

PAS Peeblesshire Archaeological Society Newsletter

October 2025

The Beach Huts at Wells-next-the-Sea - Colin McLean explores

The Yeavinger Excavations - Piers Dixon visits the site

LiDAR - Colin McLean investigates this new technology and its impact

Ancient Fields in North Somerset - Piers Dixon goes walkabout

2025-26 Lecture Programme + Other Events

UNEARTHING & CONSERVING THE PEEBLES HOARD

Special lecture at the Eastgate Theatre, Peebles at 7.30pm on

Thursday October 16th. Tickets - £15 - from the

Eastgate Box Office or online at www.eastgatearts.com

Only a few tickets left!

Welcome

Colin McLean, Newsletter Editor

Peeblesshire is now settling into autumn, but we had a final summer fling in September in North Norfolk, where we rejoiced in a week of tee-shirt weather; even the onshore breezes from across the Wash were warm. A long walk along the Norfolk Coastal Path afforded me a glimpse of the multicoloured beach huts stretching along Holkham Beach, just west of Wells-next-the-Sea. We returned later in the week to take a closer look at this very English piece of social archaeology.

Few objects capture the charm of the English seaside as perfectly as the beach huts. These brightly painted wooden cabins, perched along promenades and sand dunes, are nostalgic icons of the nation's coastal leisure culture. Their history, however, stretches not quite into prehistory, but back more than two centuries and reflects significant changes in society, fashion, health, and class.

The origins of the beach hut lie in the 18th century, when the seaside was first promoted as a place of health and rejuvenation. Sea bathing became fashionable among the upper classes, encouraged by physicians who believed salt water had curative powers. Social propriety of the time demanded that men and women should not be seen undressing or entering the sea in public. The solution was the bathing machine: a small wooden structure on wheels, drawn by horses into the shallows. Bathers entered the machine fully clothed, changed inside, and stepped directly into the sea from its rear door, out of sight of onlookers.

These bathing machines were precursors of the beach hut. By the mid-19th century, seaside resorts such as Margate, Scarborough, and Brighton were thriving. The advent of the railways made the coast more accessible to the growing middle class, and the seaside holiday became a cherished part of British life. Bathing gradually lost its association with medical treatment and became primarily a leisure activity. Victorian morality softened, and modesty rules relaxed; people began to spend more time sitting, picnicking, and playing on the beach. As the bathing machine's practical use declined, many were pulled ashore, fixed in place, and adapted for changing or shelter - effectively becoming the first static beach huts.

By the early 20th century, purpose-built huts appeared along sea fronts from Bournemouth to Southwold. They were simple timber boxes, often no more than two metres square, with doors that opened onto the sand. They offered privacy for changing, protection from wind and sun, and a place to store deckchairs and picnic gear. For many families, a beach hut was a miniature seaside home - a space of comfort and continuity.

During the interwar years, local councils recognised their popularity and began to lease plots for huts or build rows of them for public hire. Brightly painted in cheerful colours, they became a defining feature of resorts such as Frinton-on-Sea, Southwold and here



PHOTOGRAPHS © COLIN McLEAN

at Wells-next-the-Sea. After the Second World War, beach huts symbolised post-war optimism and the democratisation of leisure: a humble but happy escape within reach of ordinary people.

In recent decades, the beach hut has enjoyed a remarkable revival. Once derided as outdated, they are now coveted and often costly - particularly in fashionable resorts where huts change hands for tens of thousands of pounds. Their appeal lies partly in nostalgia and partly in their simplicity. In an age of digital distraction, the beach hut represents a slower rhythm of life: tea brewed on a camping stove, sand between one's toes, the sound of gulls and waves.

From rolling bathing machines to treasured seaside retreats, the evolution of the beach hut tells a quintessentially English story—one of modest pleasure, social change, and enduring affection for the shore.

