



January 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to the latest Peeblesshire Archaeological Society newsletter. And a Happy New Year to you! We hope that you had a lovely Christmas!

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Previous talk: Prof Gordon Noble – *Discovering the Northern Picts*, Eastgate Theatre

On **Tuesday 12 December** we joined the Tweeddale Society in welcoming **Prof Gordon Noble** to the Eastgate Theatre in Peebles to talk about '[Discovering the Northern Picts](#)'.

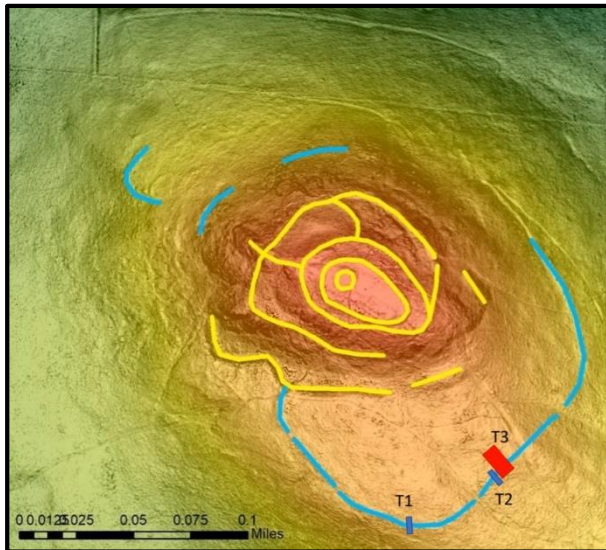
Gordon used Ptolemy's map of Britain to contrast the many tribal groupings of c.150 AD with that of 700 AD when the Pictish kingdom dominated Northern and eastern Scotland. His



Professor Noble in action at the Eastgate Theatre. Image courtesy Richard Welander

argument is that the Picts arose as a reaction to the genocidal activities of Rome in maintaining their frontier. He showed us the example of Dunnicaer as a promontory

fort on the north-east coast with rectangular buildings and Pictish symbols stone dating to the 2nd to 4th centuries as a pointer to developing Pictish society in the late Roman period. Elsewhere in Europe hillforts were being occupied in the aftermath of the breakup of the Roman Empire and Scotland is no exception.



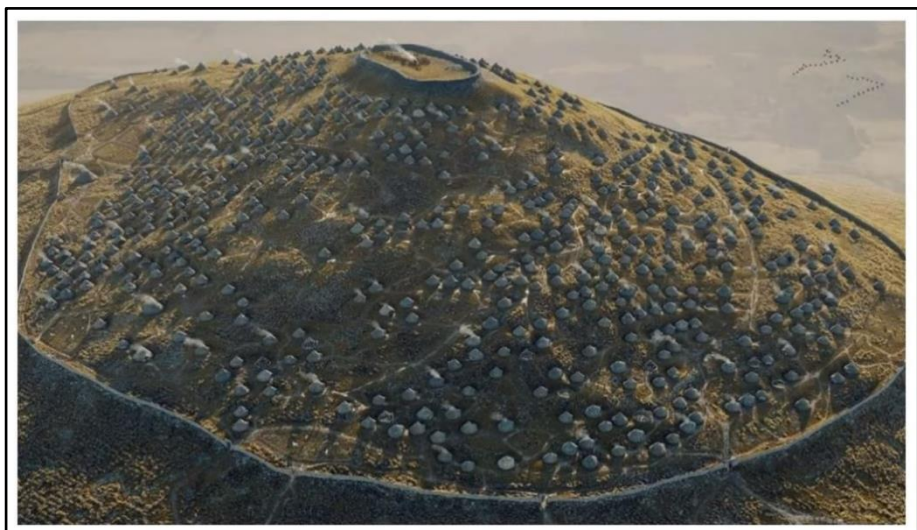
East Lomond Hillfort: University of Aberdeen/Falkland Stewardship Trust Excavations. Slide courtesy Gordon Noble

Past excavations at Traprain Law and recent ones at East Lomond and Tap o' Noth have produced hillforts occupied in the late Roman period and into the Dark Ages with houses based around stone hearths with walls of perishable material while Rhynie has large timber buildings in a lowland setting with large Pictish stones guarding the entrance and an exotic list of artefacts including imports from the Roman world indicative of an elite.

All this points to a new hierarchical society with hillforts performing an important function where large

numbers of people gathered, despite the nature of the occupation being poorly understood. Recent excavations at Eildon Hill North mainly revealed a late Bronze Age settlement, but included a Dark Age date suggesting a late phase of occupation to match that at Traprain Law.

In the final part of the talk Gordon outlined his recent excavations at Burghead producing evidence that is later than those discussed earlier dating from the later first millennium AD when the Pictish kingdom was fully established, a site



Reconstruction of Tap o' Noth at its height. Slide courtesy Gordon Noble

that was densely occupied with rectangular timber houses and include fragments of Pictish stones from an early church site.

