

PAS Newsletter

Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

January 2025

“C’est une hache, c’est très ancienne; je pense quarante mille ans”
- Strat Halliday’s French adventures

Unearthing Ancient Tweeddale project nominated for an award -
vote now - Ronan Toolis writes

Treasure Trove Update by George Prew & Antony Lee

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Next Lecture on January 16: Recent Excavations at Dunsapie

PAS Programme + Other Events

“best read this month of any magazine”

- PAS member’s description of the November 2024 issue

Welcome

Colin McLean, Newsletter Editor

Well, here we are, at the start of another new year. I hope you have all had a suitably relaxing or exciting festive break - best wishes for 2025. We still have three lectures to go in our current series, and of course the AGM - make sure you have the dates in your diary. Details on the back page.

After a promising start, the winter has brought mainly dreich weather entirely unsuited to decent photography. Taking an optimistic interpretation of the weather forecast (all photographers are by nature optimistic about the weather), I ventured to Torwoodlee near Galashiels on a Sunday afternoon in early December to have a look at the [well-documented broch](#) there. After 20 minutes sitting in the car in the golf club car park, waiting for the rain to subside, a glimmer of sun encouraged me to walk over to the site. Like many, I have long been fascinated by brochs (and I'm grateful to Piers Dixon and Strat Halliday for recommending to me that I read Ian Armit's *Towers in the North - the Brochs of Scotland* as an introduction to the subject).

Sadly, the combination of a strong wind and a light but steady drizzle was a constraint on drone flying, and the lack of directional sunlight did not help to cast shadow relief across the remains. That explains why most responses to the day's aerial photographs have been along the lines of "I wouldn't have recognised that as a broch." Undaunted, I shall return (perhaps a future PAS outing?).

Strat Halliday's French holiday turned up a spectacular and unexpected find and you can read his entertaining account starting on page 3.

Archaeology featured in the news in the latter part of the year, with a new report suggesting that the Altar Stone at Stonehenge may well have been transported an impressive 450 miles from the North East of Scotland, rather than from Wales, as previously believed. Read more about it [here](#), and watch an excellent video [here](#).

This seems an opportune moment to sincerely thank everyone who has contributed articles, holiday reports, assorted ramblings, a quiz and some wonderful photographs to the Newsletter since I took over its production last May. It has been a delight to receive each and every one - do keep them coming. ■



TORWOODLEE BROCH COLIN MCLEAN

“C’est une hache, c’est très ancienne; je pense quarante mille ans”* - what I did on my holidays

Strat Halliday

According to my wife, normal people go on a holiday where they stop doing what they usually do and travel to somewhere unspecified to do something different. Hmmn, there is a flaw in her thinking. She contends that archaeologists are not normal, ergo they do not behave like normal people. To see it from the other end of the telescope, surely everyone who goes on holiday looks around them, marvels at a little bit of what they see and wonders how it got to be the way it is.

FIGURE 1: MOATED SITE BENEATH THE TREES NORTH-WEST OF LE GRAND BUSSARD



Thus, when we rolled up in what passed for the Loire at a farm named Le Grand Bussard just west of Chateaudun, thoughts of the past had been largely dissipated in a debate - I use the term loosely - about the merits of competing satellite navigation systems that had pitted Google Maps against Toyota’s built-in brand and an out-of-date road atlas. We had picked a converted bakehouse for a three-day stay, and found it set a little apart from the big 19th-century ranges around the farmyard, I suppose as a precaution against fire. But how quickly things can change, and if I had made any pretence that we could go and do whatever she would like, those good intentions quickly unravelled.

FIGURE 2: DITCH TERMINAL BESIDE THE ENTRANCE TO THE MOATED SITE



Car unpacked, evening drawing in, I went for a quick constitutional around the back...and almost fell into the ditch of the moated manor that had evidently preceded the present farm. This was the sort of moated site, against which the home-grown enclosures that I tried to persuade you were moated sites in Peeblesshire pale into insignificance. Some 40m square across the interior, its ditch was a good 6m broad, deep with it, and by the time it had rained all night, wet. I noted there was a doorway in a brick façade in one corner, but it was getting dark and I retired for the night.



FIGURE 3: VAULTED BASEMENT OF THE MANOR STANDING IN THE EASTERN CORNER OF THE INTERIOR

The following morning I ventured into the farmyard to look at the barns and encountered Monsieur Legrand, the farmer, and embarked on a discussion of the finer points of the architecture that was well beyond my French. The fosse of the moated site seemed safer ground from a linguistic point of view, and, delighted that anyone should show an interest, he asked if I had seen ‘le couloir’, literally a passage, but here intended to mean a cool store under its earthen mound. And there, wired up behind the doorway in the brick façade, was a barrel-vault, none too safe to judge from some of the collapsed massive flint nodules from the vault lying on the floor, and plainly with a blocked doorway on one side that can have only led into a second vault. ‘Mais non monsieur, ce n’est pas un couloir, c’est sûrement la maison, un petit château peut-être?’ My apologies to the French speakers in our readership, but this was not the conversation I had anticipated when I ventured a cheery ‘bonjour monsieur’ in the farmyard.