We spent a most entertaining hour or so, just watching the huts' users, sharing families' delight as children played in the sand, and were particularly amused at the activities of the Dog Warden in his rather fruitless task of trying to persuade dog walkers to keep their pets under control, and out of the adjacent National Nature Reserve. Though the boundary between beach and NNR was very well signed, it would appear that the reading ability of the typical Norfolk dog leaves something to be desired. ■





Visit to Yeaverling Excavations 2025

Piers Dixon

A trip to Northumberland's [Ad Gefrin Museum](#) in September as the rendezvous for meeting with some old friends was also an opportunity for me to visit the excavations that were then in progress at Yeaverling under the direction of Sarah Semple of Durham University. Hope-Taylor's Yeaverling excavations of the Anglo-Saxon palace in 1953-62 were among the most impressive of their time, but made before many of the scientific techniques that are available today. It also follows some downgrading of Hope-Taylor's high status as an excavator due to the redating of Doon Hill as a Neolithic site.

On a windy and sporadically wet day I trooped onto the field containing the site with others attending the 3pm appointed time for a visit. As I was short of time I decided to drop out of the sedate pace of the guided tour and visit the trenches by myself. There I bumped into the director Sarah Semple beside the trench that revisited the famous Roman theatre-like wedge (Latin

cuneus) of concentric foundation trenches excavated by Hope Taylor back in the 1950s, thought to be some sort of meeting place focused on a platform for a throne. Although Hope-Taylor excavated most of it, finding remains of the post-settings in the bottom, he left a baulk untouched which is visible in his published photographs. Sarah explained this was what they targeted specifically to obtain dating. And there it was before me. I was excited to see that the sections were just as can be seen in the published report. In the left hand one you could make out a post pipe filled with small stones and in the right hand one the tell-tale holes of samples having been taken for Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating - I recognised them from our excavations at Bowden Moor last year. I wished Sarah good luck. The other section that was open was across the west terminal of the great enclosure with the remains of a rectangular timber building in it, unfortunately that was covered up at the time of my visit, but the ditch terminals could be seen. Sarah indicated they had obtained environmental samples as well as further dating material. I shall look forward to the results and I suggest a talk by Sarah Semple would be a good idea for a Society lecture. ■



What is LiDAR & how is it transforming Archaeology?

Colin McLean

If you were to walk across a woodland today, you might never guess that beneath the trees lie the faint outlines of ancient fields, lost roads, and forgotten settlements. Archaeologists have always relied on sharp eyes, good maps, and careful excavation to bring such traces to light. But in recent years a new technology - LiDAR - has revolutionised our ability to see the past. It allows us to peel away forests and modern clutter to reveal the ghostly imprint of earlier landscapes, often invisible from the ground.

This article will explore what LiDAR is, how it works, and why it has become such a powerful tool in archaeology.

What is LiDAR? The acronym stands for Light Detection and Ranging. At its heart, it is a simple idea. A laser scanner fires out a beam of light—usually from an aircraft flying overhead—and then measures the time it takes for that light to bounce back from the ground. Because the speed of light is constant, the instrument can calculate the exact distance to the surface below. By repeating this millions of times every second, LiDAR builds up a three-dimensional model of the landscape.

Unlike an ordinary aerial photograph, LiDAR is not concerned with colours or surface textures. Instead, it produces a “point cloud”: billions of tiny dots, each representing a precise height above sea level. When processed by computer, these dots can be turned into

highly detailed maps showing every bump, dip, and hollow in the land.

Why is it so useful in archaeology? Archaeological sites are often fragile and faint. A Roman fort might survive only as shallow ditches; a medieval farmstead may leave little more than low banks of rubble. From the ground these features can be almost invisible, especially under grass, scrub, or woodland. LiDAR, however, is exquisitely sensitive to small variations in height. It can detect a bank only a few centimetres high, or the slight hollow of an infilled ditch.

Even more remarkable, LiDAR can in theory “see through” trees. For archaeologists, the ability to examine wooded areas is game-changing, because forests cover many places where conventional aerial photography is of limited value.

But this needs qualifying. Of course, lasers cannot pass through solid wood, but many of the pulses do filter through gaps in the leaves and branches to reach the ground. With enough returns, the software can potentially strip away the vegetation and reveal a bare-earth model of the landscape. However, here in Southern Scotland where we have extensive dense conifer plantations, there remain severe limitations to LiDAR’s ability to penetrate to what lies below, and thick heather and gorse can be equally impenetrable.

