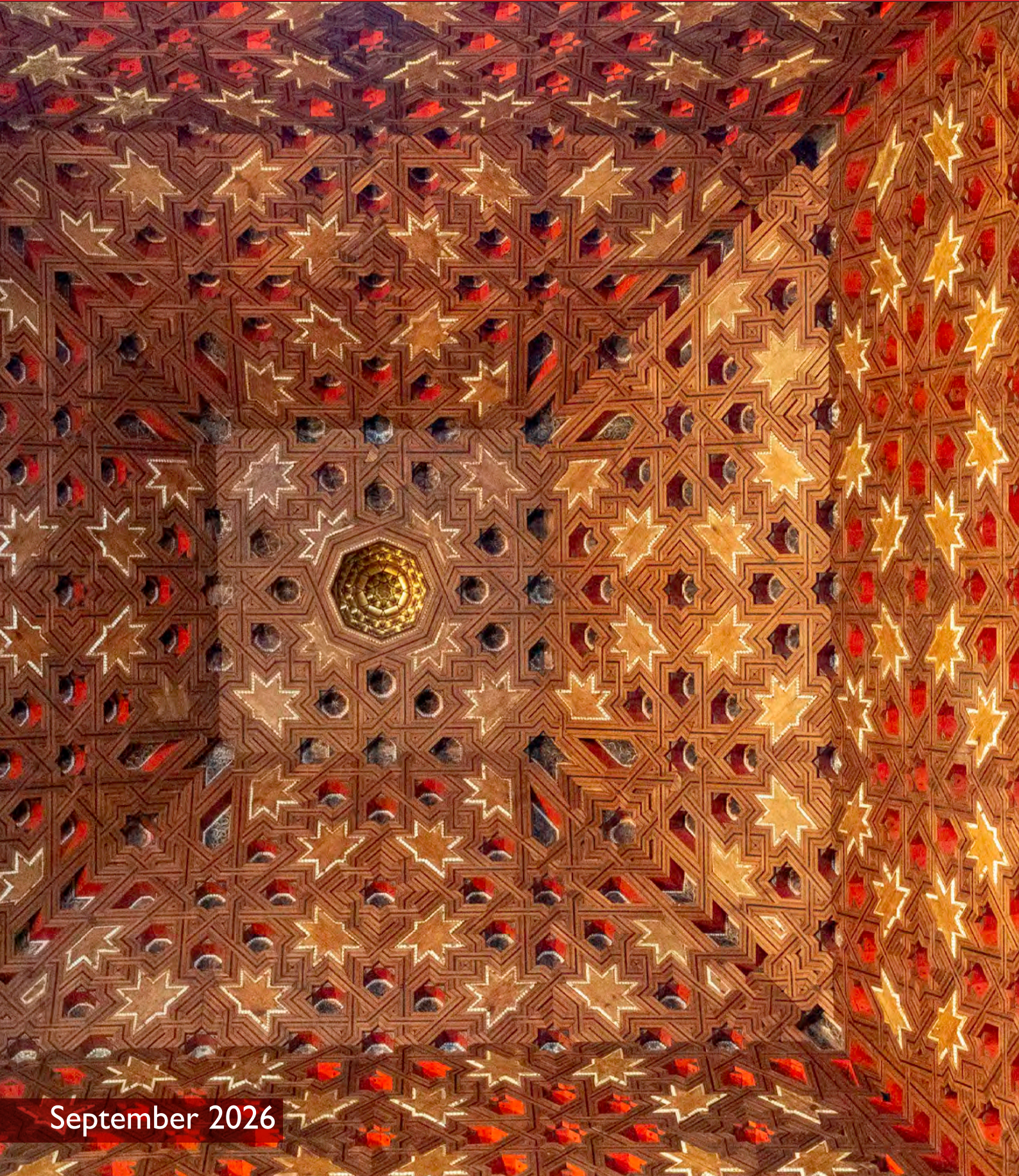


PAS Peeblesshire Archaeology

Peeblesshire Archaeological Society - Exploring our past together



September 2026



Welcome

Colin McLean, Editor

Contents

You will have noticed that you are reading a new-look publication. In the process of seeking a refresh for the Society's posters etc, it was clear that the *Newsletter* could perhaps do with a refresh too. It is no longer just a newsletter. Its content has developed over the past year or two to include excellent substantive articles by members, and by occasional guest writers. It may not (yet) be a journal, but its new weightier content deserves a title that better reflects this shift. We have also decided to move from monthly to quarterly, to reduce the strain on the contributors and the production team. And so we have *Peeblesshire Archaeology*. Local material will continue to be our focus, but we see no reason not to include articles reflecting members' travels and interests beyond these shores. Archaeology is of course the main topic, but heritage matters, museums and historic buildings would, to my mind, be perfectly acceptable. Frankly, anything goes. We might draw the line at recipes, but if you have a good one for a tasty Bronze Age Bannock, why not?

Do remember that it is your *Peeblesshire Archaeology*, so do please consider writing something. Perhaps about a site, monument, museum or church you have visited, or perhaps about a subject that interests you. We're always looking for good photographs too. We can provide you with our guidelines on submitting an article and on how best to submit your photographs. Just email [here](#).

You will recently have received the Society's excellent lecture programme whose quality reflects the hard work which Richard Welander and Neil Crawford put into assembling it, and this is a good place to record our profound thanks to them both. The season starts on Thursday September 17th, with a talk by Dr David Caldwell, former Keeper of History & Archaeology at National Museums Scotland. David is a recognised expert in his subject of Finlaggan on Islay, and we can look forward to an interesting and stimulating evening.

In March, the Committee formed a Member Recruitment Group (MRG) - to recruit more members. It has been hard at work running events over the summer and commissioning a new web site for the Society. You can read more about it on page 4.

We look forward to seeing you at this season's lectures.

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Photograph by Colin McLean

Inside front cover: Peebles Churches Walk at Cross Kirk (see page 23). Photograph by Colin McLean

Rear cover: Peebles Old Parish Church, visited on the Churches Walk on 5th September. Photograph by Colin McLean

In Search of the Peeblesshire Neolithic

words & photographs - Stratford Halliday

The excavations at Sprouston in the lower Tweed as part of the Uncovering the Tweed project raise an interesting question about our home range. Where are our equivalent early Neolithic monuments in Peeblesshire? That of course begs a supplementary question: is that arc of ditch segments separated by causeways at Sprouston Neolithic, a causewayed camp in southern English parlance, or is it just another settlement enclosure in our intractable Iron Age landscape? Either way, we don't have an enclosure with a segmented ditch quite like that in Peeblesshire, the nearest comparable cropmark, also undated, being at West Lindsaylands (Id: 48665) on the banks of the Clyde west of Biggar, Lanarkshire. There, it is the outer ditch of a promontory enclosure that is segmented, and on some of the aerial photographs there are traces of a pit-defined cursus monument extending away to the east.

The dating of pit-defined cursus monuments appears to be early Neolithic, and even if the date of the enclosure at Sprouston proves to be later, there is still a Neolithic component in the complex of cropmarks, namely the massive building defined by pits on its southern margin.

WEST LINDSAYLANDS © HES DP-01 | 1827



Its footprint replicates dated Neolithic buildings at Balbridie, Aberdeenshire (Id: 36669), and Doon Hill, East Lothian (Id: 57668). These were massive structures. From 20m to 35m in length by 10m in breadth, they were truly monumental and it seems unlikely they are typical of every Neolithic settlement.

As has been found in Ireland, the everyday story

of Neolithic farming communities in Scotland was probably served by smaller buildings. The large 'halls' only come through in the cropmarks exceptionally – there are perhaps no more than eight currently known and another three discovered in commercial excavations – so our chances of recognising smaller rectangular post-built structures, such as that found sealed beneath a cairn at Raigmore, Inverness (Id: 13414), are vanishingly small.

So what Neolithic monuments do we have in Peeblesshire and what did our Neolithic look like? When the Peeblesshire County Inventory was published in 1967, it contained a single recognisable Neolithic monument, namely the possible long cairn on Harlaw Muir (Id: 50228). Close to the county boundary with Midlothian, the cairn was never the greatest of visitor experiences. Situated on what was once a bleak piece of peat moorland, the experience is now poorer still for the surrounding shroud of forestry. Since then, only one long cairn has turned up. It was first noted



BROUGHTON KNOWE, SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE TREES © S HALLIDAY

as a miscellaneous mound by Alastair MacLaren when carrying out the fieldwork for the Inventory on Broughton Knowe (Id: 48627), and its true character was not recognised until 1981. Some 27m in overall length, it tapers from 9.5m in breadth at the east-north-east end to no more than 5m on the west-south-west, but the eastern half has been almost entirely robbed of stone, leaving no more than a fringe of rubble to mark its margin.