As we returned to the yard, communication was about to get more challenging still. I mean does your French vocabulary cover the finer points of flint technology, like striking platform, pressure flaking... or hand-axe? Bending down suddenly, he picked something up from the doorway of the barn we were standing in and said: ‘qu’est-ce que c’est?’. Normal people rehearse the questions they are going to ask in an unfamiliar tongue, in the expectation of the possible answers, and then panic as they recognise absolutely nothing in the reply.

The last hand-axe I had seen was in a classroom at Newlands School when my daughters were there 30 years ago. Evidently water-rolled in southern gravels, this one was clearly a long way from home, and when I asked where it had been found, the closest provenance we could establish was ‘in the attic’. But here in my

FIGURE 4: THE HAND-AXE FOUND AT LE GRAND BUSSARD



FIGURE 5: THE EDGE OF THE HAND-AXE



hand was another hand-axe, a thing of beauty found close at hand, and well outside my comfort zone. ‘C’est une hache, c’est très ancienne’, and with an impression of a gallic shrug ‘je pense quarante mille ans’. Upon which he said he had a box of them, and his father had a couple too. And of course if this is really a palaeolithic tool it may be considerably more ancient than the 40,000 years that I had hazarded my guess at. I await comment from French colleagues to narrow down this field.

So what would a normal person have done? Well it’s obvious isn’t it, and when the box was duly produced I photographed about half dozen that seemed genuine flaked tools and identified two broken polished stone axes. Depending on which side of this perceptual boundary between different normalities, this holiday had got off to a pretty good/bad start. And such is one’s ignorance of someone else’s landscape, I had learnt something new, because I had no idea that Palaeolithic

hand-axes turned up in this way.

Of course, it is those broken Neolithic tools that are a proxy for my usual diet on holiday in France: chambered tombs and stone alignments, picked at random from the road atlas, leavened with Romanesque churches and streetscapes packed with timbered buildings. On this occasion I had made my pitch before we left, that I wanted to go back to the Gavrinis tomb. We had been before *en famille* 30 years ago, the sort of archaeological expedition I could get away with with small children, involving a boat trip across the Golfe de Morbihan. The designs carved into the stones of the chamber are truly spectacular, but what never ceases to amaze me is one of the capstones forming the roof. It is a fragment of what was probably a standing stone in an alignment adjacent to another tomb almost 4km away to the west, at Locmariaquer, where another fragment of the same stone has been reused as a capstone at La Table



FIGURE 6: BOX OF HAND-AXES DISCOVERED IN PLOUGHING AT VARIOUS LOCATIONS ON THE FARM OF LE GRAND BUSSARD

des Marchands. The Breton Neolithic starts about 1,000 years before our own, and yet there is so much shared vocabulary and syntax that we can identify with in their monumental landscape.

So what of the conflicted normalities? Well in my book a change is as good as a rest and I have returned refreshed. Did I tell you about the long cairn 120m long that has turned up on the LiDAR just east of the Weston Henge in Lanarkshire? Well, we will leave that for another day. ■

* It's an axe. It's very old; I think 40,000 years.

