEER SCALE OF THE PLACE 📍 PIER'S DIXON



FIGURE 3. 10M HIGH STATUE OF HERCULES 📍 NAPLES ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM



FIGURE 5. THE COLD PLUNGE, SHOWING ONE OF THE OVERFLOW AND WATER INPUT CULVERTS AND THE DEPTH OF THE POOL 📍 PIER'S DIXON

Qaṣr Al-Hallabat, a Roman Fort in Jordan

Piers Dixon and Denys Pringle



In 2016, I joined the Castle Studies Group tour of Jordan led by Professor Denys Pringle. The tour included some of the finest Crusader castles like Montreal (Al-Shawbak) and Kerak that famously belonged to Reynald de Chatillon, but also included later Mamluk castles and Roman forts converted to Qaṣr by the Umayyads after the Arab invasion in the 630s - something akin to a hunting lodge or estate centre. Qaṣr al-Hallabat, featured here in the following article by Professor Pringle, poses the question for us, “When is a fort a castle?”

Denys Pringle writes: Studied by Butler and the Princeton Expedition in the early 20th century, in 1978 by David Kennedy, and then excavated between 1979 and 1985 by Ghazi Bisheh of the DoA, the excavation has revealed a complex development which has recently been reinterpreted by Ignazio Acre on the basis of a strict stratigraphical analysis of the standing masonry:



It is a 2nd-century Roman fort, rather like one of the milecastles on Hadrian’s Wall, with an enclosure 17.5m square and a gatehouse. There is no direct dating evidence for it, but it was evidently linked in some way to the construction of the Via Nova Traiana in 111–17. The fort was rebuilt in AD 212/15, apparently to the

same footprint, when an inscription refers to it as novum castellum.

A restoration of the kastra was carried out by the dux and consul Flavius Anastasius in 529 under Justinian (Greek inscription not in situ): the first quadriburgium.

After the earthquake of 551, rebuilding of quadriburgium and laying out of ranges of reception rooms around the outer courtyard, incorporated over 100 basalt blocks bearing an edict of Anastasius I (491–518). These seem to have come from elsewhere, as Qaṣr al-Hallabat would hardly have been important enough to have merited the display of such a lengthy imperial edict and the local stone is limestone. In this phase we also have evidence of mosaics, plaster and

painting, including crosses; and in the inner fort, a three-arched portico (with crosses on the keystones) and a winepress. As this phase is evidently pre-Muslim, it is suggested by Arce that it represents the conversion of the fort into a praetorium (or headquarters) for the Ghassanids, the Christian Arab tribe of foederati to whom the defence of the frontier was entrusted in this period. (Cf. Qaṣr ibn Wardan near Hama, Syria, where there are a 6c. barracks, church and praetorium.)

Converted by the Umayyads into a qaṣr, which is more or less what it had already become anyway. Collapse of first-floor room to right of entrance gate includes fragments of finely carved pilasters, cornices and arcades. Elsewhere traces of vault mosaics with glass tesserae and decorative carving, stucco panels and window grills, wall paintings and floor mosaic (including repair of the 6c. ones). This decoration is concentrated in the rooms added in to the second-phase quadriburgium, while the older parts of the fort were left for stores, kitchens, etc. Nearby there is a mosque: tree-aisled, with miḥrāb (hence after 709-10).

Unlike some quṣūr, QH sits in an oasis with fields, gardens and houses watered by an irrigation system from a large reservoir and 8 rock-cut cisterns dating at least from Roman times. ■

Denys Pringle, *Castles of Jordan* 2016. Denys Pringle is Emeritus Professor in the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University

All photographs by Piers Dixon



Cromarty: Exploring the Origins of a Royal Medieval Burgh

Trevor Cowie reviews Steve Birch's February lecture

Having set the scene, Steve went on to explain the historical background to the establishment of the burgh. This owed much to its strategically important location, controlling the entrance to the Cromarty Firth and the ferry crossing on the pilgrimage route to the important medieval shrine of St Duthac in Tain. With good coastal access and a rich agricultural hinterland, Cromarty was a natural location for a medieval power

CROMARTY: GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN TRENCH



As our speaker in February, we were delighted to welcome Steve Birch of West Coast Archaeological Services. Originally based on Skye, Steve has carried out contract, community and research-based archaeological projects all over the Highlands. However, his company now operates from Cromarty over in Easter Ross, and it was the new light that archaeological excavations have shed on the origins and development of this attractive historic burgh that was the focus of his talk to us at PAS.

