



## Scottish Group Newsletter

August 2014

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### Scottish Group Recent Activities

Members of the Scottish Group represent the IfA on a number of other panels and groups, including:

- SHED programme management group
- Regular BEFS Historic Environment Working Group meetings.
- Archaeological Archives in Scotland discussion group
- Historic Environment Bill stakeholder workshops

The IfA also continues to be involved, through a BEFS taskforce, in the progress of the Scottish Government bill to merge Historic Scotland and RCAHMS into Historic Environment Scotland.

Part of the Group's work is to assist IfA's main office in Reading in responding to historic environment consultations relevant to Scotland and Scottish members. IfA recently responded to consultations on:

- Consultation on future CAP direct payments in Scotland from 2015
- Consultation on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

If there are any consultations, or views on consultations, that you would like IfA to include, then please do get in touch.

### Training

Training continues to be very active, and indeed the Group is one of the most active of IfA's special interest groups.

Watch this space for further training events to be held in 2014; a number of events are in the planning stage and will be announced in due course.

[www.archaeologists.net/groups/scottish](http://www.archaeologists.net/groups/scottish)

We're always interested to receive feedback from our training events, and to hear ideas for our next events, so do get in touch!

### News

#### Historic environment update from the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for culture and external affairs

This is a very exciting time to be involved with the historic environment in Scotland. It is also a period of un-paralleled opportunities for everyone engaged within the sector to influence and shape the future of our critical and precious national resource. We are adopting a new approach set out in the first ever Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland, *Our Place in Time*, and creating a new national body to help take forward its delivery.

Recent weeks have seen some major progress and there are further key milestones coming up. The Strategic Historic Environment Forum, which will oversee delivery of our vision, met for the first time recently at the Engine Shed in Edinburgh. We also saw the successful passage of the Historic Environment Scotland Bill through Stage One of the Parliamentary Process on 19 June, with a very positive debate and unanimous support in the chamber. The process of creating Historic Environment Scotland will move an important further step forwards next month when adverts seeking applications for the first Board of the new organisation appear.

I am certain that Scotland's historic environment is a vital resource in cultural, social and economic terms. It can and should deliver greater benefits for communities and individuals alike. The support and engagement in delivering this ambitious agenda for the historic environment in Scotland so far has been very welcome and reaching these major milestones in the journey is a testament to the quality of individuals and organisations involved with Scotland's historic environment. Continued partnership working in the exciting next steps of our collective journey will ensure our historic environment is understood, valued, enjoyed and enhanced now and for future generations.

For a full update and further information see [www.archaeologists.net/news/140722-historic-environment-update-cabinet-secretary-culture-and-external-affairs](http://www.archaeologists.net/news/140722-historic-environment-update-cabinet-secretary-culture-and-external-affairs)

## **RCAHMS recognised as an Accredited Data Archive Centre (DAC) for the Historic Environment**

In May 2014, MEDIN - [the Marine Environment Data and Information Network](#) – approved RCAHMS as part of an Accredited Data Archive Centre for the Historic Environment recognising our commitment to ensuring that information about the marine historic environment of Scotland is properly documented, preserved and accessible. Accreditation will help raise the profile of the historic environment with those working in the marine industry and encourage deposition of archives and use of our information, which in turn can help to deliver effective stewardship of our fragile maritime past.

MEDIN is a partnership of public and private sector UK organisations set up to promote good governance of marine survey data. Marine data is expensive to collect and provides a unique snapshot in time and location of the richness and condition of Scotland's coasts and seas. MEDIN encourages the consistent application of standards to improve discovery of, access to and re-use of geographical data across the marine industry through a series of Accredited Data Archive Centres (DACs).

Scattered along 18,000 kilometres of coastline and across nearly 77,000 square kilometres of sea to the 200 nautical mile limit, Scotland's marine heritage is extremely diverse ranging from coastal (and submerged) archaeology to wrecks of ships and aircraft. Much of what we know about underwater heritage stems from investigations following chance discoveries of historic shipwrecks. For example a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Cromwellian shipwreck, thought to be the Swan, was discovered by Royal Navy diver John Dadd in 1979, close to Duart Point, Isle of Mull, then excavated with support from Historic Scotland between 1992 and 2003. Onshore, lighthouses and coastal defences helped keep people safe. From the air, our aerial survey programme has helped document human exploitation of the seas – recording tidal fish traps and kelp grids in tidal waters. Interest in the marine historic environment has recently grown considerably. Community projects help document / monitor and record coastal heritage under threat from coastal erosion; Historic Scotland's recent surveys are helping to record Scapa Flow's rich wartime underwater heritage; commercial projects looking at possible impacts of offshore renewable energy projects – are all opening up knowledge about our coasts and seas, while generating large amounts of important marine survey data.