All photographs provided by Strat Halliday

FIGURE 7: ENTRANCE TO THE TOMBAT GAVRINIS



FIGURE 8: STONE DECORATED WITH AXE BLADES AND OTHER DESIGNS ON THE ISLAND OF GAVRINIS IN THE GOLFE DE MORBIHAN

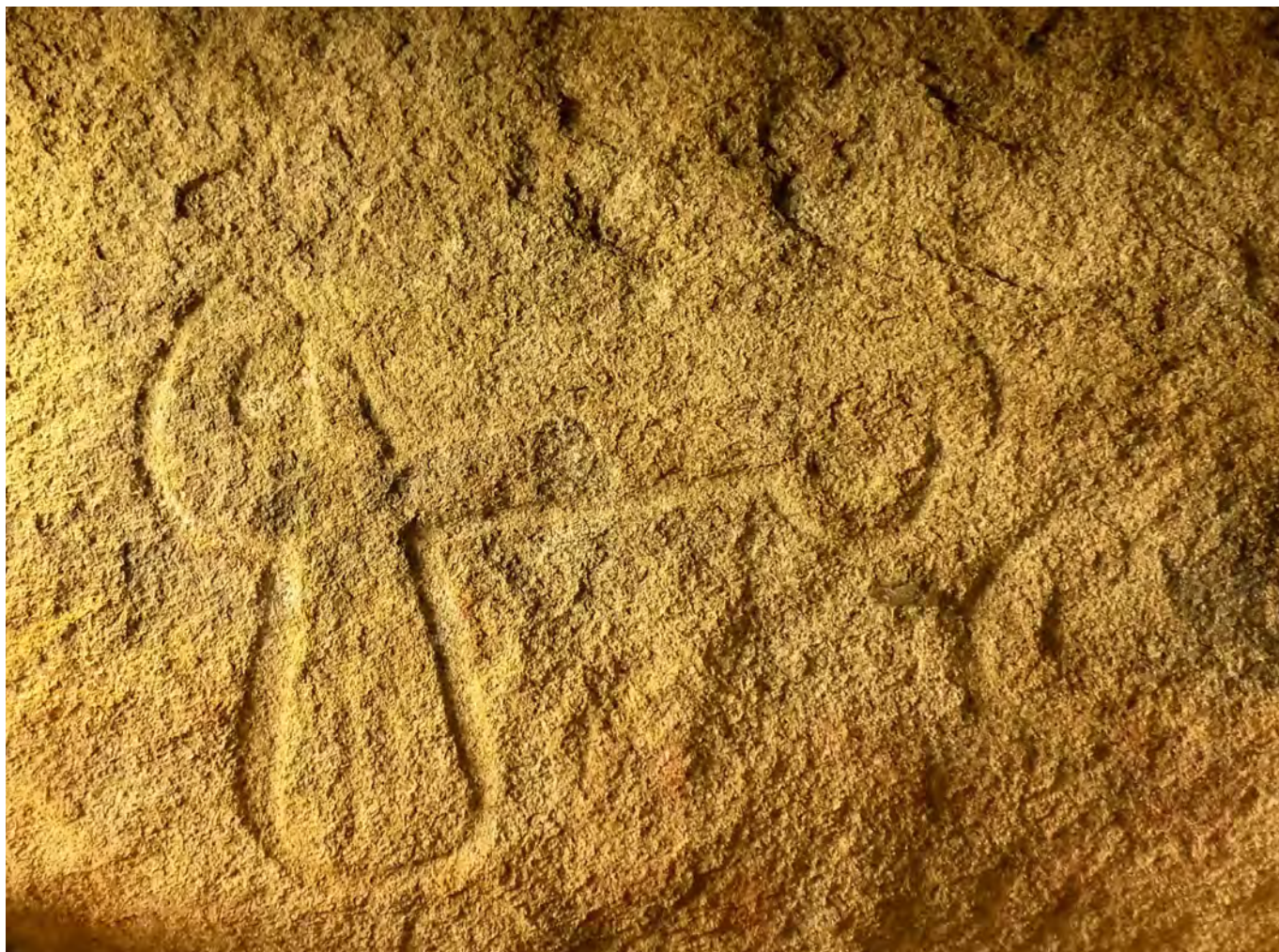


FIGURE 9: AXE CARVING ON THE BROKEN STANDING STONE INCORPORATED INTO THE ROOF AT LA TABLE DES MARCHANDS, LOCMAQUER

Unearthing Ancient Tweeddale project nominated for an award - vote now!