From point clouds to hillshades. One of the most popular ways archaeologists use LiDAR data is to create hillshade images. These are greyscale maps where a virtual sun is placed at a low angle, casting shadows across the surface. Features such as ramparts, terraces, and hollow ways suddenly leap into view. By changing

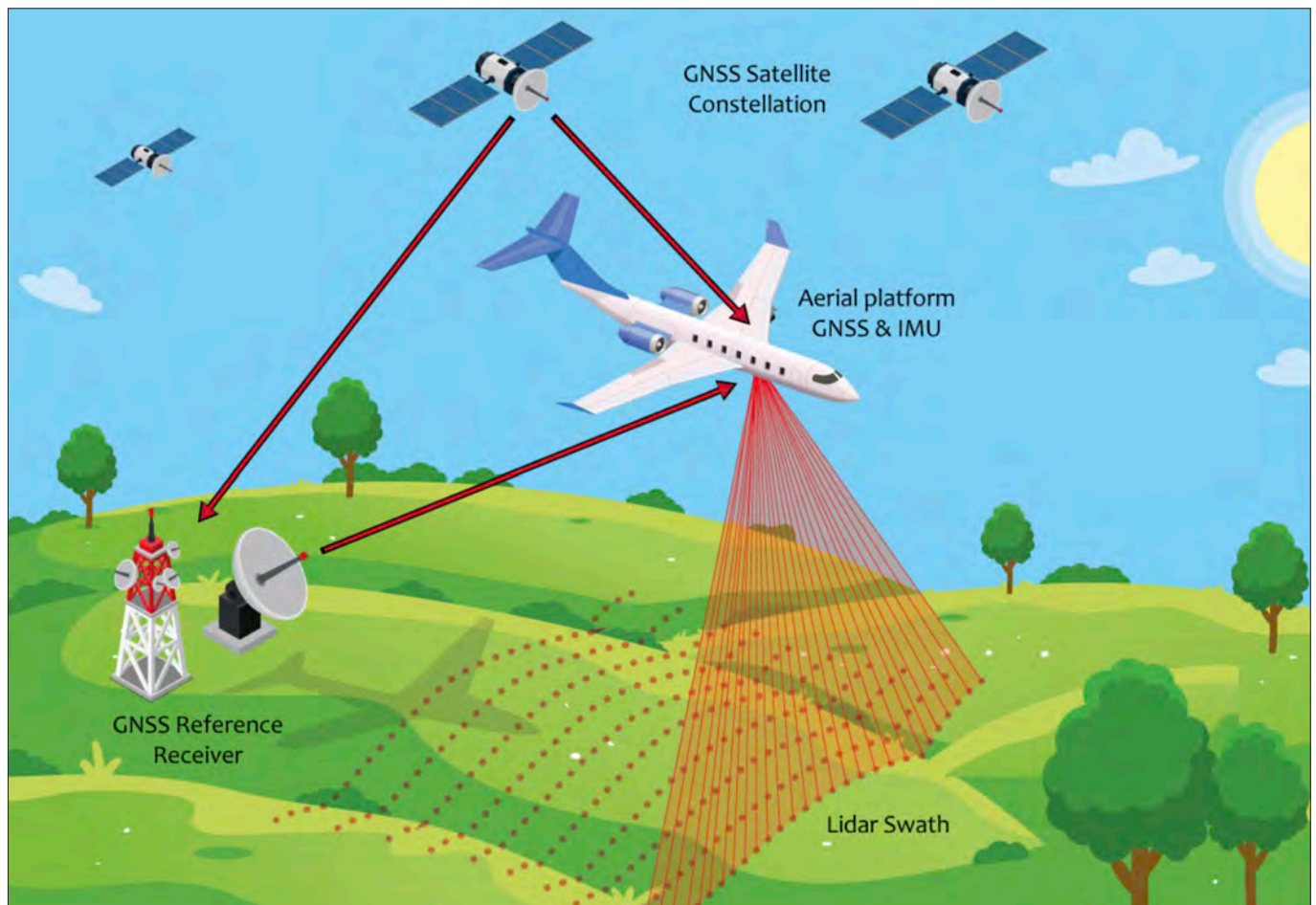
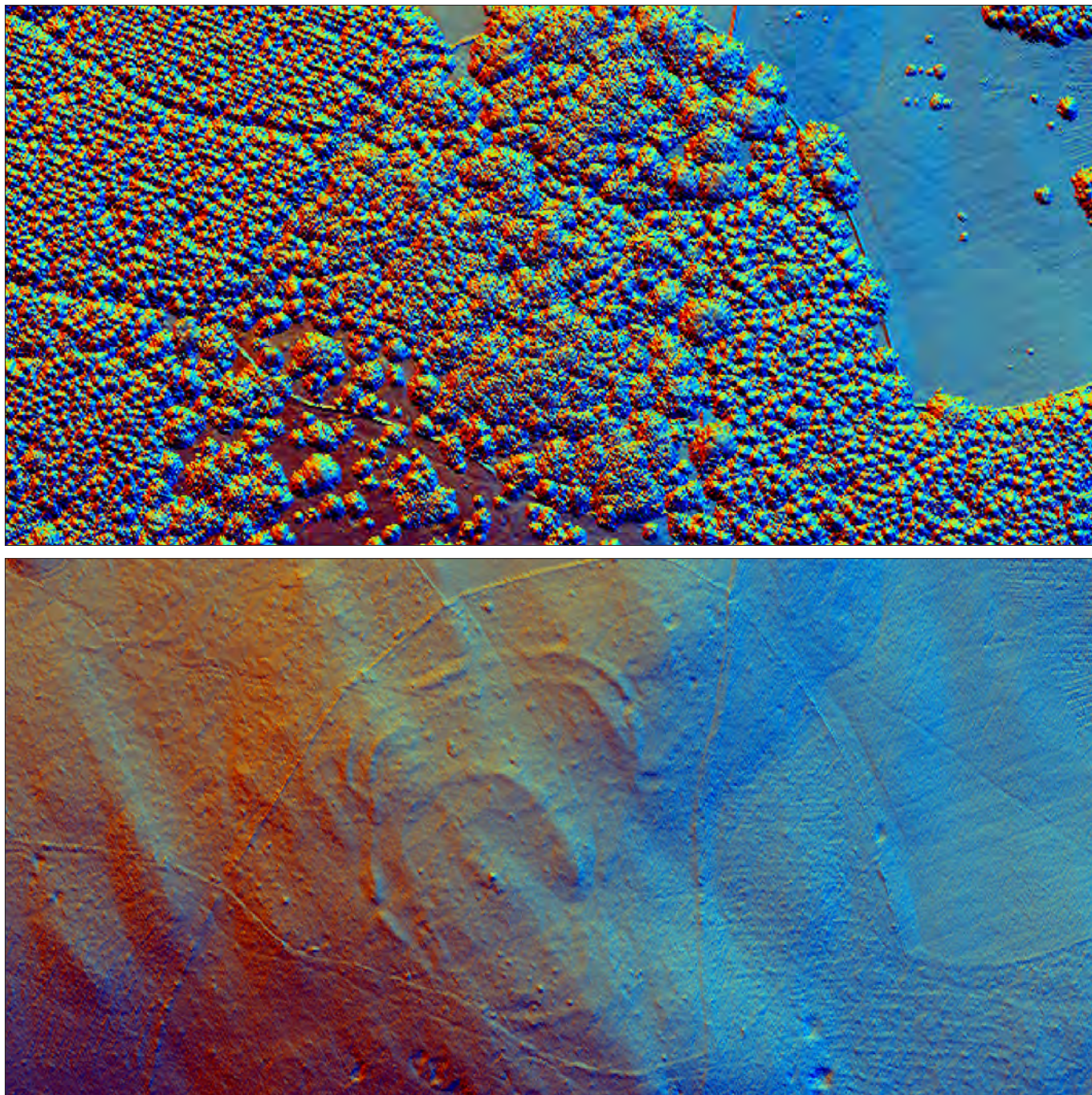