*Carved wooden putto or cherub (DP92/169) exposed at the time of the Archaeological Diving Unit's visit on the wreck of The Swan in 1992. In the foreground is a partly-exposed staved wooden costrel, and between it and the cherub is a human ulna. Wreck timbers are seen on the right. © RCAHMS: DP 173909.*

Through Canmore, RCAHMS ensures that anyone interested in Scotland's maritime heritage can find information about these and other sites and explore

the wealth of drawings, photographs, documents and, increasingly, digital data catalogued in our Collections. Both RCAHMS and Historic also share data with Marine Scotland's [Marine Planning Portal](#) to provide an access point for those working offshore. All marine surveys now commissioned by Historic Scotland have to comply with MEDIN data archiving standards

Useful links

MEDIN: [http://www.oceannet.org/about\\_us/](http://www.oceannet.org/about_us/)  
Marine Scotland National Marine Planning Interactive (Map):  
<http://marinescotland.atkinsgeospatial.com/nmpi/>

## Student Competition

In March of this year, the Scottish Group ran a competition for students, to write a 500 word essay on the topic "So why *do* you want to become a professional archaeologist?". We wanted to hear students' archaeological hopes and dreams – or concerns for the future. We wanted to hear about the fields current students wanted to work in and how they were going to achieve their goals; what makes studying in Scotland special; and how can the archaeological profession best prepare students for life after university?

There were some outstanding entries which the committee found it hard to choose between and in the end the prize was split between two entries, which are reproduced below. We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we did, and we look forward to welcoming our new student members. The prize winners received a book token, free student membership for a year, and will also be Honorary Student Representatives on the committee for the next year - we look forward to having their input and hearing about how IfA and the Scottish Group can be of benefit to students.

Current benefits to student members include:

- free weekly jobs information service (JIS) bulletin by e-mail
- free IfA publications including *The Archaeologist* magazine
- free fortnightly e-newsletter, the *Heritage Update*
- discounted entry to the annual conference, the premier archaeological conference in the UK

- free membership of Area and Special Interest Groups and reduced rates at group events

You can apply for IfA Student membership during a period of relevant study – find out more at [www.archaeologists.net](http://www.archaeologists.net).

### Tristan Boyle, University of Aberdeen

I came across archaeology almost 4 years ago by chance, it was one of the first alphabetical courses after I had chosen my required modules for chemistry. However, I was hooked from the word go and even changed my degree so that I could continue with archaeology. To me the past is interesting but its value lies far beyond the fascination of the other, instead archaeology teaches us reflection and forces us by its very existence to examine ourselves examining. I feel that it is through archaeology that we can illuminate not only information in the past but also how to form the questions of the present. We as archaeologists need to understand our goals beyond digging in the ground, beyond work in a lab; we study the basis for many of the feelings, understandings and ideologies that exist today. For a society so entangled in its own present, we draw upon so much from the past; one only has to look at how our society treats the past to see this. We are judged on how we view the past, what atrocities should horror us and which should be overlooked; how many died in the name of colonisation and slavery and how many died in war and acts of genocide? Instead of asking the right questions, politics deals us weighted dice and expects us to play their game. It is time to claim back history and the deep past, and this means we need to claim archaeology back; no longer should we confine ourselves to storerooms of museums or in trenches. We need to be out in the open and ready to answer the difficult questions. Many would argue we already do in community and public archaeology, but this is purely 'outreach', from expert to non-expert. Community archaeology is archaeology, not merely a pandering part of the discipline or a set of approachable ideas to easily be digested by the public. As the artist comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable, archaeology should have a galvanising effect on society, it should teach us the power of perspective and the drive to unearth truth and understand our own limitations. In this respect, I would liken archaeology to philosophy, in that, we aren't out to seek definitive answers, and instead we

are looking for good questions. I want to topple the hierarchical “expert” pyramid and make it into a table, I want to see the ivory tower crumble and fall, I want the ordinary person to know and feel archaeology in the same way I do. It is time to throw off our hats, whips and satchels and take up trowels against a sea of troubles. If archaeology can make one think and reflect and bring the joy of discovery and of understanding, then surely it is something worth studying to reach out to the world.