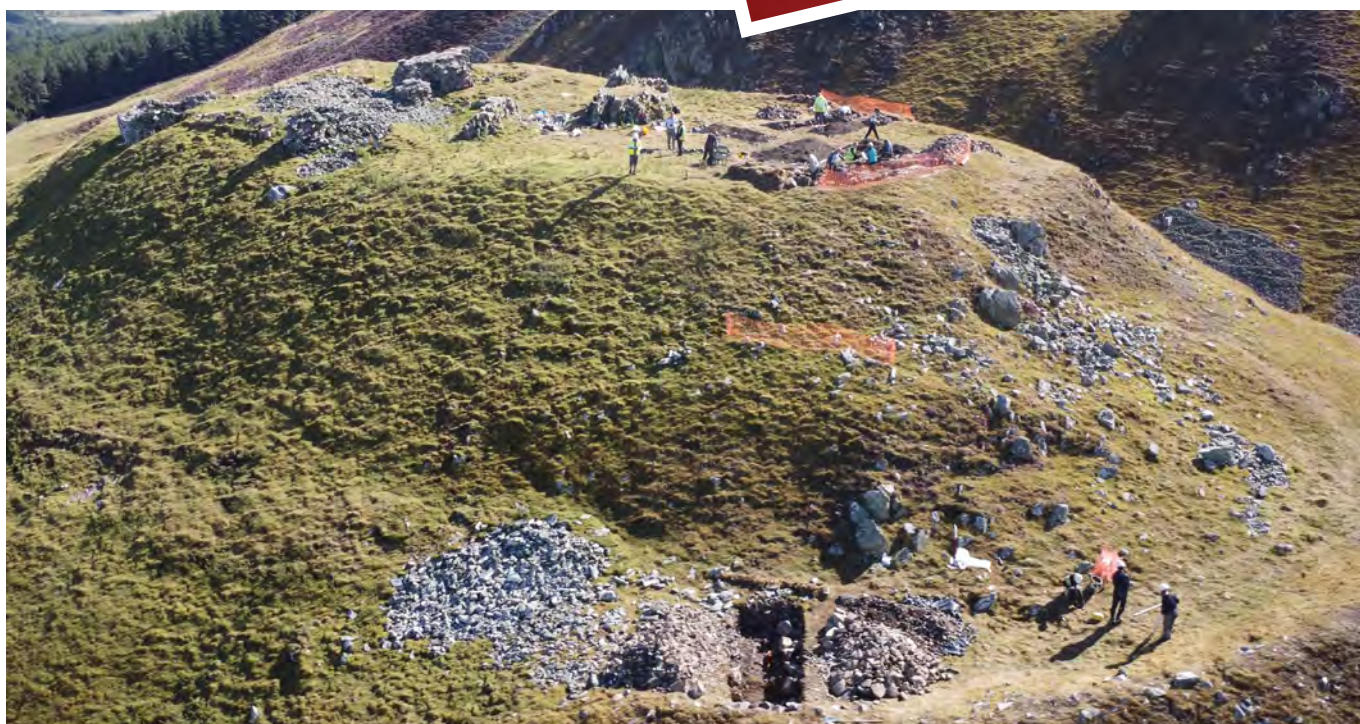
Ronan Toolis, GUARD Archaeology

The *Unearthing Ancient Tweeddale* project, in which many PAS members participated in 2022, investigating a suite of different types of archaeological sites around Drumelzier and Broughton, and published earlier in 2024, has just been nominated for an Archaeological Research Project of the Year Award. The awards celebrate the projects and publications that made the pages of *Current Archaeology Magazine* over the past 12 months. These awards are voted for entirely by the public – there are no panels of judges – so anyone can choose the projects, publications, and people they would like to win. **Voting closes on 10 February 2025**, and the winners will be announced on 1 March as part of the Current Archaeology Live! 2025 Conference. If PAS members or anyone else would like to vote, follow the link: <https://archaeology.co.uk/vote>.

To find our project when voting, the project is listed under the *Research Project of the Year 2025* section, and is called: *Unearthing Ancient*

Tweeddale: 'Merlin's Grave' and other lost stories embedded in the landscape (GUARD Archaeology/Arthur Trail Association) ■

All photos provided by Ronan Toolis



Treasure Trove from Peeblesshire and beyond

George Prew & Antony Lee, NMS

Welcome to the new year Treasure Trove update for 2025. The Treasure Trove Unit (TTU) records many thousands of finds from across Scotland every year, and, with the rich archaeological heritage of Peeblesshire and surrounding areas of the Scottish Borders and Lothians, fascinating finds local to newsletter readers are never far from our desks. In this update, we highlight some of the most interesting of these, from a Bronze Age hoard, Roman Iron Age chariot and weapon fittings, to a Medieval heraldic pendant.

Bronze Age Assemblage, Howgate (TT33/24). The earliest objects in this update are an assemblage of three tools from the Early Bronze Age, c.1700-1500BCE, the Arreton period (with thanks to Dr Matthew Knight for identifying the objects). The assemblage includes two flanged axeheads and one spearhead (broken into two parts in modern times), all in copper alloy. One of the axeheads, pictured below, features visible decoration in the form of incised radiating lines with patches of hatching at alternating points between, bordered by a column of herringbone pattern at each flaring edge.

These artefacts were found together in a field near Howgate, not near any known Bronze Age sites, and the metal detectorist who found them duly got in touch with

the Unit and helped with an emergency excavation. This confirmed that there were no other artefacts associated with this assemblage, or any reconstructable context for



HOWGATE ASSEMBLAGE

their deposition.

What was identified, however, was a clear comparison with the Lochwinnoch Hoard, a hoard of two Arreton-period axeheads and one dagger found together in Renfrewshire (Scott 1953). Here, the items were considered as potentially representing the effects of a single fighter, deposited together perhaps as a gift or votive. Did our Howgate Assemblage have a similar history? However they ended up in the ground, they are beautiful examples of their type, and they have found a new home at National Museums Scotland.