IMAGE FROM THE CLIMATE CHANGE AND COASTAL HERITAGE NEWSLETTER: CHERISH



STRIPPING AWAY THE TREES: THE UPPER IMAGE IS A LIDAR MODEL OF VENLAW NEAR PEEBLES, SHOWING THE TREE COVER. THE LOWER IMAGE IS A BARE EARTH MODEL WITH THE TREES REMOVED. IMAGES PROVIDED BY STRAT HALLIDAY.

the sun's angle or adding colour, different details can be emphasised.

Other techniques include *slope maps* that highlight steepness, or *contour models* that reveal patterns of drainage. Each approach offers a different way of visualising the same underlying data.

Famous discoveries. LiDAR first came to wide public attention with spectacular discoveries in the tropical forests of Central America. In Guatemala, researchers used airborne LiDAR to map the Maya city of Tikal. What seemed from the ground to be a scattering of temples turned out to be part of a vast urban landscape, with causeways, defensive walls, and tens of thousands of hidden buildings.

LiDAR has been used across Britain with remarkable results. In the New Forest, for example, surveys have revealed prehistoric field systems, medieval deer parks, and the remains of Second World War airstrips—all coexisting within the same woodland. In Scotland, the technology has picked out Iron Age hillforts long

concealed beneath forestry plantations (*see qualification above*). Even on open moorland, where features might be too subtle to spot on foot, LiDAR can trace networks of trackways and enclosures.

Each discovery adds pieces to the puzzle of how people lived, farmed, and travelled through the landscape.

A tool for preservation as well as discovery. Archaeology is not only about finding new sites; it is also about protecting them. LiDAR provides a powerful way of monitoring the condition of monuments. Because it records precise heights, repeated surveys can show whether earthworks are being eroded by vehicles, livestock, or natural processes. It also helps heritage managers to plan woodland planting or quarrying projects, ensuring that sensitive areas are avoided.

Importantly, LiDAR is non-invasive. Unlike excavation, it does not disturb the ground. This makes it especially valuable for surveying large areas quickly while leaving sites untouched for future research.

Limitations and challenges. Like any technology,

LiDAR is not a magic key that solves every problem. It can only record the shape of the ground surface, not what lies beneath. Subsurface features such as buried walls or pits may remain invisible unless they cause slight changes in ground level. Moreover, the quality of the results depends on the density of the laser pulses. High-resolution surveys can show extraordinary detail, but they are costly. Cheaper, lower-resolution data may miss small features.

Another challenge is interpretation. A hillshade image can look dramatic, but not every bump is archaeological. Natural features such as tree throws, animal burrows, or geological formations can all create misleading shapes. We should always combine LiDAR with ground visits, historical maps, and other sources of evidence before drawing firm conclusions.

Citizen archaeology and open data. One of the most exciting aspects of LiDAR is how widely it is now available. Government agencies such as the Environment Agency in England and the Scottish Remote Sensing Portal have released large amounts of LiDAR data to the public. This means that anyone with a computer can explore their local landscape in extraordinary detail.

Amateur archaeologists have been quick to seize the opportunity. Local societies have used LiDAR to locate previously unknown earthworks, from Bronze Age barrows to medieval farmsteads. In some cases, volunteers have identified sites later confirmed by professionals. This “democratisation” of data has opened up new possibilities for community engagement, allowing enthusiasts to make genuine contributions to research.

Locally, participation of PAS members in the *Uncovering The Tweed* project has involved them in examining LiDAR data to search for previously unrecorded features in the Tweed Valley, and with some success, thus far uncovering some 200 new sites. Graeme Cavers spoke about this in his September lecture.

What is the future of LiDAR in archaeology? LiDAR continues to evolve. New instruments mounted on drones allow small-scale surveys of individual sites, offering archaeologists flexibility without the cost of hiring an aircraft. Advances in computing power make it easier to process vast datasets and combine them with other forms of remote sensing, such as aerial photography or ground-penetrating radar.