This was a revelation at the time, suddenly offering the exciting possibility that other long cairns might be out

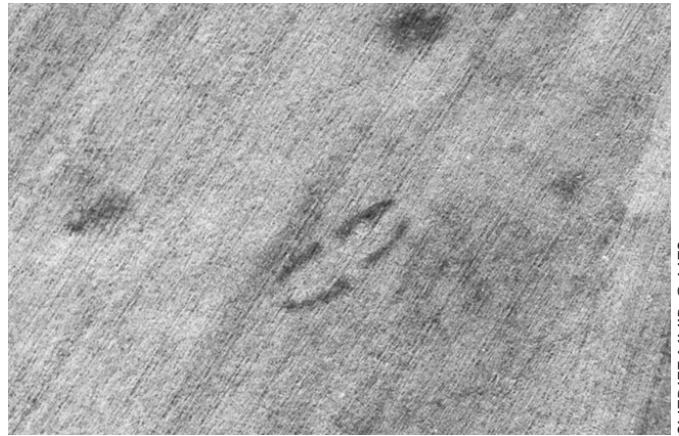


there awaiting discovery. If so, they have kept a very low profile and they have eluded me on foot for forty years since. And this is not just true of Peeblesshire, but of the whole of the Tweed basin. The only others known are one at Caverton Hillhead (Id: 58269), situated in the fringes of the Cheviots south of Kelso, the Mutiny Stones (Id: 60309) in remote moorland deep in the Lammermuirs, and, in Northumberland, Dod Hill on the eastern flank of the Cheviots. The Caverton Hillhead example had been largely removed by 1836, although its characteristic tapering shape can still be detected in a low swelling visible in the LiDAR.

Just east of the Peeblesshire county boundary, on the hillside opposite Caddonlee, a 'capstone' resting on an upright slab has been proposed as the remains of a chambered tomb (Id: 269087), but it is an unlikely candidate. Shrouded in gorse, it lies immediately above the quarried terrace for an old road running along the crest of Caddonlinn Bank, but the slope is already accelerating into the top of the escarpment at this point, which counts it an unlikely site for a cairn. Furthermore.



the angle of the capstone, which is about 1.5m across, suggests that the upright slab is set on a rock shelf and can be no more than 0.5m high. This is no chamber. At best it is possibly the remains of a burial cist, but if there was a cairn here, it has been totally removed and there is no trace of any disturbance.



The only possibilities amongst the cropmarks are a curious feature on the gravel plateau of Sheriff Muir



opposite the terrace where the Late Neolithic timber enclosure at Meldon Bridge stood (Id: 51564), and at Chirnside (Id: 171245) in Berwickshire. Contrasting monuments, that at Chirnside is a long sausage-shaped enclosure 190m in length by 15m in breadth within a continuous ditch, whereas at Sheriff Muir two opposed pairs of curving ditches frame an open-ended area about 50m in length by up to 12m in breadth. Neither is a classic long barrow, and to some extent these identifications rest on the premise that they are long and narrow so what else in the prehistoric repertoire could they be. Hardly definitive, whereas the Broughton Knowe mound at least betrays the typical trapezoidal shape of long cairns and barrows.

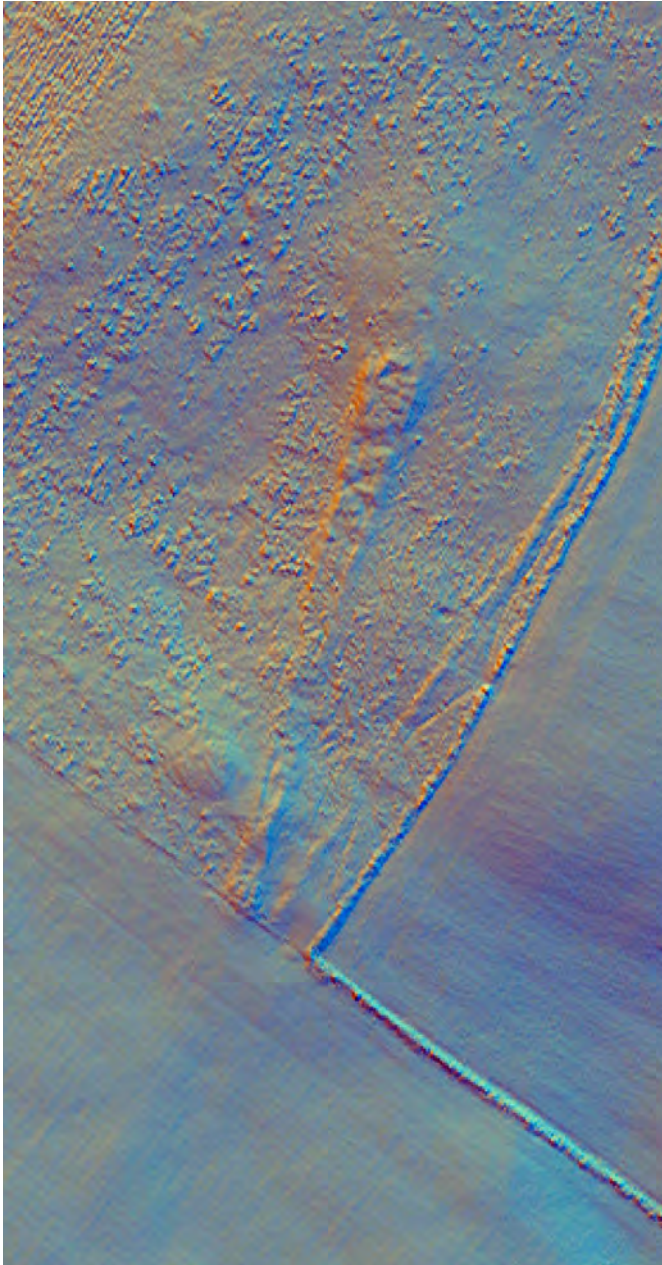
If we stand back a little and make the comparison with Lanarkshire, however, Peeblesshire and the Tweed Valley appear almost bereft. The Harlaw Muir long cairn and the cursus at Whitfield (PAS News), along with the other recently discovered cursus just across the county boundary crossing the valley at Melbourne crossroads (Id: 73422), seem to enhance the comparatively dense concentration of monuments around Biggar. That is dense in the sense that five long cairns and barrows – including Greens Moor (Id: 48877), Burngrange (Id: 48870), Easton-Medwin Water (Id: 48820) and Biggar Common (Id: 72629) – strung out over a little more than 10 miles on a sparse distribution map appear as a significant cluster. The Broughton Knowe cairn on the hills overlooking the Biggar Gap is arguably another extension of this cluster and takes the number to six, while a new discovery in Lanarkshire at Weston makes it seven. This last has

come off LiDAR some 500m NE of the Weston henge (Id: 48914), that other type of monument that often serves as a marker of a monumental Neolithic presence, albeit rather later than the assumed Early Neolithic date of long cairns.