Roman Iron Age chariot linch pin, Stobo (TT277/22). Our next find is a copper alloy and iron linch pin dating to between c.100BC and AD100. One vase-shaped terminal survives at the end of the iron shank, but a further terminal at the opposite end is sadly lost. Linch pins were an essential technology in attaching the moving wheels to the static axles of wheeled vehicles. Though often firmly associated with Iron Age chariots, 'chariot' is an evocative term. We must be careful in immediately imagining dramatic images of woad-painted British warriors swooping across the landscape in their war chariots, such as famously described by



STOBO LINCH PIN



PEEBLESSHIRE AXEHEAD

Caesar. A range of other wheeled vehicles of varying sizes and functions also required similar technological solutions and were likely to be far more common sights trundling along local roads and tracks.

The findspot of the linch pin is significant. It was located amongst the complex of forts and camps around the confluence of the Lyne Water and the River Tweed. Although the linch pin cannot be sufficiently closely dated to connect it to any particular military installation or phase of activity, it can be seen to overlap with 1st Century AD activity at the forts. However, whether it represents native activity in the area prior to the arrival of the Romans or interactions during the life of the forts must remain speculative. It may even be the case that it represents the use of wheeled vehicles by the Roman army.

Linch pins are known from across England, though with notable concentrations in Yorkshire. Closer to home, examples are known from Newstead and Cockburnspath in the Scottish Borders, and at Traprain Law in East Lothian.

Roman Iron Age sword hilt guard, Ednam (TT207/23). Our third find sees us staying in the Roman Iron Age, and is a cast copper alloy sword hilt guard dating to the late 1st Century AD. The guard would have formed part of a suite of handle fittings for a sword and sat at the top of the blade, below the handle itself. The guard is decorated with moulded trumpet and foliate decoration which would have flared downwards towards the blade when in use.

Hilt guards such as this are an indigenous British form, and many are known across northern England and southern Scotland. The swords used north of the River Humber tended to be shorter and thinner overall than those used in the south of England, and the size of this hilt matches other northern types. Research by Fraser Hunter (2016) into Iron Age swords suggests that Scottish finds tend to be concentrated in the eastern Scottish Borders, Dumfriesshire and Perthshire.

Guards are the most common parts of Iron Age swords that are found, and this suggests that they may have been deliberately dismantled prior to deposition. The



findspot of this hilt guard is not immediately connected with any other known Roman Iron Age activity, but is feasibly within the broader hinterland of Ednam Hillfort and might relate to activity there. However, despite their native origins, Iron Age sword fittings are not generally found on Iron Age sites. Perhaps surprisingly, a majority of contextualised finds actually come from Roman military sites. Do they represent native presence in the Roman army, the adoption of local artistic and weaponry styles by Roman military personnel, or even weaponry confiscated from the local population?

Heraldic Pendant, Peebles (TT276/22). Finally, we have a heraldic harness pendant dating to the Late Medieval period, c.1200-1400CE, found just outside Peebles itself. This would have formed part of a horse's trappings, hanging from the harness under its head, neck, and chest. The pendant takes the form of a heater shield, with one face bearing visible decoration in the form of a heraldic device in enamel. The device consists of two horizontal red enamel lines on a field which, based on a small section of surviving metal, was likely silver, meaning this can probably be blazoned: 'Argent, two bars gules'.

This device probably identifies the mount with the FitzMartin, or just Martin, family. The Martins were an England and Wales-based family of Norman descent who are known to have campaigned in Scotland on multiple occasions throughout the thirteenth and