### **Leonie Redgate, University of Aberdeen**

My archaeological dream is to have a multi-layered job within the field of Native North American archaeology. I want to work alongside Indigenous people and to be involved in the excavation process of sites. I would also like to be involved in the post-excavation procedures: the cleaning, analysis, documentation and conservation of the artefacts. After this process has been completed, I would like to play a role in returning the artefacts to the Indigenous peoples and, if their heritage has been lost due to past atrocities, I would like to be able to help them gain an understanding of the context of the finds. My concern for the future is that this will not become a reality and I will be as far away from this field as possible. Or worse: I will not have a career related to archaeology in any sense.

I aim to achieve this goal by continuing to make use of the fantastic opportunities that my University provides, including volunteering in lab work with extraordinary Alaskan artefacts, and by continuing to relate my University work, as much as I can, to this field of archaeology.

Studying in Scotland is great as I can get a taste of various aspects of archaeology from around the world without leaving the comfort of my home country (a frightful prospect for my younger self!). The University of Aberdeen is particularly special as it has fantastic members of staff who are passionate about what they teach and, as mentioned previously, there are many amazing opportunities for myself and my fellow archaeology students to take hold of. For example, I have already participated in a Scottish excavation and I am heading to Alaska in the summer to take part in the excavation there.

I have found that archaeology has helped me to become a more-rounded and confident person. I have started to appreciate my surroundings – the spaces, people and objects – in a whole new light. I feel as though I no longer take things for granted, whether that is on a personal level e.g. how I interact with the world around me, or a more academic level e.g. questioning sources of information and having a better understanding of the many prejudices and biases that exist when speaking about ‘history’.

As there are many aspects to the discipline of archaeology, I feel I have benefited from a wide range of experiences that can help me with my life after university. For instance, I believe I have a chance to gain a career in various fields such as, but not limited to, commercial or contract archaeology, museum work, lab work and community archaeology.

## **Members’ News**

### **Discovering the heart of prehistoric Galloway**

Warren Bailie MIfA (7419) and Kevin Mooney AlfA (4903), GUARD Archaeology Ltd

Over the last couple of years, GUARD Archaeology teams led by the authors have discovered a range of prehistoric archaeology spanning 7000 years of activity, during excavations undertaken in advance of the A75 Dunragit Bypass in Dumfries and Galloway in south-west Scotland. Funded by Transport Scotland and carried out in collaboration with Amey and RJ McLeod, the archaeological remains include the earliest known house in south-west Scotland dating to the Mesolithic period, as well as a Neolithic structure, Neolithic/Early Bronze Age stone lined cists, a Bronze Age cemetery complex and an Iron Age village.

The remains of a Mesolithic house was discovered in an area of criss-crossing palaeochannels, on the edge of a former estuary which existed here throughout prehistory. Radiocarbon dates recovered from the Mesolithic house revealed that this settlement dates to around 6000 BC. A perforated stone adze was found on the Mesolithic site, not a common find on sites of this period and which may have been used to work wood. In excess of 13,500

Mesolithic flint microliths and knapping waste were also recovered, indicating that this site represents a core focus of Mesolithic activity in Dumfries and Galloway. The location here, on a coastal fringe, was probably deliberately chosen by the occupants to exploit readily available resources of fish and shellfish seaward and hunting grounds close at hand in the hinterland.



*Remains of Mesolithic house at Dunragit © GUARD Archaeology Ltd*

Neolithic remains were also found, and which may be related to the nearby ceremonial complex at Dunragit, previously excavated by Manchester University between 1999 and 2002. This comprised three concentric rings of timber posts, which had been preceded by a post-defined cursus monument. These remains were first spotted through aerial photography and the only visible part of this ceremonial complex is Droughduil Mote, a prominent conical shaped mound to the south of Dunragit. This was once assumed to be a medieval motte but the Manchester University excavation revealed it to be a Neolithic mound, perhaps used, like the better known Silbury Hill in south-west England, as an elevated platform in ceremonies, before an Early Bronze Age cairn was built on its summit.