The overall project was organised by the Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project, which was formed after winter storms and high tides in December 2012 revealed extensive medieval and post-medieval archaeological deposits along the shoreline just east of the town. Excavations by Steve and co-director Mary Peteranna took place between 2013 and 2016, producing a wealth of information about the medieval and later occupation of the burgh.

EXCAVATIONS WITHIN C16-17 MERCHANT'S HOUSE REVEALING THE UNDERLYING MEDIEVAL BUILDINGS



centre. Politically too, it was strategically located on a key frontier zone in northern Scotland for, unlike other areas of the north and Highland regions that were under clan control, Cromarty fell under the feudal authority of the Scottish crown. Although it was documented that the town's sheriffdom had been established by 1266, little was known about the early history and layout of medieval Cromarty.

Carried out on an extensive scale not often possible in an urban setting, the excavations have provided detailed insights into the development of the burgh, revealing the remains of a remarkable succession of buildings, property boundaries and zones of activity within an area focused on the line of a former road referred to enigmatically as Thief's Row during the 18th century.

The latest buildings recorded on the site, dating to the 19th century, were located on the north side of the road. They comprised rectangular stone-built structures running parallel to Thief's Row and set within plots of land demarcated by stone boundaries. As excavation progressed, the foundations of earlier buildings were revealed, most likely constructed during the closing stages of the 17th century. Steven explained that these broadly mirrored the footprints of the latest buildings, though complicated by multiple phases of later remodelling and alterations.

However, in the preceding centuries, the layout of the settlement turned out to have been completely different, with the gable ends of the buildings aligned

THIS 3M DEEP WELL WAS ACCESSED BY A WELL-CONSTRUCTED FLIGHT OF STURDY STEPS. THE WELL WENT OUT OF USE AFTER DISPOSAL OF A PONY CARCASS IN ITS BASE, POSSIBLY AS A DELIBERATE ACT OF POISONING



on an earlier road in the same location. The scale of the excavation enabled no less than six of these houses to be uncovered; somewhat smaller in area than the later buildings, they were laid out in regular plots. Certain construction details suggested that these buildings may have had basal walls built primarily of stone which supported upper structures of timber and daub reaching up at least two storeys in height. These buildings opened onto a series of adjoining stone-laid paths, or vennels. Finds indicate 16th to 17th century dates with high status materials suggesting a prosperous and thriving economy at this time.

Layers of midden deposits covered the earliest structures on the site - a complicated series of broadly 13th to 15th century buildings, mostly surviving as

STACK OF 3 UPPER ROTARY QUERNS RE-USED AS HEARTHS, REPRESENTING SUCCESSIVE FIREPLACES IN ONE OF THE MEDIEVAL BUILDINGS



post-hole alignments and ditch slots. These represent the traces of large timber buildings, whose alignments apparently respect property boundaries running off the former High Street. Informal gravel or cobble surfaces marked the position of paths between these medieval buildings, the earliest of which appear to have been constructed from timber and turf, while the later structures had wattle-and-daub panels in combination with cruck-frames and upright timber posts. A widespread burnt layer encountered across much of the site suggests that a major conflagration must have taken place at some point during the 13th to

15th century occupation. In the absence of any evidence for deliberate attack on the town, this may simply have been the result of an accident.

In summary, the sequence revealed by excavation shows a general progression from mostly timber buildings in the 13th to 14th centuries to mostly stone buildings in the 18th to 19th centuries. At various times, the roof structures comprised turf, thatch, pantile and slate.

It is only possible here to touch on the wealth of artefactual evidence recovered over the course of the excavations. The finds range from personal items such



DECORATIVE SPINDLE WHORL

as copper alloy buckles to iron tools such as knives and sickles, while ceramics imported from England and the Low Countries reflect significant trade links. Combined with numismatic evidence, everything points to Cromarty having been a well-established and well connected settlement during the medieval period. One exceptional find deserves a mention - a bone tuning peg from a musical instrument, most likely a harp, and only the second example to have been recovered from a medieval context in Scotland (the other was discovered during excavations at Edinburgh Castle).