There is also growing interest in 3D visualisation and virtual reality. Imagine walking through a digital reconstruction of your local landscape, with the modern trees and houses stripped away to reveal how it looked centuries ago. LiDAR provides the foundation for such



WHITE MELDON: LIDAR LOCAL RELIEF MODEL SHOWING THE PATCHWORK OF FIELDS SOUTH OF THE FORTIFIED SETTLEMENT (SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT REMOTE SENSING DATA)

immersive experiences, linking past and present in a way that captures the imagination.

Archaeology is often thought of as the painstaking business of trowels, trenches, and muddy boots. While that remains true, technologies like LiDAR remind us that discovery can also happen from the air and on computer screens. By revealing subtle traces of past human activity, hidden under trees or lost in the folds of the land, LiDAR has transformed how we understand our landscapes.

For local archaeology societies, the technology offers both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in learning to interpret complex data responsibly. The opportunity is the thrill of discovery—seeing familiar places in a new light, and perhaps uncovering forgotten chapters of history in our own backyards.

Next time you walk through a forest or across a windswept hill, pause and imagine the unseen layers beneath your feet. Thanks to LiDAR, those hidden stories are now within reach, waiting for curious minds to bring them back to life.

This article has drawn on a number of resources: online, AI and elsewhere, plus advice from colleagues, for which I am extremely grateful. ■

Ancient Fields in North Somerset

Piers Dixon

During a trip down to the south-west of England to visit friends and relations in early September, I spent a couple of days in north Somerset and enjoyed walks in the Mendips and in the hills around Bath, dodging short sharp showers on occasion. My friend Kevin wanted to show me some of the things he has seen on his walks. These included quarrying and extraction of minerals, but also medieval strip fields surviving as terraces on

of Bath - not to be outdone by Rome - with my son James. There on Bathampton Down in a strip of cattle pasture near the fake Sham Castle beside Bath Golf Course I stumbled across the lynchets of a very fine example of 'Celtic' fields (*lower photo*). If you open Google maps and go to Bathampton Down you will see them spread across the golf course: roughly rectangular fields about 50m across, but not as a grid, more like a rectilinear patchwork quilt.

The lynchets are terraces built up over time by cultivation of small plots on sloping ground. These are prehistoric fields found in many of the downs of southern England, where they have escaped modern

EXTENSIVE STRIP FIELDS ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE MENDIPS
NEAR LITTON VILLAGE, NORTH MENDIPS PERS SDIXON



the steep hillsides (*upper photo*) and 'Celtic' fields that he had encountered on parts of the Mendips ridge, but he could not show me any of those close enough to his house on a morning's walk.

The next day I walked up onto three of the seven hills

cultivation regimes, but also across many parts of North-west Europe. As they were once thought to be Iron Age they were called 'Celtic' fields, but they date back to the Bronze Age and so are not as such Celtic. ■

LYNCHETS OF 'CELTIC' FIELDS ON BATHAMPTON
DOWN PERS SDIXON



2025-26 Lecture Programme

The 'Peebles Hoard': new light on the Bronze Age of the Borders and beyond.

One Monday morning in August 2020, local folk woke up to the unusual news of a significant new archaeological find in the Peebles area. Earlier that summer, Mariusz Stepien and two friends had been metal detecting in a field not far from Peebles when he discovered some unusual bronze rings. Recognising they might be of interest, Mariusz resisted the temptation to explore further and immediately contacted the Scottish Treasure Trove Unit based in the National Museum of Scotland.

FIG 1. MARIUSZ STEPPIEN



The unusual nature of the rings was confirmed and, despite the difficulties posed by the Covid19 pandemic, a team from the museum immediately undertook a small excavation with assistance from the finder and the kind permission of the landowner. Over the following days, painstaking excavation gradually revealed the outline of a pit containing what proved to be a truly remarkable hoard of Bronze Age artefacts dating from around 1000-800 BCE.

Very soon it became apparent that this was an exceptionally significant find: to a large extent, this was due to the fact that Mariusz reported his initial finds straightaway, providing the archaeological team with an all-too-rare opportunity to investigate the hoard still undisturbed and in its original context in the ground.