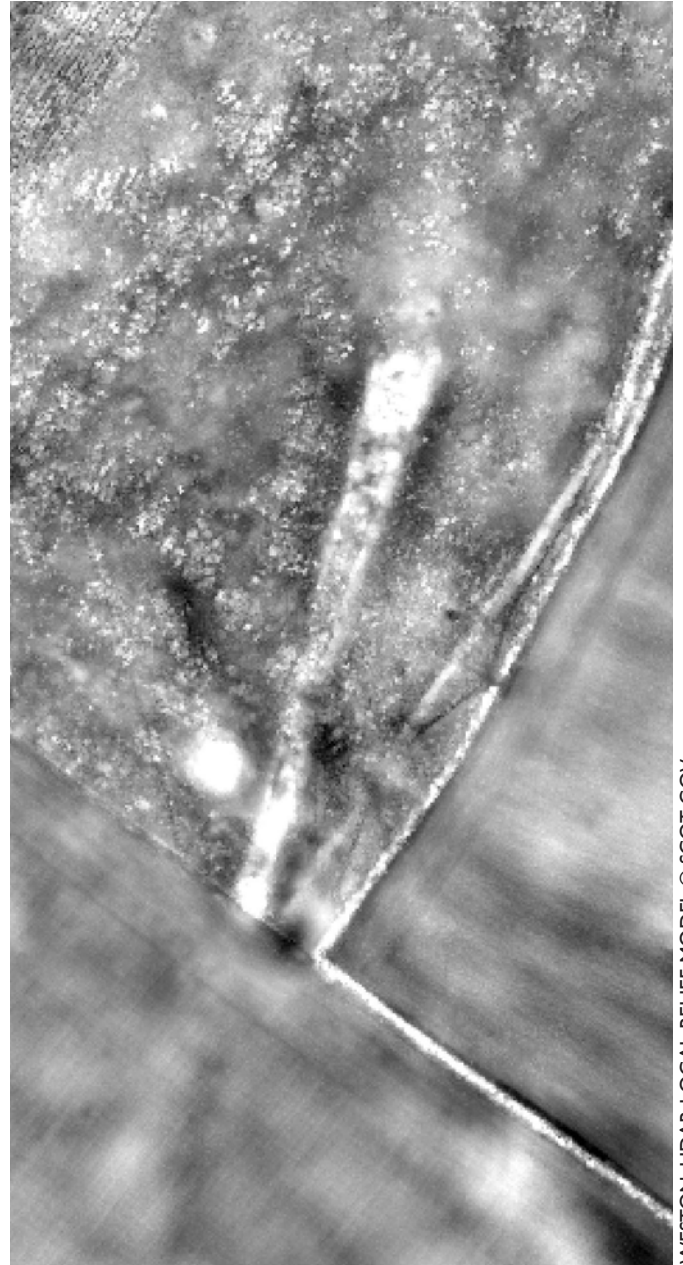
This is an extraordinary discovery, in an area that has been much visited archaeologically, first for the henge monument itself, and then for fieldwalking, initially in the late 1970s (Id: 48895 & 48896), and later between 1998 and 2005 by the Biggar Archaeology Group in a project that included excavation (<https://biggararchaeology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Weston.pdf>). This project has mapped hundreds of stone artefacts and pieces of debitage across all the fields then ploughed around the henge, while the excavations identified a series of post-holes and dug pits containing charcoal-rich sediments and burnt hazelnut shells. A few of the features also contained early Neolithic pottery. The site of the excavation lies about 150m SE of the long cairn.

The Local Relief Model of the LiDAR data brings out the long cairn starkly and its distinctive tapering shape, so much so that you may wonder how it has escaped notice. In part the answer lies in the Multihillshade visualisation, which is much more subtle. When you know what you are looking at you can detect the irregularity of its surface where it has been robbed of stone, in places virtually to ground level. But visit it on the ground and it is instantly understandable how it has slipped by unnoticed. On the edge of moorland, its north-north-east end forms little more than a slightly

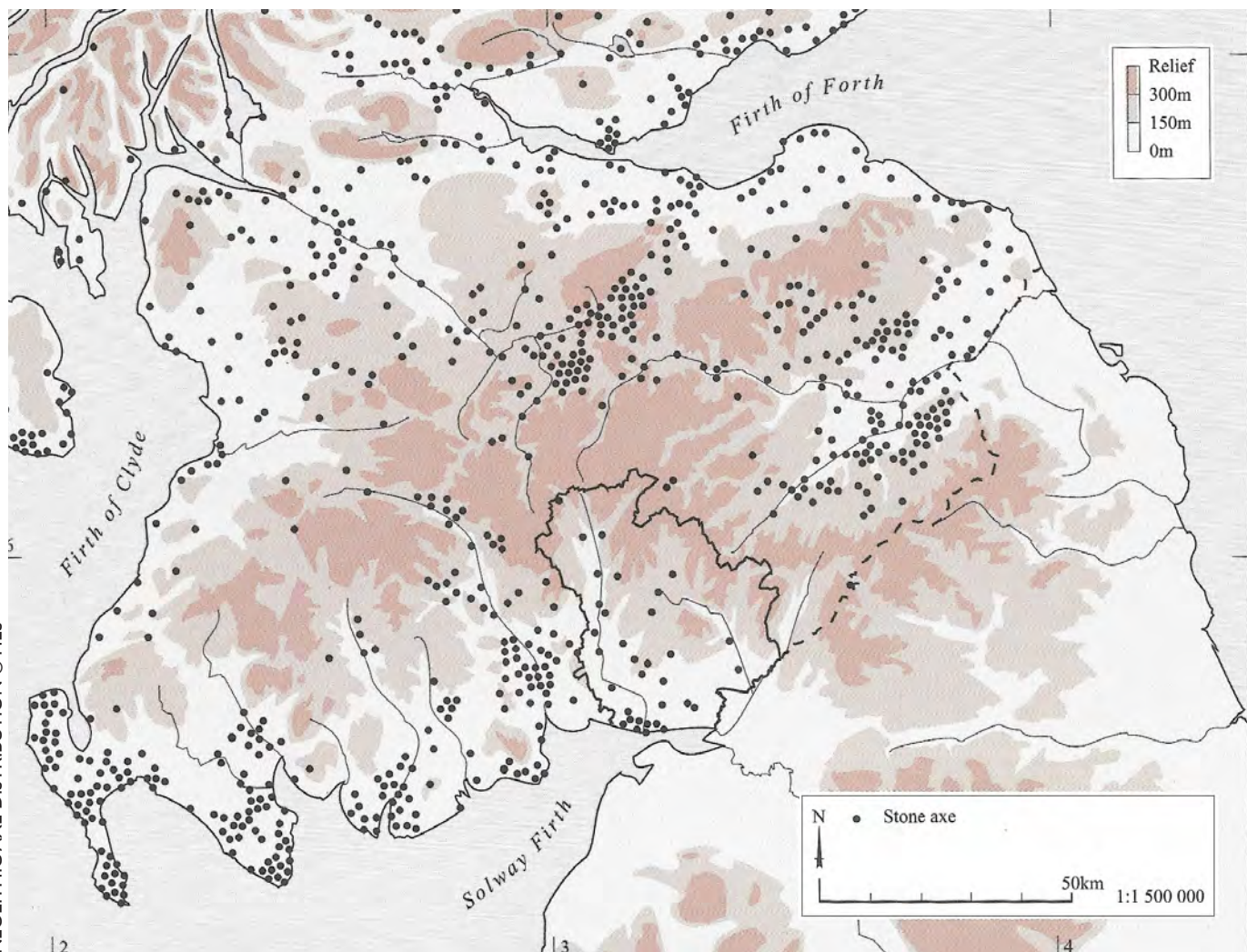




raised rib of grassy sward flanked by swathes of reeds where the stone content beneath the turf has allowed a narrow strip to drain more freely than the surrounding ground. Overall, the cairn has measured at least 128m in length and tapers from 13.5m in breadth to 7.8m at the edge of the field on the south-south-west. While the sides of the mound are quite sharply defined, the outline of the broad northern terminal is more ragged, and it is unclear whether the asymmetry here retains fragments of the eastern horn of a shallow forecourt or whether this is merely the residue of more aggressive robbing and that the cairn once extended further north, perhaps as much as 10m. The cairn material is nowhere much more than 0.5m high, but the builders clearly exploited the crest of natural undulation to maximise the height of the cairn and, by extension, its visual impact. A faint and diffuse raised feature that can be seen on the Local Relief Model extending another 60m into the field from the southern end is possibly this undulation. Within the moorland the visualisations



also show a low circular mound about 13m in diameter immediately north-west of this end of the long cairn. Although we don't know how the Neolithic features located in the excavations at Weston relate to the long cairn, the targeted fieldwalking of the Biggar Archaeology Group has had an extraordinary impact, not simply in identifying concentrations of stone tools, but also in the recovery of Neolithic pottery. This concentration of cairns and three cursus monuments dating from the Neolithic, which coincides with one of the denser concentrations in the distribution of stone axes, is now replicated in the concentration of sites yielding Neolithic pottery. Excavations in the woodland above Melbourne crossroads, long before the cursus was identified crossing the valley, found hearths, pits and post-holes, and recovered both Early and Late Neolithic pottery, as well as a stone axe (Id: 109688). At face value, domestic activity seems to be taking place in proximity to these monuments, but whether relatively permanent settlements or temporary camps will not



become clear before more extensive excavations are undertaken.

Returning to the Tweed, it is difficult to explain the apparent dearth of Neolithic monuments satisfactorily. The distribution of stone axes falls away too, and even in the lower Tweed basin the majority seem to be on slightly higher ground flanking the basin rather than along the river. These distributions, of course, are fraught with biases. On this national scale the concentration of pottery around Biggar, for example, is mapping the activity of the Biggar Archaeology Group rather than Neolithic farmers, while the collection of Adam Sim (1805-68) of Coulter Mains may have contributed likewise to the apparent concentration of stone axes there. The history of agricultural improvement and its progress may equally have shaped other aspects of the distribution up and down the Tweed Valley.