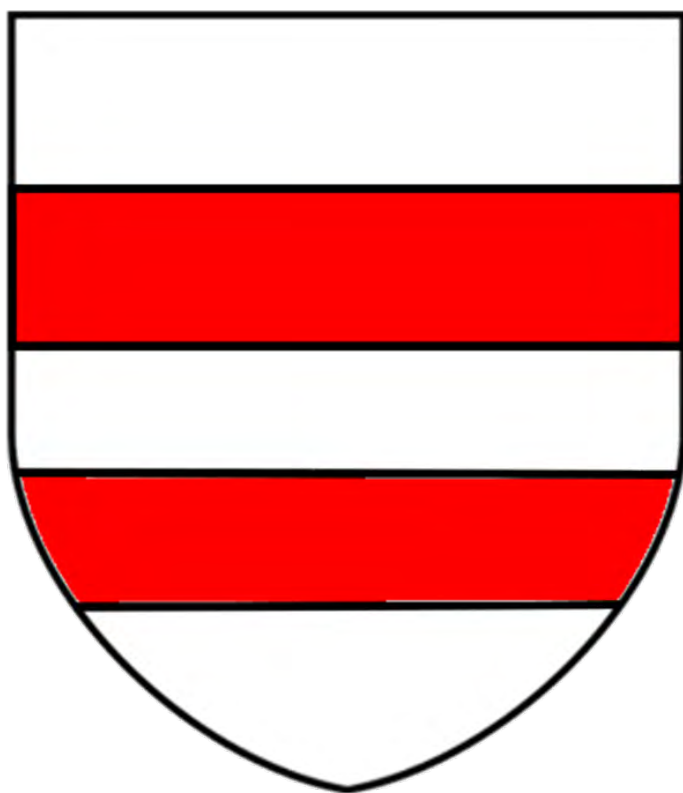
fourteenth centuries. In particular, their heraldry is attested representing William Martin in the Falkirk Roll, a collection of the arms of the nobles who fought in the Battle of Falkirk on 22nd July 1298. As is often the way with heraldry, this does not necessarily mean that the pendant fell from the horse of William Martin or any direct member of the Martin family, as these pendants were used to distinguish the servants and agents of these families as well as their direct members, but it remains a wonderfully tangible and reconstructable link to Scotland's Medieval past. ■

References:

Hunter, F. 2016. *Iron Age Swords and Roman Soldiers in Conquest-Period Britain*. Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies, 17: 11-21.

Scott, J. 1953. *A Hoard of Bronze Weapons from Gavel Moss Farm, Near Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire*. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 85: 134-138.

George Prew and Antony Lee are based in the NMS Treasure Trove Unit, and provided the photographs



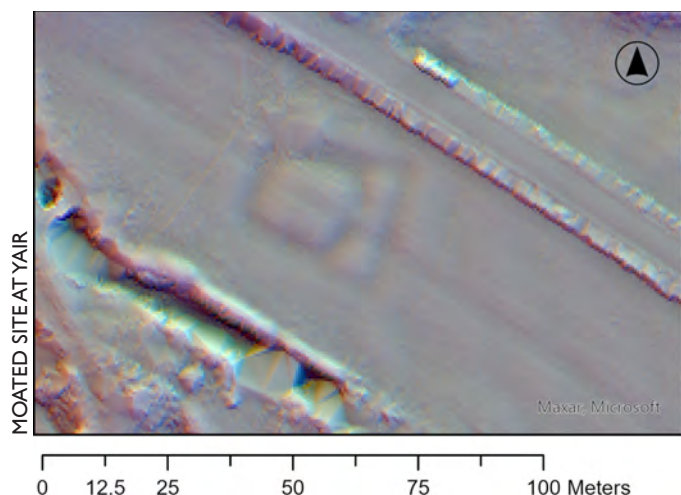
Uncovering the Tweed

Graeme Cavers & Katie O'Connell

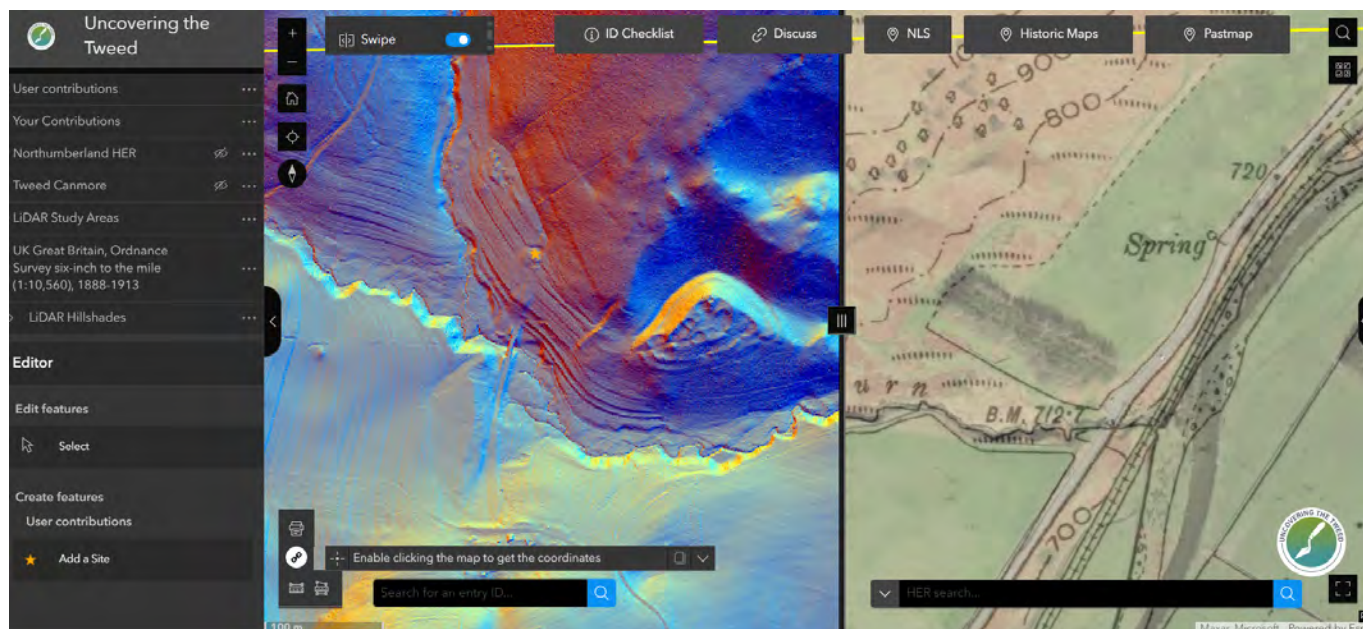
Uncovering the Tweed (UtT) got off to a flying start in the autumn. Delivered by AOC Archaeology on behalf of Destination Tweed, *Uncovering the Tweed* is funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland (HES), and the Fallago Environment Fund. This is a 3-year community heritage project that sets out to explore the archaeology of the Tweed from Moffat to Berwick-upon-Tweed.