He concluded that hilltop settlements were established from the late Roman period into the Dark Ages and that the scope and diversity of settlement in this period has been underestimated. What he found reflects the 'landscapes of power' rather than small settlements. If I have a critical comment it would be that Burghead did not fit with the core of his talk which was focused on the development of Pictish society and settlement in the late Roman period and Dark Ages. It is this research that has transformed our understanding of the period in Scotland.

Piers Dixon

Next lecture: Dr George Prew – *Recent Discoveries in the Borders*

We're starting the New Year off with something of an archaeological retrospective and a look back at the artefacts claimed as Treasure Trove during 2023.



*Dr George Prew, Treasure Trove Officer
(Crown Copyright)*

On **Thursday 18 January** we'll be welcoming **Dr George Prew** to the St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre in Peebles to speak about '[Recent Discoveries in the Borders](#)'. Having recently joined the **Treasure Trove Unit** as a TT Officer, George has a big geographical and archaeologically varied 'patch' to cover – Moray, Orkney, Shetland and the Lothians. But his interests and expertise are equally wide and varied. Completing his PhD thesis recently, George describes his research interests as being centred on 'dress and death', and the analysis of how communities in Iron Age Italy dressed their corpses. Interesting if a little macabre! Within the Treasure Trove Unit, he has a particular interest in Late Medieval enamelled objects, small lead finds, and shot.

The Treasure Trove system in Scotland operates in a uniquely distinct way. Under Scots Law, any object, however discovered, does not automatically belong to either the finder or the landowner. If it's shown to be '*without known heritor*', it may be claimed by the grandly named King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer on behalf of the Crown and disposed of by her/him as deemed appropriate.

George will explain this more fully, giving an overview of how the Treasure Trove system works, what the Treasure Trove Unit does, who



17th/18th century sword belt hanger found recently near Posso Tower, Kirkton Manor (Crown Copyright)

they are, and some of the big changes to the unit over the last year, before showing us some recent cases of objects claimed as treasure from Peebles and the rest of the Scottish Borders in 2023.

Join us for a fascinating glimpse behind the scenes of how important archaeological artefacts reach the safe keeping of local and national museums across Scotland.

Venue: St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre, Rosetta Road, Peebles

Date: Thursday 18 January

Time: 7.30pm

Response to Colin Bell's *Lost Manorhead Cup & Ring-Marked Boulder* article

*In our December issue, **Colin Bell** described his hunt for an elusive cup and ring marked boulder at Manorhead in the Manor Valley. Chairman **Trevor Cowie** responds...*

Congratulations to Colin on his very thorough research on the boulder at Manorhead! I stopped to look at the stone back in the late 1990s so I can confirm that his sleuthing is quite correct. It is currently mapped quite wrongly on Canmore!

I recall that the stone at Manorhead was one of the very earliest discoveries made by what was a raw and inexperienced field walking group set up by the late Tam Ward – it may even have been found on their very first day out in the field. Its discovery was later noted in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* (DES) for that year (1995) along with a note of the group's intention to survey the whole valley.



This intriguing fragment of rock from the Manor Valley was brought into the National Museum for identification a number of years ago. The central cup and surrounding rings are in fact the result of natural formation and weathering processes. Image courtesy Trevor Cowie

Rather embarrassingly for PAS, the source of the error in the co-ordinates seems to have been the Society's own DES entry. It is possible that a typing error has crept in during the publication process rather than at the time of the original field recording but as Colin deduced, the net result of transposing those numbers is that the supposed location has been moved a grid square to the west. As ever, small errors can have significant consequences: as Colin also showed,

if that data is exported for use elsewhere, those errors go on to infect other projects (in this case the ScRAP rock art database). Goodness knows how many other rock art enthusiasts have had a fruitless trudge up that bare hillside to the west of the true location!

Turning to the correct location (which would have been at or very close to Pin 2 as shown on Colin's map), it is concerning if the boulder has actually been entirely lost. As regards the supposed rock carvings, it is fair to say that these were not universally accepted as artificial in origin at the time, as entirely natural cups and cup and ring-like features are found in our local metamorphic rocks (see illustration). However, those doubts about its identification don't entirely soften the blow if it has gone: if the stone has subsequently been removed or destroyed or covered by spoil due to the works on the track, then that deprives us of the opportunity to check or verify these features using more modern recording techniques such as photogrammetry.

It looks like a visit will be needed up to Manorhead and down memory lane to see if all traces of this elusive boulder really have gone!