Nevertheless, if the identification of Sheriff Muir as a long barrow is correct, it is not completely devoid of monuments, and we should also remember that it took the evaluation of the A1 corridor prior to the construction of the dual carriageway to populate the Lothian Plain with any long barrows – Eweford

(Id: 257432) and Pencraig Hill (Id: 249181). There are also several megalithic monuments, principally standing stones, which may be Neolithic. These include the pair of standing stones on Sheriff Muir, where the Statistical Account provides a tantalising description of other stones and cairns on the plateau (Id: 51525 & 51545). But who would bet against there being Neolithic settlement on all these gravel terraces the length of the Tweed. It is an article of faith in the literature that Neolithic farmers sought out light gravel soils, and one that is routinely re-affirmed all over Britain by the discovery of Neolithic pits in commercial interventions before development. There is certainly an attested early Neolithic presence at the Late Neolithic post-defined enclosure on the Meldon Bridge terrace, manifested by shallow pits containing pottery and burnt hazelnut shells. Mainly occurring in clusters across the area excavated, they are dated by a handful of what are now 'old' radiocarbon dates spanning 3800-3000 BC, and one of the clusters coincided with what was interpreted as primary knapping material that possibly indicated occupation rather than transient use.

This was a rescue excavation and falls into this category of commercial discoveries, as does the pit containing Neolithic pottery recorded in an evaluation at



SHERIFF MUIR © S HALLIDAY

Horsburgh Castle Farm opposite Cardrona (Id: 51272). What is more startling is the discovery of Neolithic pits on hillsides at the top of the Clyde valley, where watching briefs and excavations for the Clyde Windfarm have explored locations that are usually pretty well closed off to any of the surface survey techniques currently available. Fieldwalking can only recover material where the soil is exposed, so distributions of Mesolithic and Neolithic artefacts tend to be tied to the pattern of fields (and the shores of reservoirs) in the bottoms of the valleys, whereas the evidence from the Clyde Windfarm points to the likelihood that Mesolithic and Neolithic people were doing things all over the hills as well. And if that is the case in Clydesdale, there is no reason why it should not apply to Tweeddale too.

So where does that leave us in understanding our Neolithic in Peeblesshire, because it seems unlikely that any amount of fieldwork is going to redress that contrast with the concentration of monuments around Biggar? The pits uncovered by excavation at Meldon Bridge and Cardrona clearly demonstrate an early Neolithic presence, but the absence of coherent structural remains means we don't really understand how this habit of digging pits relates to the places being occupied, particularly as the current fashion in archaeological interpretation is to attribute deliberate intention - ritual - to the burial of much of this pottery. Undoubtedly some of the sherds are deliberately

placed, but these pits have invariably been truncated by centuries of cultivation. We never see the deposits through which they have been cut. How would we view these fills if we knew that the pits had been cut through midden-rich field soils? Yes, some of the Neolithic sherds may have been deliberately placed, but the back fill would inevitably include other material. The scatter of pits at Meldon Bridge is perhaps the closest we will ever get to identifying a Neolithic field in Peeblesshire, and if there were fields on that terrace the parent settlement must be nearby.

But what would that settlement have looked like? The scatter of random post-holes and occasional hearths, for example at Melbourne crossroads, is such an ephemeral contrast to the remains of a 'hall' that is substantial enough to create a visible cropmark, as at Sprouston. Perhaps we should imagine the typical Neolithic houses rather differently and take our cue from some medieval and later architecture. Rather than thinking of some of these hearths for open-air cooking, perhaps they were at the centre of turf-walled buildings. Decayed and ploughed over in prehistory, these would have been unrecognisable long before these locations were truncated by post-medieval ploughing, and we would be none the wiser.

Notwithstanding the possible long barrow at Sheriff Muir, perhaps we should concede that the distributions

are real, and that the early Neolithic in Tweeddale was not about monuments, but settlement, occupying the terraces and exploiting the hills. It was part of a wider constituency served monumentally by the concentration of long cairns and cursus monuments from Biggar up to West Linton. The significance of this location is perhaps a topographical crossroads in the geography of Scotland, a zone through which Arran pitchstone bound for the Scottish Borders or the Lothians, for example, would have to pass. The creation of a monumental landscape in the Tweed valley is perhaps a feature of the Late Neolithic after about 3000 BC. This is what the Meldon Bridge enclosure represents, which has its fellows in Lanarkshire at Blackhouse Burn (Id: 47640)

and, on a smaller scale, Annieston (Id: 48696). Eastwards, there is one in Lauderdale (Id: 55837) and, again on a smaller scale, at Sprouston (Id: 58329). Who is to say there weren't others under Peebles and Innerleithen? Whereas in the early Neolithic the rhythms of life may have taken people from Tweeddale to the monumental landscape centred on Biggar, could it be that in the Late Neolithic the monuments came to the people, a preparation for the Early Bronze Age when burials in cairns would be invested throughout the settlement landscape?

Trove Id numbers have been provided in the text for anyone who wants to follow up the site references. ■



The Convent of Santa María la Real de Huelgas, Burgos

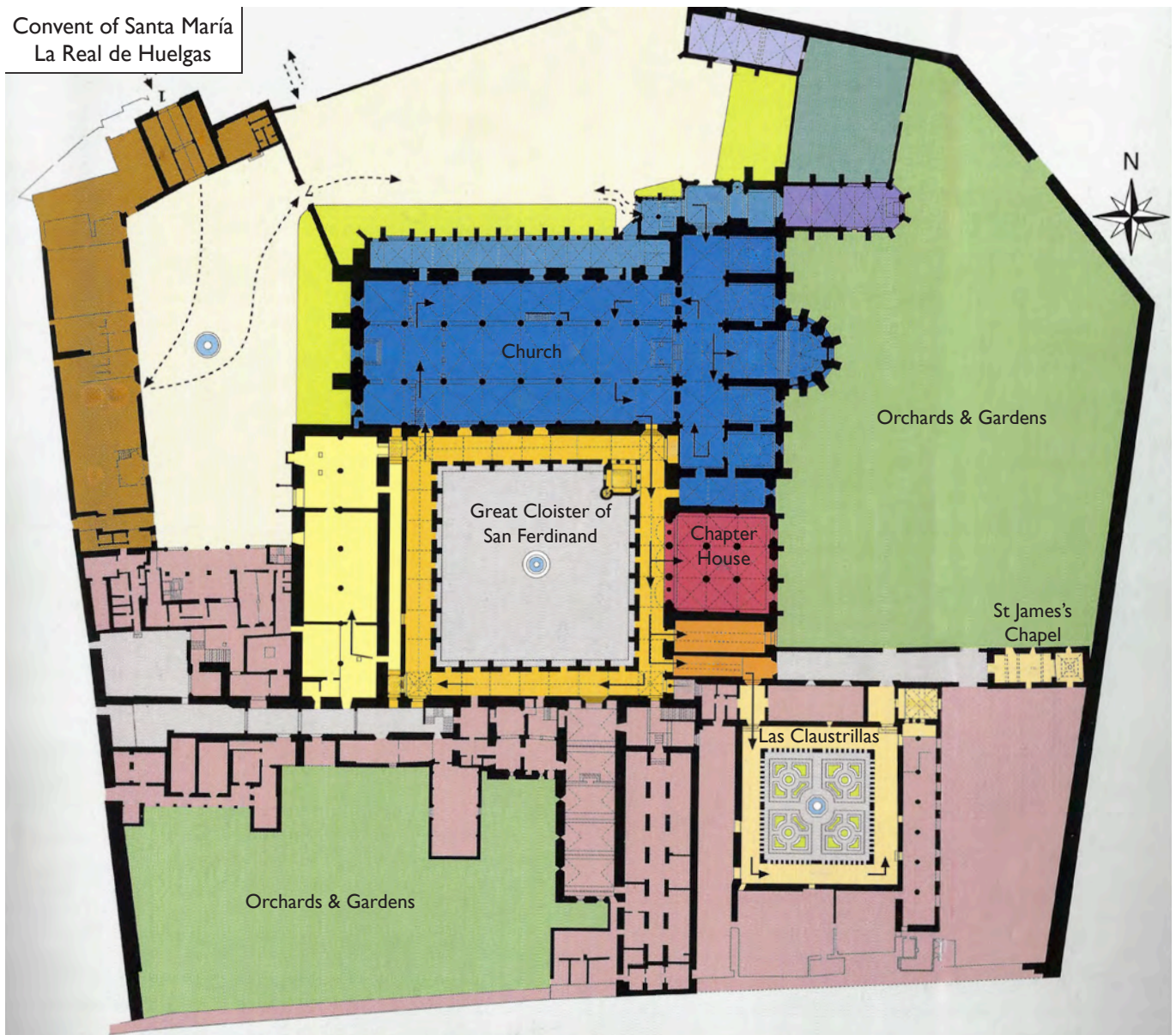
words & photographs - Colin McLean

The convent of Santa María la Real de Huelgas stands one kilometre from the centre of the cathedral city of Burgos in the community of Castile and León in Northern Spain. Its location was selected by King Alfonso VIII (1156-1214), who created a convent there at the request of his wife, Eleanor of England (1160-1214). In 1187, Pope Clement III authorised the religious house to be dedicated to St Mary, and Alfonso granted the royal charter for the formation of the Cistercian Convent later that year. The status of the institution was further enhanced in 1199 when the Royal Convent was transferred to

the nuns. From that point, it became the place where monarchs were knighted by divine authority. Thus was the importance of this place established from its very formation in the 12th century. Despite it being a daughter institution of the Convent of Santa Maria de la Caridad in Navarre, the jurisdiction of the Abbess of Las Huelgas was extensive covering civil, ecclesiastical and criminal matters, and geographically widespread, extending across the plain of Burgos and including fourteen large and fifty small villages.