At first, excavation revealed a sword which would have been placed in a pit along with what was initially thought to be a complete set of horse harness including buckles, rings and strap ornaments, some of them of types not previously known from Scotland. To the



FIG 2. ITEMS FROM THE HOARD

delight of the archaeologists, painstaking excavation then began to reveal vestiges of leather and wood preserved in the soil fill of the pit, actually allowing them to trace the straps that once connected the rings and buckles.

Such evidence rarely survives, so owing to the complexity of the find the decision was taken to lift the pit in a block of soil for CT-scanning followed by 'micro-excitation' in the NMS Laboratories. Although technically challenging, this process revealed a remarkable array of densely packed bronze objects - many of types never been seen before and all preserved in their original alignment. In the end, nearly 600 items have been recovered, stimulating a host of questions about the people who made, used and buried them.



FIG 3. BRONZE FITTINGS

In May 2024, the Peebles Hoard was officially allocated to National Museums Scotland through the Treasure Trove process. A great deal of research work still remains to be done but it is already clear that this

is an archaeological find of international significance. This amazing local discovery will shed fascinating new light on Bronze Age ‘high society’ around 3000 years ago, not just in the Borders but far beyond.

PAS is therefore delighted to have been able to arrange a public talk at the Eastgate Theatre on Thursday 16 October when Dr Matthew Knight, Senior Curator of Prehistory at National Museums Scotland, and his conservator colleague Bethan Bryan, will be presenting the results of the project so far. All tickets cost £15 and are available from the Eastgate Theatre.

Trevor Cowie

Fig 1. Finder Mariusz Stepień beside the hoard after it had been lifted as a block of soil and packed for transfer to the National Museum laboratory. To find out what it contained, come to the talk at the Eastgate Theatre (© Dariusz Gucwa, courtesy of Treasure Trove Unit)

Fig 2. Just a few of the hundreds of fascinating bronze items from the Peebles hoard. The set of interlinked rings and plates form a type of object known as a rattle pendant. They have never been found before in Scotland, but similar artefacts are known from Wales, Denmark, Germany and Poland. (© National Museums Scotland)

Fig 3. Some of the bronze fittings in the hoard may be connected with horse gear. They include decorated straps, rings and ornaments - many are of types not previously found in Scotland (© National Museums Scotland)

The Salmon of Knowledge? Identity, mobility and food in medieval Scotland - Dr Sam Leggett, 7.30pm, October 9th 2025, St Joseph’s Neighbourhood Centre, Rosetta road, Peebles

This month’s speaker is Dr Sam Leggett, an Edinburgh University lecturer specialising in biomolecular archaeology and the Middle Ages. Before moving to Edinburgh in 2022 she was an Oxford University researcher undertaking biomolecular work for Time Team and commercial units including on the Anglo-Saxon bed burial at Trumpington in Cambridgeshire.



FINLAGGAN © SAM LEGGETT

With the intriguing title ‘The Salmon of Knowledge? Identity, mobility and food in medieval Scotland’, she will be telling us about ArchaeoFINS, a Leverhulme Trust funded project looking at the medieval archaeology of fishing in the Irish and North Seas. ArchaeoFINS is centred around an old and still unresolved archaeological question of when, why and where people began to eat fish again after the introduction of farming to Europe,

which brought about a decline in fish consumption c. 5-10,000 years ago in favour of cereal crops and dairying.

Sam is investigating the “Fish Event Horizon”, using Scotland, a watershed region for the re-introduction of fish consumption in western Europe in the Middle Ages, as the core study area. So far 500 samples have been analysed from five Scottish sites: Upper Scalloway in Shetland, Iona, Finlaggan on Islay, Gairloch in Wester Ross, and Castle Park in Dunbar. Isotopic data from humans, plants and animals reveal what they were eating and where they may have migrated from/to; as well as organic residues from pottery that show what was being cooked/processed/stored in a variety of vessels at these



IONA © SAM LEGGETT

sites.