Drawing his talk to a close, Steve outlined some of the evidence for the economy of the burgh. Its people ate fish, beef, mutton and pork. Sea fishing was clearly of importance to the medieval town, based primarily on cod. Large numbers of iron fish hooks and boat rivets, together with the fish remains, middens composed of shellfish (used as bait) and layers of wood ash, appear to indicate fish processing on an industrial scale, including smoking and drying. Analysis of the animal bone suggests that hide and wool processing also formed a significant part of Cromarty's medieval industry.

Our thanks again go to Steve for an enjoyable and informative presentation of what was a model community project. With post-excavation work and the preparation of the final publication now well in hand; it is clear the project has provided a wonderful snapshot of the layout of the burgh and its changing fortunes between the 13th and 19th centuries. Over the four seasons of fieldwork, the excavation attracted over 700 volunteers and thousands of visitors, and was lauded by medieval specialists as 'one of the most important medieval excavations happening in Scotland.' Given the quality of the evidence presented, it would be hard to disagree. ■

All photographs are from the Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project.

Medieval Coin Hoard Discovered in the Borders

Metal detectorists have unearthed a hoard of 15th century coins in the Cappercleuch area of the Scottish Borders.

SELECTION OF COINS FROM CAPPERCLEUCH



Keith Young and Lisa Stephenson discovered thirty gold and silver coins in close proximity, dating to the 15th Century. The coins are a mix of Scottish and English coins, comprising English silver groats minted by Henry V (1413-1422) to Edward IV (1461-1483), and Scottish gold demy and half-demys of James I (1406-1437) and James II (1437-1460). The deposition date was likely in the early to mid-1460's.

Lisa said: "The hoard is the find of a lifetime and being part of the excavation with the National Museum and Treasure Trove team was an amazing experience, something we'll never forget."

Keith said: "Lisa and I have been lucky enough to have found some wonderful artifacts while metal detecting, but nothing quite prepared us for a find like this. Hopefully the hoard will go on public display for others to enjoy. We'd like to thank the National Museum of Scotland and Treasure Trove team for their help and support."

HENRY VI SILVER GROAT



REVERSE OF A GOLD DEMY OF JAMES I



The find was reported to the Treasure Trove Unit (TTU), who assess all Scottish archaeological finds and, through the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel (SAFAP), assign a monetary value to be paid ex-gratia to the finder and make the find available for Accredited Museums to bid to acquire.

Commenting on the significance of the find, Antony Lee from the Treasure Trove Unit said: "Coin hoards containing a mix of both English and Scottish coins are not unusual, but we do not see many hoards from this period in Scotland, so it's a fascinating find. Keith

and Lisa acted promptly and correctly in reporting it to us. In turn we, along with archaeologists from National Museums Scotland (NMS), were able to attend and excavate the site, finding five more coins and documenting the circumstances of the hoard alongside the finders."

The coins will progress through the Treasure Trove system and, following further study, be made available in due course for Accredited Museums to acquire through the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel.

Acknowledgements:

Our thanks go to Dr Antony Lee, Acting Manager of the Treasure Trove Unit, National Museums Scotland for these preliminary details of this important recent find. We look forward to hearing about the hoard in more detail as research progresses.

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PAS Lecture Programme and Other Events

Our 2024-25 programme is now drawing to a close, with the final event being the AGM on Thursday April 17th, at 7.30pm in St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre.

April 17 2025 AGM and Members' Night

Other Events

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

April 24th 2025 April lecture: **South Asian Coins in UK Museums and Proactive Repatriation and Justice-Seeking.** Shreya Gupta, University of Exeter and Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. 6.00pm, Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh. Details [here](#)

Join PAS

If you're not yet a member of PAS, do join: only £20 pa (£30 for couples).

- We have monthly lectures from September until March
- We organise site visits and outings
- We run local projects and digs
- We produce a monthly 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