As with many buildings of that age, the architecture is

Convent of Santa María
La Real de Huelgas







THE EAST END OF THE CHURCH

a complex jigsaw, of which there are three main phases. The earliest is the Romanesque cloister - Las Claustillas - dating from the late 12th century. Then the church was constructed in the early part of the 13th century. The later Gothic cloister of San Fernando followed later in that century. Such complexity is beyond the scope of this article, so I am going to focus on four elements: the Church; Las Claustillas; St James's Chapel; and the 13th century stained glass in the Chapter House.

The Church

As one would expect, the church is the single largest building and the centrepiece of the convent. It is 13th century Gothic with a traditional east-west orientated Latin-cross plan (see drawing on p11) typical of Cistercian churches, a vaulted nave, two side aisles and an external Knight's Aisle on its north side. There is a pair of side chapels on each side of the principal chapel in the apse. Beyond the tower, also on the north side, is St John the Baptist's Chapel. Three additional chapels - of the Lay Sisters, of Good Success, and another one to St John the Baptist - sit at the west end of the nave. It is well-endowed with chapels; there are others: 18 in total. Some of the chapels are effectively octagonal in plan as a result of their pattern of vaulting, with eight ribs.

The columns separating the nave from the aisles are relatively simple, but this is not the case with the High Altar, commissioned in 1665 from the architect Policarpo de la Nestosa and the sculptor Juan de Pobes.

La Nestosa also created the altarpiece at the Church of St Cosme and St Damien in the centre of Burgos. The Santa Maria altarpiece is a magnificent example of Spanish Baroque, with four giant barley-sugar golden columns on raised plinths, framing The Assumption (the ascendancy to heaven of Mary on her death). To either side are statues of St Bernard and St Benedict, saints significant in the Cistercian order. Above the Assumption is the Crucifixion, flanked by saints and angel musicians. Full-blown Spanish baroque may not be to everyone's taste, but there is no doubting this piece is impactful.

It is a feature of a number of churches and cathedrals we visited in Northern Spain that the nave and choir are divided by a substantial screen, interrupting the long view that we are accustomed to back in the UK. And so it is in Santa Maria, with a neoclassical screen with a central iron gate, through which the nuns could observe the church ceremonies (but presumably not take part). This screen is topped with a panorama of the Battle of Navas de Tolosa, fought in 1212, and painted here in 1594.

Las Claustillas

The lesser cloister, so-called because it is smaller than the San Fernando Cloister, is an exquisite enclosure of Romanesque architecture dating from 1180-90. It may in fact predate the convent itself, before the King donated the land and buildings to create the complex.



It has twelve arches on its four sides, each sitting on paired columns with elongated capitals decorated with stalks and leaves. It is normally planted as a formal rose garden with a fountain, but not at the time of our visit. The play of light through the paired columns into the walkway was a delight.

St James's Chapel

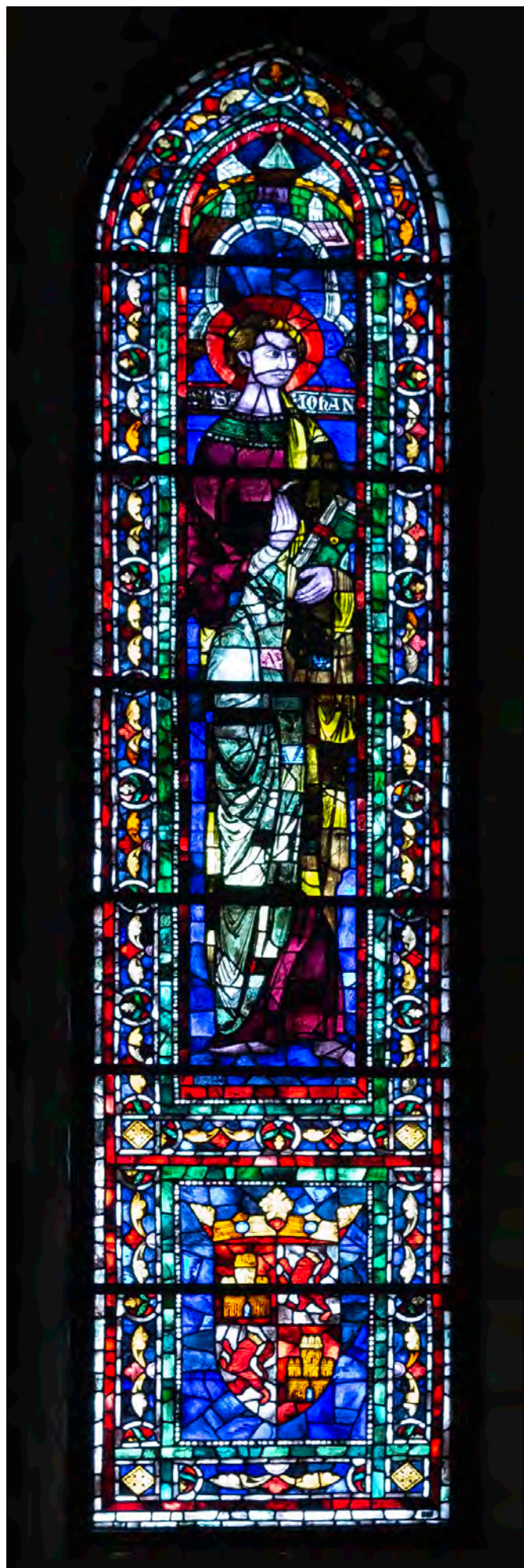
In addition to the stained glass, the convent has examples of romanesque, gothic and renaissance architecture, but perhaps more interestingly, three chapels created by Muslim artists. These contain fine plasterwork and the wonderful Mudejar Ceiling in St James's Chapel (see front cover). The Muslim influence in this art is not dissimilar to that seen in southern Spain, most spectacularly in the Mezquita in Cordoba. These designs are distinguished by being much more geometric and rectilinear than the baroque, gothic or renaissance styles seen elsewhere in the convent. The St James's ceiling is a particularly fine example of this art, created by Arabic craftsman travelling north from Africa. It's glowing red tiles and zig-zags are hypnotic.

Panels of ceiling plasterwork have been carefully restored and now displayed and lit to great effect.

The Chapter House and its Stained Glass

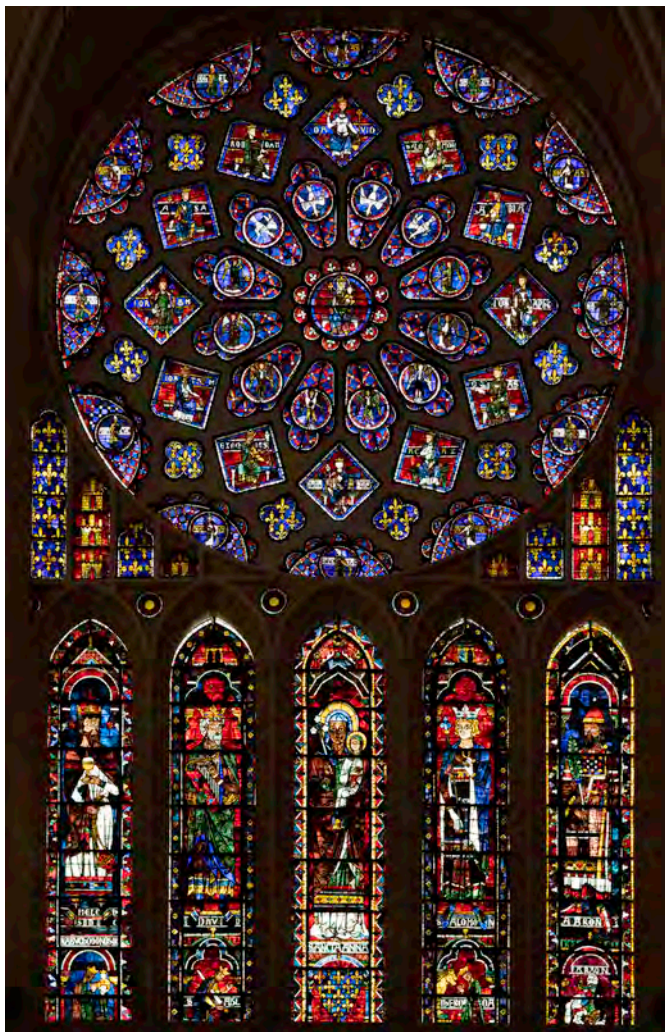
Santa María's Chapter House was for me a special delight. I am particularly interested in stained glass and we had diverted on our way south through France to visit Chartres Cathedral, whose 13th century glass is regarded as among the best and most significant in the world. It was therefore a real pleasure to find the three 13th century lancets in this space, and to explore the similarities with Chartres. The influence of the stained glass at Chartres cannot be overstated. At 170 windows, it is by far the most extensive collection of early medieval glass that exists, famed for its powerful narratives as well as for its stunning Chartres Blue. Here in Scotland we have virtually no medieval glass, it having been destroyed by the Protestants after the Reformation and not re-appearing for nearly three centuries.