Trevor Cowie

Date for the diary: Piers Dixon public lecture – Peeblesshire Archaeological Society's Excavations at Shootinglee 2012-2022

Lying some 4km south of Traquair, **Shootinglee** was the seat of a warden of the Ettrick Forest during the 15th century and the 16th-17th century house of the Stewarts of Shootinglee at the forest stead of that name. In this talk, **Piers Dixon** will describe the



Aerial view of Trench 7 at Shootinglee. Image courtesy Stephen Scott/Piers Dixon

results of the Society's long-running fieldwork project at the site. Now at the final research and report-writing stage following the completion of the excavations, the project is set to be a significant contribution to our understanding of the rural settlement record in southern Scotland during the Late and Post-Medieval periods.

'Peeblesshire Archaeological Society's Excavations at Shootinglee(s) 2012-22: Masterstead, Forest Stead and Sheep Farm, c.1400-1850'

Dr Piers Dixon (University of Stirling & Peeblesshire Archaeological Society)

Venue: St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre, Rosetta Road, Peebles

Date: Thursday 7 March

Time: 7.30pm

Tickets: £6 per person (includes tea/coffee)

The proceeds of this event will be used to fund research on the finds from the excavation by artefact specialists.

Tinnis Castle & Thirlestane Barrows Lithics Update – Dark Age Digs



Extract from the Dark Age Digs website at <https://dark-age-digs.com/tinnis-castle-and-the-thirlestane-barrows-lithics-update/>.

PAS members will be interested to know that research continues on **Tinnis Castle** and **Thirlestane Barrows**.

The lithics recovered from the sites have now been studied by Lithics Specialist **Torben Ballin**. Most of the assemblage was merely quartz chips but a flint microlith was found in the earliest layer of Tinnis Castle, underlying the rampart in Trench 1.

There are no local sources of flint – it was probably brought from a coastal area, where it may have been washed out of the till bordering the North Sea shores. The quartz on the other hand could have been collected anywhere in the local area, for example in the form of erratics or pebbles from water-courses.

Microliths are small lithic implements manufactured to form part of composite tools, either as tips or as edges/barbs. These date to the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic periods (i.e. 8400-3500 BC), so we now have evidence for when the summit of Tinnis was first occupied, long before the fort itself was built.

Walkerburn's 'wee' 19th century gem – Trevor Cowie

*It is an old adage that 'the past begins yesterday' and in this article, **Trevor Cowie** highlights a rare local survivor of Scotland's rich 19th century industrial heritage.*

As readers pass through the village of Walkerburn by car or bus, I wonder how many are aware of the significance of the unassuming little grey-painted structure that stands at the gable end of the stone building next to the Caberston Farm Coffee Shop. If you have time to spot it, the 'Gentlemen' sign on the wall next to it provides a pretty obvious clue! However, this is no ordinary public convenience for it is a rare survivor of a type of cast iron urinal that was once in widespread use all over Britain from the later 19th century onwards.



View of the urinal from the exterior. Image courtesy Trevor Cowie

Prefabricated cast iron urinals like these were manufactured in a variety of shapes and sizes by a number of Glasgow iron foundries. Embossed patterned panels on the Walkerburn structure proudly proclaim that this one was manufactured by what was by far the most successful of them - the Saracen Foundry of Walter Macfarlane & Co. This particular design comprises a gentleman's urinal with an open entrance bay and two stalls, made up of a series of panels attached to uprights. Victorian cast ironwork was very often decorative as well as functional and despite the very functional purpose of the structure, a number of the panels bear attractive ornamental fretwork. The flat roof has a decorative cornice, while there is a further charming



Left: Each stall is embossed 'PLEASE ADJUST YOUR DRESS BEFORE LEAVING'. Still sound advice today in such situations! Right: Waterspouts in the form of crouching beasts lead rainwater off the roof. Images courtesy Trevor Cowie

detail on each long side in the form of a gargoyle-type waterspout to lead off rainwater.

Eventually developments in environmental health rendered public conveniences like these obsolete. Only a very few remain in use; others survive, but often in a sorry state while a significant number are now in museums or are otherwise protected. Due to its rarity and its good condition, the Walkerburn urinal has since 1978 been given statutory protection and is now a category A listed structure (for further details, including the process of listing and the criteria for designation see the relevant entry on the Historic Environment Scotland (HES) website at <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB8326>).

The statement of significance published by HES succinctly captures the importance of this fascinating little structure. It notes how the village of Walkerburn grew up around the local textile mills to meet the demand for workers' housing. In turn, as the village grew, public amenities grew, ranging from the provision of pavements and better roadways to street lighting. This urinal seems to have been brought to the village around 1897, for in a report that year, the County Sanitary Inspector commented that a 'great improvement has been effected in Walkerburn Village by the erection of a public urinal'. This little local treasure is therefore a tangible reminder of the growth and drive and energy of the late Victorian period, and the social changes that came in its wake.

Trevor Cowie

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to seeing you soon.

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