A series of workshops have taken place so far that are building on investigation of the landscape through LiDAR analysis. LiDAR, short for 'light detecting and ranging', has revolutionised landscape survey in archaeology, giving us the ability to inspect micro-topographic detail even in areas obscured by vegetation or tree cover. The *Uncovering the Tweed* project has compiled the available LiDAR data for the area surrounding the river, up to a distance of 2km, and participants in the project have been working through the data to identify traces of unrecorded features. To date, over 200 new features have been submitted, including newly-identified prehistoric settlements, cairns, field systems and buildings.

Highlights in the new data even include new multi-vallate hillforts, including one example at Jedderfield, and possible medieval moated settlements, like an example on the north bank of the Tweed at Yair. In other places, assessment of the LiDAR is adding new information to known sites, such as further unrecorded remains and associated enclosures, field systems and structures. The results of the assessment will be compiled into new historic environment records and submitted to HES and Scottish Borders Council, as well as forming the basis for an interactive web map presented through the Destination Tweed website, and in 2025 and 2026, surveys and exploratory excavations are planned at sites across the Tweed basin. These new investigations aim to enhance our understanding of these new sites, and open a new chapter of research into the archaeology of south-east Scotland.



A start has already been made on field investigations, and in early October 2024, the UtT team carried out their first significant fieldwork activity with an investigation of the prehistoric site of Adie's Brae near Corehead. This took place under the Prehistoric Lives theme of the overall project investigating the probable scooped settlement of Adie's Brae. Three trenches were excavated over ten days with thirty volunteer participants – including a few members of PAS.





AERIAL VIEW OF TRENCH 1



TRENCH 1 ROUNDHOUSE DURING EXCAVATION

Scooped settlements are a type of enclosed settlement associated with the middle to late Iron Age in Scotland, likely remaining in use during the Roman period. These sites are particularly common in Annandale and along the Tweed, with around 40 known examples. However, as is often the case with widespread archaeological monuments in Scotland, relatively few have been

excavated.

The trenches were situated to assess evidence for internal structures and to examine the bank structure. At the northern end, the structure was found to be comprised of a collapsed spread of large angular stones that likely once formed facing for the enclosing bank. This had been cut into the natural hillside at the northern



EXCAVATING IN TRENCH 2

end with at least one roundhouse constructed close up against the interior facing.

In Trench 1, a small roundhouse was identified comprising a ring groove (the slot cut for a wooden stake wall) and internal postholes, while a second ring-groove, offset from the first, suggested multiple phases of occupation. The roundhouse in Trench 1 had a single entrance at the south-eastern side and was overall c.6m in diameter, with evidence of both a roughly cobbled internal surface and stone paving in the entrance area.

In Trench 2, another ring-groove roundhouse was identified, this time with a possible double ring groove and postholes. One of these postholes was set into the ring-groove and was c.0.5m deep, and may have formed part of the entrance to the building. Tightly packed stones formed a floor surface similar to that identified in Trench 1.



FLINT CORE

Possible coarse stone tools and metal objects were found within both roundhouses. Lithics were found within the topsoil including cores that are likely Mesolithic in date and fragments of cannell coal. A series of samples were retrieved from the features that will be processed in due course for dating and environmental evidence, which will give an insight into the timber species used, crops grown and livestock kept by the inhabitants.