Research online reveals that the three lancets in the Chapter House, depicting Peter, Paul and John, were originally designed and installed in the apse of the convent's church in the period 1200-20. The three were originally part of a larger presentation of the College of the Apostles, but these are all that remain. Our guide explained that they had been boarded over, perhaps for protection. The church was subject to a restoration project in 1964-65, when the windows were revealed and moved to the Chapter House, though quite why is not clear. What is clear is that the window openings in



C13 STAINED GLASS IN THE CHAPTER HOUSE PORTRAYING ST JOHN

C13 STAINED GLASS AT CHARTRES CATHEDRAL

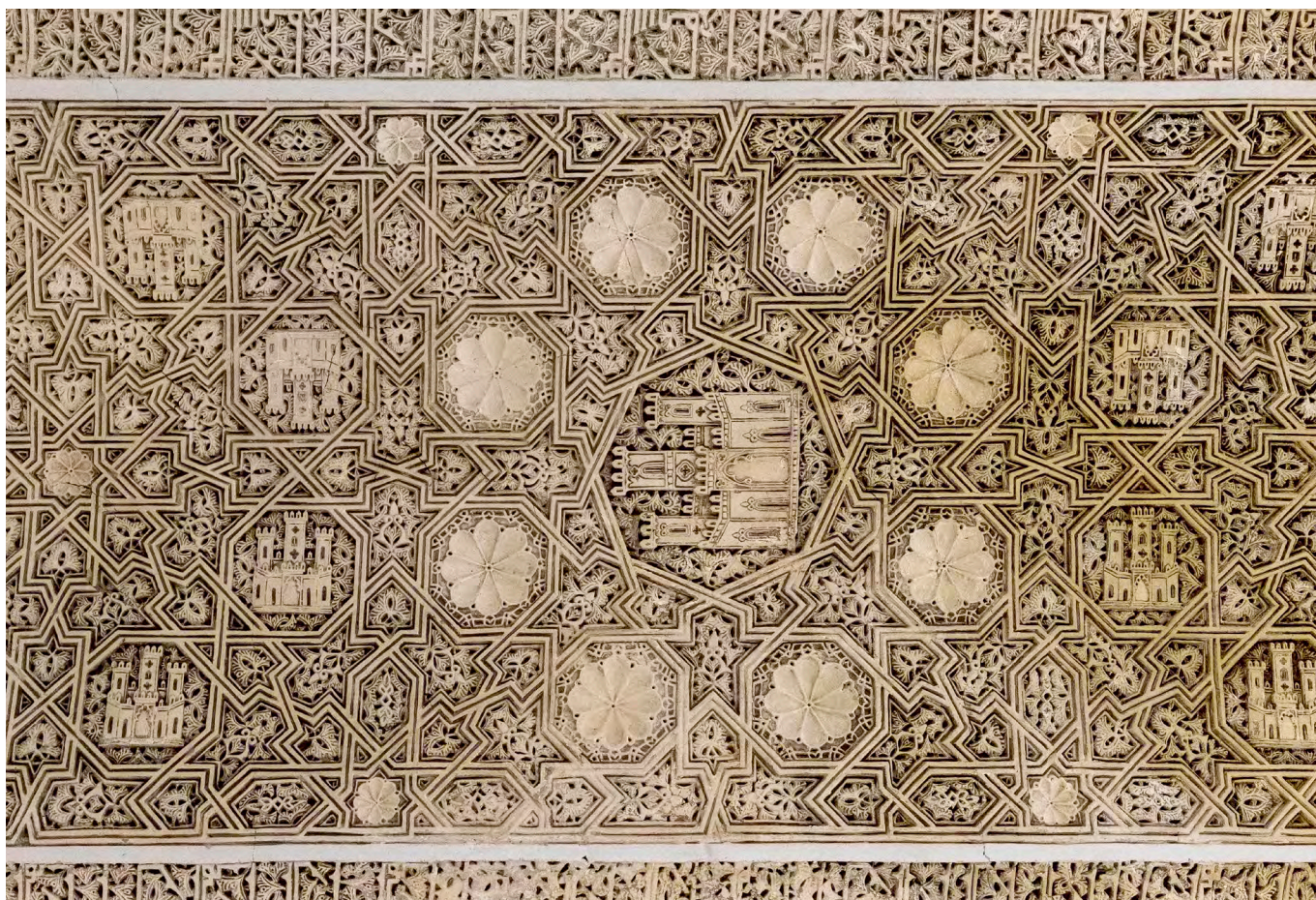


the Chapter House are larger than those the windows had originally occupied in the church. And so, on each lancet two new panels, depicting the coats of arms of Castille and Leon, were added below the original figure. This addition can clearly be seen in the photograph, as can the whole of the original floral medieval border.

Unsurprisingly, the designs are naive and of their time, but the colours are astonishing. Having seen the blue glass at Chartres just a couple of weeks earlier, I was struck by the similarity of the deep blue in the convent's Chapter House lancets. Technical and stylistic studies have independently pointed to strong French connections in the Las Huelgas glass.

Santa Maria is still a working convent, and though large areas are accessible via a guided tour, some portions are private for the nuns. It is cared for by Patrimonio Nacional which looks after State properties for the Crown. Our tour was greatly enhanced by an excellent guide who, though she explained she did not have time to do the whole tour in Spanish and English, provided excellent and expansive answers to my many questions.■

RESTORED CEILING PLASTERWORK



Summer Uncoverings on the Tweed

words & photographs - Colin Bell

2026 marks the third and final year of excavations for Uncovering the Tweed, the project which has identified and excavated sites of varying historical chronology, broadly along the Tweed basin.

AOC archaeologists and volunteers returned in mid-April to the Adie's Brae scooped settlement site at Ericstane, north of Moffat. The settlement sits on a promontory with great views across and down the valley to other Iron Age sites in the vicinity. It's easy to imagine the former inhabitants looking out towards plumes of rising smoke from other settlements nearby. During the first dig in October 2024, cremated human remains – likely from an adult male - had been found buried in the ring-groove of a roundhouse at the lower end of the site. Since this was quite an unusual discovery, a bigger trench was opened this time to try to understand more about the context of this part of the site.

We had a lovely period of sunny, dry weather over the week while we mattocked and trowelled our way across the trench, exposing what appeared to be a second ring-ditch feature; a cobbled area which was thought might have been used for drying, and a lovely set of carefully positioned flat stones, curving up the slope. Local schoolchildren who arrived one morning, and



A COBBLED PLATFORM OUTSIDE
THE ROUNDHOUSE AT ADIE'S BRAE

who were only on-site for a couple of hours excavating small holes, made one of the highlight finds of the week – what appeared to be a very corroded iron knife in two parts.

A couple of small pieces of burnt bone were found not far from the original cremation burial pit but it was thought likely that these were residual remains from this first burial rather than any new unrelated one.

In mid-May, another site had a second visit - this time the proposed medieval moated site close to the Tweed at Fairnilee, near Yair Bridge.

A small trench spanning the perimeter ditch had been opened in Summer 2025 with some sherds of medieval pottery found. This time a larger trench was opened in the central area within the moat ditch with the aim of



EXCAVATIONS AT ADIE'S BRAE SCOOPED SETTLEMENT AT ERICSTANE



searching for any signs of structural remains. A previous geophysical survey hadn't shown up any obvious signs of stone foundations.