Sam has uncovered possible dietary taboos and the “missing” dead, human mobility and imported dietary practices, surprising culinary practices in the pots, and complex ecological relationships in coastal and island environments. The re-adoption of marine fish into medieval diets is not a straightforward process - even for islanders and coastal dwellers.

Does this all seem a bit ‘fishy’ to you? Be reassured that Sam has promised to explain all including the essential basics of isotopes!

Richard Welander

Other PAS Lectures

All lectures start at 7.30pm, and are held in St Joseph’s Neighbourhood Centre, Rosetta Road, Peebles, *unless otherwise indicated*.

November 20th 2025: New Light on Dumyat Hillfort: Results of New Survey & Excavation – Dr Murray Cook, Stirling Council

December 9th 2025: The Lost Royal Lodgings in Edinburgh Castle & the Birthplace of Great Britain – Peter Yeoman (Eastgate Theatre)

January 15th 2026: The Archaeological Landscape & Historical Context of the Galloway Hoard – Dr Orla Craig, Historic Environment Scotland

February 19th 2026: Hillforts, Settlements & Ancient Geography – Strat Halliday

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

April 16th 2026: Annual General Meeting & Members’ Evening

EDINBURGH, LOTHIAN & BORDERS ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE 2025
 Saturday, 15 November 2025 Queen Margaret University, Musselburgh

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Tickets £30 each, Buffet Lunch £13
 Buffet lunch MUST BE PRE-BOOKED
 Conference only tickets available on the day.

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BOOK ONLINE: www.eastlothian.gov.uk/archaeologyconference

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Edinburgh, Lothians & Borders Archaeology Conference

Saturday 15 November

This year's Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders Archaeology Conference is to be held on Saturday, November 15th 2025 at Queen Margaret University (QMU) in Musselburgh.

As ever there is a range of speakers covering a selection

of periods, themes and topics from across southeast Scotland. For the Scottish Borders in particular, there will be reports on the following:

- The results of metal-detecting and fieldwalking at Trimontium (Newstead) Roman Fort;
- Varied fieldwork at a number of Medieval and Post-Medieval sites in Towers of Rule for the Rule Valley (located between Hawick and Jedburgh)
- Excavations at a possible Medieval hospital at Horndean undertaken as part of the [Uncovering the Tweed](#) project.
- The Scottish Borders will also feature in the presentation launching the [South East Scotland Archaeological Research Framework \(SESARF\)](#).

Between the conference talks there will be breaks, and of course time for lunch, when you can visit a wide range of displays, stalls and stands from the many organisations, societies and other groups with interests in South East Scotland.

The programme can be downloaded from [here](#) and you can book your tickets [here](#). If you wish to have the buffet lunch (£13), then you will need to book for this in advance. Talks-only tickets can also be bought on the day itself.

Other Events

Uncovering the Tweed, Get Involved - Birgham Cemetery Survey, October 10-11th [tickets here](#)

Uncovering the Tweed, Get Involved - Lithics at Paxton, November 10-13th [tickets here](#)

Message from St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre

Following lapses in tidying up on the part of some groups (not PAS!) using the facilities at St Joseph's, Eileen (Booking Secretary) has sent round a general circular to inform all users of the need to be co-operative and responsible in their use of the centre by leaving it as they find it.

Join PAS

If you're not yet a member of PAS, 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.

You will recently have received an email inviting you to renew your subscription. If you have already re-joined – thank you! If you have still to respond, we hope that this is still on your “to do” list and that you will continue to support PAS!

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

'UNEARTHING & CONSERVING THE PEEBLES HOARD'

Dr Matthew Knight and Bethan Bryan
National Museums Scotland



© National Museums Scotland

Hundreds of Bronze Age artefacts discovered in a field near Peebles in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown turned out to be '*one of the most remarkable hoards ever discovered in Scotland*'.

Hear the full story of its discovery and the extraordinary work being done to conserve these unique 3,000 year old artefacts.

Thursday 16th October, 2025 at 7.30pm
Eastgate Theatre, Peebles

Tickets £15

Available online or from the box office
eastgatearts.com



Raising project funds for Peeblesshire Archaeological Society