Uncovering the Tweed is a community-led initiative, and we would very much like your input, suggestions, contributions and participation. If you are interested in taking part in the project, click [here](#) to sign up to the mailing list and keep an eye on upcoming events. ■

Graeme Cavers & Katie O'Connell are with [AOC Archaeology](#) and provided the photographs for this article.

Shootinglee Update

Piers Dixon

Two specialist reports on artefacts from the excavations that PAS supported at Shootinglee have been uploaded to the PAS website.

One is a report by the late Robin Murdoch on [the glass artefacts](#). This was Robin's last report before he died last summer, shortly after sending me an interim paper, pending scientific analysis that he intended to carry out at Heriot Watt University. Over the years Robin

had become the *go-to* expert on Post-Medieval bottle and vessel glass artefacts in Scotland, and this report represents the fruits of his knowledge of the country's glass industry. Robin's obituary is to be found [here](#).



GLASS ARTEFACTS FROM SHOOTINGLEE

A second report, by Dawn McLaren of AOC, which you can read [here](#), is on the daub samples, some of which turned out to be not daub at all, but pine resin coated soil, due to the presence of pine trees that covered the site! ■

Photographs on this page provided by Piers Dixon



SAMPLES OF SOIL AND PINE NEEDLES COATED IN PINE RESIN



PAS Programme 2024-25 + Other Events

Richard Welander

Our 2024-25 programme is now well under way, and here are the dates of our meetings in the New Year for you to get into your diary. All talks are now at 7.30pm at our usual venue in St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre. You can watch the recording of Peter Yeoman's talk on *Pilgrimage* [here](#).

January 16 2025 Holyrood Park, Edinburgh: Recent Excavations at Dunsapie Fort (details below)

Jamie Humble, AOC Archaeology

February 20 2025 Rediscovering Cromarty Medieval Burgh

Steven Birch, University of Aberdeen

March 20 2025 Optically Stimulated Luminescence and its use in Archaeology

Tim Kinnaird, School of Earth & Environmental Sciences at St Andrews University

April 17 2025 AGM

Next PAS Lecture on January 16: Jamie Humble on the Holyrood Archaeology Project

Since 2021, AOC Archaeology, the University of Edinburgh & Historic Environment Scotland have been conducting a collaborative research project into the archaeology of Holyrood Park, Edinburgh.

Holyrood Park lies at the heart of Edinburgh and dominates the skyline of the city. It is a special place for animal and plant life, its geology, its cultural value and its archaeological sites and monuments. The Park is visited by thousands of people each year and is an important place for the people of Edinburgh. The park is home to the remains of earlier landscapes stretching back for over two thousand years, from 20th century rifle ranges and 18th and 19th century quarries to rig and cultivation terraces and the walls of prehistoric forts and settlements.

The Holyrood Archaeology Project was set up in 2021 as, despite the wealth of archaeology within the park, little investigation has been done, and there is sparse information about the extent, condition and threats to the archaeological sites and monuments. The aim, alongside providing training for students, is to map & understand the archaeology while assessing the pressure that the high numbers of visitors is having.



DUNSAPIE HILLFORT

The project completed its fourth season of investigations in the summer of 2024, and so far has had a focus on Dunsapie, one of four forts within the

park. The enclosures and the internal occupation of the summit plateau have been investigated, as well as an additional enclosure and probably later settlement on the east side of the hill. More limited excavations have been undertaken on a second fort at Samson's Ribs, investigating internal occupation and the enclosing ramparts.

The final area that has been looked at so far lies on the east side of Arthur's Seat. Covering this slope is one of the most impressive monuments in the park: a series of cultivation terraces that are amongst the best preserved in southern Scotland. A small section of these terraces was investigated, alongside a structure visible



STRUCTURE ON
ARTHUR'S SEAT

on LiDAR imagery.

Jamie Humble joined AOC Archaeology in 2013 and is a project manager within the survey team. Jamie is primarily involved in the recording of buildings, landscapes, upstanding monuments and artefacts through laser scanning, photogrammetry, GPS and Total Station survey as well as the interpretation of LiDAR data. Alongside these surveys Jamie is involved with community-led research projects.

Other Events

January 9 2025 Society of Antiquaries of Scotland January Lecture: The Archaeology of the Glasgow Garden Festival. Kenny Brophy of the University of Glasgow. Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh. Details and booking information [here](#).

February 13 2025 Society of Antiquaries of Scotland February Lecture: Hillforts - a perspective from the Pentland Firth to the Western Mediterranean. Professor Ian Ralston, Edinburgh University. Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh. Details and booking information [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.

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