A second trench spanning the ditch to the south-east might pick up evidence of any structure beside the causeway entrance across the moat ditch. Two large flat stones were uncovered in the central trench sitting side by side. Could these perhaps have been a threshold into



a building or room? Little other evidence of a structure or foundations were found save what might have been one or two post-holes. If some kind of fortification had been there in the past, might it have been made from wood?

A couple of beautiful loom weights were discovered relatively close to the surface as the de-turfing was taking place for the secondary trench. Little else was found as we dug down to section the ditch.

In my final participation in the project, I took part in a test-pitting exercise in July on a site at Sprouston, near Kelso. This activity was taking place in advance of a planned three-week dig on a known multi-period site, originally discovered through aerial photography of crop marks. The crop marks suggested the possible presence of a neolithic causewayed enclosure on a promontory site above the east bank of the Tweed, close to possible Anglian and medieval farming and settlement remains.

The purpose of the test-pitting was to assess what lay in the top-soil over the target areas for trenches. The nature and volume of finds from the test pits could have a bearing on the approach taken to opening the larger trenches.

Again, we had some scorching days and, with the lack of any significant rain for weeks, the crust was like concrete. This only eased once you had dug down a few inches.

We excavated a series of test pits over the target areas,





A SELECTION OF LITHICS FROM ONE OF THE LARGER TEST PITS

some measuring a couple of feet square and some a metre square. We excavated the topsoil down to a depth of about 12-14 inches and riddled everything. With the bone-dry earth, you didn't want to be downwind of a riddle! My finds were all small lumps and flakes of lithics, a few showing some signs of working, including what appeared to be bulbs of percussion, knapping marks and sharp edges. In one area of the field the flakes were a lovely red colour, in another more yellow and lime in colour – however, none in large concentrations.

At the same time, David Bartholomew went over the target trench tops with his metal detector. Amongst David's finds was an unidentified copper-alloy coin

which he thought could date from the Roman period. During the subsequent dig phase at Sprouston, David also found a silver annular brooch, missing its central pin, which he thought might date to between the 13th and 15th centuries - really interesting finds to add to the understanding of the site.

All in all, it was a great summer for participating in Uncovering the Tweed and getting hands-on experience together with the benefit of the knowledge and experience of the professional archaeologists. With the excavation phase of the project coming to an end, hopefully a similar project will come along at some point in the future. ■

Medieval Stones & Modern Frameworks

words - Simon Gilmour

As Scotland's oldest heritage charity and learned society, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland actively supports the study and enjoyment of the past across the country, including in the South East.

Funding Cutting-edge Research

In August, we announced that a grant from the Society will fund initial archaeological fieldwork in south-east Scotland as part of plans for a multi-year project documenting around 200 fragments of medieval carved stone south of the Forth-Clyde line, most of which have not been studied for over a century.

SIMON GILMOUR BY NEIL HANNAH



Beginning this autumn, the Sculpting Southern Scotland, AD 500-1100 project, coordinated by archaeologist Dr Christina Cowart-Smith FSAScot, seeks to collect images and data from these stones to shed light on the story of a historically contested border zone. The project will investigate sculptures made during a time when the boundaries of various kingdoms shifted repeatedly.

The Society's grant—together with funding from the Pictish Arts Society, and from the Hunter Historical & Archaeological Trust for a pilot study in south-west Scotland—will enable Dr Cowart-Smith to create 2D and 3D images of these sculptures and record details about their design. This data will then be collated into an open access searchable digital database with the aim of eventually covering the Lothians, Borders, Ayrshire, and Dumfries & Galloway. In time, the database will allow for analysis and comparison, giving researchers the tools to answer key questions about how the sculptures were made and what they tell us about church and society in early medieval southern Scotland.

The Society supports high-quality research and publication relating to various aspects of Scottish history and archaeology by making several grants and awards twice each year. They are open to everyone, and the next submission deadline is 30 November 2026.

Responding to an Urgent Challenge

Some of the surviving sculpted stones in southern Scotland are considered “at-risk” by Dr Cowart-Smith, because many are housed in or adjacent to churches that are currently earmarked for sale or have already been sold. What happens to the historical objects - including sculpted stones - associated with these churches when they change use is often uncertain.

This urgent challenge is one of the reasons why we are working with Scotland's Churches Trust on Research in Action on Church Heritage (ReACH). Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Pilgrim Trust, this two-year project is creating a lasting record of church heritage during a period of significant change, focusing on both material culture and community value. The team have been visiting many of these historic sites, speaking to hundreds of people about Scottish ecclesiastical heritage, and bringing experts and heritage professionals together for conversations about the challenges of churches with uncertain futures. The project's work is creating a lasting record of church heritage, and capturing the many stories, memories, and practices relating to these sites.

Creating a Framework for the Future

Dr Cowart-Smith's research on carved stones will also address questions posed in our South East Scotland Archaeological Research Framework (SESARF). Launched in 2025, the chapters highlight the significance of the region and explore the priorities for future archaeological investigation through useful research questions. All the chapters are open for consultation, and the team would love to hear your suggestions. You can also contribute by adding comments directly to the website scarf.scot/regional/sesarf using the inline commenting feature.



Providing a Home for the Sector

This is just a snapshot of how we work with a wide range of researchers, heritage organisations, volunteers and community groups across the country to increase understanding of the past, share knowledge and ensure that Scotland's heritage is accessible to everyone. However, Scotland's heritage sector is facing increasing pressures. Expertise and resources are often dispersed, while many community organisations and smaller charities are working with limited capacity, reduced funding and rising costs. There is currently no independent, visible national centre where the public, communities and the heritage sector can come together to collaborate, exchange knowledge and access support. The Society's own premises are inaccessible, and we are unable to welcome our own members (Fellows) or to use them to deliver events and activities connected to our national projects.

This is why the Society is seeking to create Scotland's first national heritage hub to provide a permanent, accessible home for our charitable work and create a national resource for Scotland. Although physically based in Edinburgh, it will connect statutory bodies, heritage professionals, researchers, grassroots organisations, volunteers and enthusiasts across the country, as well as Scotland's global diaspora.

The hub will support collaboration, research, learning, skills development and knowledge exchange, while helping organisations share resources, reduce costs and build greater financial resilience. We are already in discussions with a range of heritage organisations, including Treasure Trove, Scotland's national system

for recording, assessing and allocating archaeological finds to museums, which would like to use the heritage hub as a base for its public engagement. The hub will also provide a welcoming destination where people from Scotland and around the world can explore their Scottish roots and heraldry and be guided towards heritage sites, archives, organisations and communities across the country connected to their own stories.

We have identified a B-listed building beside the National Museum of Scotland, within Edinburgh's cultural corridor and UNESCO World Heritage Site. The surrounding cultural attractions collectively welcome more than 10 million visitors each year. With centuries of history of its own, the building offers a highly visible base.

This ambitious next chapter builds upon nearly 250 years of public benefit. Since its foundation in 1780, the Society has helped shape how Scotland's history is researched, preserved and shared. The heritage hub will build on this remarkable legacy, providing the accessible permanent home and national infrastructure needed to ensure that the Society can continue safeguarding Scotland's past for the next 250 years.

You can help by donating, becoming a Heritage Hub Champion with a small £20 monthly gift, or sharing the campaign (socantscot.org/heritagehub) through your networks.

To find out more about our work, visit our website at socantscot.org, follow us on social media or subscribe to our public e-newsletter socantscot.org/enews. ■

ARTIST'S IMPRESSION OF THE HERITAGE HUB © BENJAMIN TINDALL ARCHITECTS



Member Recruitment Group

- an introduction and update

In March of this year, the Committee agreed to the formation of the Member Recruitment Group (MRG), with the following terms of reference:

Purpose: To explore and implement practical, low-risk strategies to increase PAS membership, engagement, and community visibility.

Objectives:

- Maximise recruitment opportunities at events (lectures, walks, exhibitions, etc).
- Capture visitor interest via sign-ups, emails, and follow-up communications.
- Produce activities and communications plans to

- Recommend improvements to forms, posters, and website to support recruitment.
- Report outcomes to full committee after each event.

Reporting:

Regular updates to the committee (e.g., after March lecture, April walk).

Summary of successes, challenges, and recommendations for further initiatives.

Review:

Remit and activities to be reviewed after initial 6 months or after 2–3 pilot events.



STRAT HALLIDAY WITH THE INTREPID GROUP AT WHITESIDE HILL FORT

enhance member and non-member engagement.

- Pilot small-scale initiatives (e.g. March lecture extended membership offer, guided walks)
- Collect and report simple metrics: new members, visitor contacts, event feedback.
- Maintain alignment with PAS values and branding, including the strapline: “Exploring our past together.”

Scope:

- Develop and manage recruitment initiatives at PAS events.
- Coordinate communications to prospective members (e.g., newsletters, follow-ups).

Reporting

The MRG has met on a number of occasions and has exchanged very many emails and telephone calls. At our first meeting we agreed the following priorities in pursuit of recruiting more members:

- To make it as easy as possible for prospective members to join and to pay their subscription
- Investigate the feasibility of introducing Direct Debits for subscriptions
- Collect data to inform our decisions on which communications channels are the most effective for recruitment
- Identify an individual to take forward our social



media presence

- Plan to have a “recruitment desk” at all PAS events and at others as appropriate
- To investigate the feasibility of gaining charitable status
- To prepare publicity material to promote membership and events
- Investigate the introduction of Eventbrite ticketing for events
- To examine the prospect of improving or replacing the Society’s web site
- To organise events for members over the summer

We have organised and run the following events over

the spring and summer:

- Guided walk to Whiteside Hillfort on 4th April
- Guided visit to Roslin Gunpowder Mill on 13th June
- Guided visit to “Scotland’s First Warriors” exhibition on August 10th.
- (Members also participated in the Hay Lodge Ice House Survey on 13th August, as part of the Uncovering The Tweed project)
- Walk round Peebles Historic Churches on 5th September

There are a number of events in hand for September, some arranged jointly with Peebles Museum, but these fall outwith the scope of this paper.

Web Site

We decided that as we had been regularly advised the existing web site was on the point of collapse, we should have a new one. Thoughts of designing it in house were quickly abandoned due to a lack of time and expertise. A considerable amount of time was spent on preparing a brief, putting it out tender, assessing the proposals and making a recommendation to the Committee. That work is well in hand and we expect to be testing a pilot shortly.

Publicity

We have prepared and distributed posters for various events. Where these are “member only” events, these have been emailed in electronic form to members. Richard Welander has continued his saturation bombing of Peebles with printed posters for public events, and that has been successful. We have trialled Eventbrite ticketing (even where events were free) to





KAI WALLACE OF AOC ARCHAEOLOGY EXPLAINING THE INTRICACIES OF 3D LASER SCANNING AT HAY LODGE ICE HOUSE SURVEY

manage numbers where required, and this seems to have been successful. We are aware that we are close to the capacity of the meeting room at St Joseph's and we may need to introduce ticketing for lectures, but we are not there yet. We have evolved a consistent format for PAS posters, to expedite production and to create and raise brand awareness.

With the Newsletter moving to quarterly instead of monthly, we agreed to complement this with regular short bulletins to notify members of forthcoming events.

Recruitment

Membership numbers have risen slowly but the magic one-hundred still eludes us. We experimented with extended membership offers at the March and April lectures and these did bring in a few. We propose to have a membership desk at all our seasonal lectures,

and at other events such as the Fundraising lecture in the Eastgate on November 5th, and at the Halkett Hendrie joint lecture on December 15th; both excellent opportunities.

Evaluation

We committed to carrying out short online evaluation exercises for each event. In short, members are very enthusiastic about having events to participate in, in addition to the seasonal lectures, and that is something we should continue. They are also an important offering to prospective members.

Member Recruitment Group

Caroline McDonald, Colin Bell, Richard Welandar, Colin McLean
September 2026



PEEBLES CHURCHES WALK AT CROSS KIRK

News

Subscription Renewal

It is time to renew your subscription to PAS, and you will find the necessary form in the email along with this issue of *PA*, complete with instructions. We hope that next year you can do this online via the web site.

New Web Site

We are pleased to announce that PAS has a new web site. Created for us by Hedley Phillips of Innerleithen firm *Digital Essence*, it is fresh, modern and better suited to our current requirements. The URL is unchanged:

<https://www.peeblesarchsoc.org.uk>

Publication of the excavations at Shootinglee

As of July 2026, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland formally accepted "Excavations at Shootinglee, near Traquair, 2012-2022" for publication in Scottish Historical and Archaeological Internet Reports, the online publishing platform of the Society. This is a great achievement for the Society.

The excavation project was the major field project of PAS during the 'teens' with digging going on every weekend every year from March to November. The project was co-directed by Piers Dixon and Joyce Durham with some 20 diggers in total taking part though usually 6-8 people were on site at any one time. It is expected that the editing and design work will take several months to complete with publication due next summer.

For those interested in seeing the finds, they will be exhibited at the Eastgate on Saturday 26th September from 10-12am and 2-4pm, or at Traquair Village Hall from 2-5pm Sunday 27th September followed by a guided tour to the site on Sunday 3rd October at 11am from the car park at Traquair Kirk. Piers will be giving talks titled "Shootinglee - A Rediscovered Forest Stead"

on the 22nd and 24th of September - see Events page.

Piers Dixon

Archaeology Week

PAS is joining forces with Peebles Museum and Library Services (part of Live Borders) to promote a week of activities later in September: walks, talks and object handling sessions, based at the Eastgate Theatre. See our Events Page for details.

Peggie Ferguson

We are saddened to report the loss of our member Peggie Ferguson, who died peacefully at Hay Lodge Hospital on 29th July 2026, aged 91 years. A former member of the Committee, Peggie had been a very long-standing supporter of the society, a stalwart



PEGGIE RECORDING DURING THE GRAVEYARD SURVEY AT LYNE KIRK IN 2007 © TREVOR COWIE

attender of our talks and a regular participant in activities over the years ranging from field trips to fieldwork projects. She will be missed.



SHOOTINGLEE ILLUSTRATION © ALAN BRABY

Events

17th September, 7.30 pm, St Joseph's
Finlaggan & the Kingdom of the Isles
Dr David Caldwell, former Keeper of History & Archaeology, National Museums Scotland

21st September to 1st October, Eastgate Theatre
Peebles Pop-Up Museum (various days)
Jointly with Peebles Museum/ Live Borders

22nd September, 7.30pm, Traquair Village Hall
Shootinglee - A Rediscovered Forest Stead
Dr Piers Dixon, Co-Chair, Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

24th September, 7.30pm, Eastgate Theatre
Shootinglee - A Rediscovered Forest Stead
Dr Piers Dixon, Co-Chair, Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

26th September, 10.00-4.00, Eastgate Theatre
Treasure Trove Finds Day
Treasure Trove Unit, National Museums Scotland

26th September, 10.00-12.00 & 2.00-4.00
Eastgate Theatre
Shootinglee Finds Display
Jointly with Peebles Museum/ Live Borders

26th September, 11.00 & 2.00, Starts Eastgate Theatre
Family Friendly Town Walk
Jointly with Peebles Museum/ Live Borders

27th September, 2.00-5.00, Traquair Village Hall
Shootinglee Finds Display
Jointly with Peebles Museum/ Live Borders

3rd October, 11.00am, meet at Traquair Kirk car park
Guided Walk to Shootinglee
Piers Dixon

15th October, 7.30pm. St Joseph's
The Horsehope Craig Hoard Revisited
Trevor Cowie, Chair, Peeblesshire Archaeological Society

5th November, 7.30 pm. Eastgate Theatre*
Ness of Brodgar Revealed*
Nick Card, Director, Ness of Brodgar Project
19th November, 7.30pm. St Joseph's

PALaEoScot: New Approaches to Scotland's Earliest Archaeology
Prof Kate Britton, Department of Archaeology, School of Geoscience, University of Aberdeen

15th December, 7.30pm. Eastgate Theatre**
Roman Scotland: Life on the Edge of Empire**
Dr Fraser Hunter, Principal Curator, Iron Age & Roman Collections, National Museums Scotland

21st January, 7.30pm. St Joseph's
Christianity comes to Scotland: Exploring Late Antiquity in the Borders
Dr Adrián Maldonado, Project Curator, National Museums Scotland

18th February, 7.30pm. St Joseph's
Visible Invisibles: Women in Roman Archaeology
Dr Rebecca Jones, Keeper of Scottish History & Archaeology, National Museums Scotland

18th March, 7.30pm. St Joseph's
The Silk Roads in Central Asia – The Lost Heart of the World
Prof Tim Williams, Emeritus Professor of Silk Road Archaeology, University College London

15th April, 7.30pm. St Joseph's
PAS AGM and Members' Night

All lectures, unless otherwise indicated, are held at **St Joseph's Neighbourhood Centre, Rosetta Road, Peebles EH45 8JU** (limited parking available)
Guests: £5 (at the door), PAS members free

* **PAS Public Lecture.** Tickets available online from the Eastgate Theatre
** **Halkett Hendrie Memorial Lecture** hosted jointly with the Tweeddale Society