The new bypass route was carefully selected to avoid this archaeology and other known archaeological cropmarks, most of which are scheduled monuments. However, amongst the new archaeological remains discovered during the removal of topsoil from the A75 Bypass route, were Neolithic remains perhaps associated with the ceremonial complex.

A Neolithic structure or house was found by the GUARD Archaeology team, constructed of multiple

posts and from which amongst the flint and pottery artefacts was found a leaf-shaped flint arrowhead of Neolithic date. This rectilinear structure lay on a ridge overlooking the lower lying area of the Mesolithic site.



*Neolithic/Bronze Age Jet Necklace recovered from one of the cemetery burials at Dunragit © GUARD Archaeology Ltd*

On this same ridge the GUARD Archaeology team also recovered two jet necklaces from two separate stone-lined pits or cists, as well as a beaker and food vessel. The jet necklaces are of exceptional quality, made from jet that originated from Yorkshire and are the first such jet necklaces to be found in Galloway, indeed the first such jet necklaces to be found in Scotland in many years.

The Beaker pottery dates to the end of the Neolithic/ beginning of the Bronze Age period and may be linked to the introduction of the Beaker Culture from Europe into south-west Scotland at that time.

No bone survived in either cist, but further post-excavation work is expected to include chemical tests to tell us whether the bodies were removed from their graves or if these were ritual deposits or cenotaphs. These cemeteries appear to have been used over the late third and second millennia BC.

Two Bronze Age cemeteries were also discovered. 20 cremations of likely Bronze Age date were excavated, including three Barrows. Finds from the excavations here included several fragmentary urns and one wholly intact example which contained the cremated remains of an adult. Flint artefacts were

also recovered and one of particular interest was a very finely serrated transverse flint blade



*Neolithic/Bronze Age Vessel Find from Dunragit © GUARD Archaeology Ltd*

The remains of six Iron Age round-houses were also discovered, apparently forming a large unenclosed settlements, perhaps only the second such Iron Age village to be found in Galloway, a previous one being discovered last year on the banks of the Black Loch of Myrton in the Machars. Iron Age pottery, which is not normally found on Iron Age settlements in Galloway, was recovered from the Dunragit round-houses, as well as a Romano-British Iron Age brooch and evidence of metalworking. While radiocarbon dating has still to be undertaken, the artefacts indicate occupation of this settlement around the first century AD.



*Excavation of one of the Iron Age round-houses at Dunragit © GUARD Archaeology Ltd*

It is not certain if the Romans had a specific positive or negative influence on this community but the settlement appears to have been occupied during

the Roman occupation in the early centuries AD and a Roman road passes close by.

GUARD Archaeology's initial post-excitation work has commenced, but the wealth of unforeseen finds recovered from Dunragit is likely to reveal new insights into prehistoric Scotland from the Mesolithic to the Iron Age eras, encompassing a range of ceremonial, burial and domestic structures and activities, and revealing the development, transformation and demise of a densely occupied prehistoric landscape.

## **Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project**

Mary K Peteranna PIFA (5141), RoCAS

The Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project 2014-2016 is a community-based archaeological research project that focuses on the history and archaeology of the Royal Burgh of Cromarty from the burgh's foundation around 1266 AD to 1880 AD. Through a programme of events, training and excavation, the project will provide opportunities for the children, youth and adults of Cromarty and the Black Isle (and visitors!) to engage with their heritage by discovering and learning more about the origins of the town

The excavation will be running from 12 July until 3 August 2014. More information about the project is available on the website, <http://www.medievalcromarty.org/>.

## **Other News**

### **New Research into Painted Pebbles**

Robbie Arthur, Weisdale, Shetland Isles  
Jenny Murray, Shetland Museum and Archives

Painted pebbles are a bit of a conundrum. These decorated, white beach-worn quartz pebbles dating to the first millennium AD, have been the subject of much thought and discourse since the nineteenth century. The presumed emblematic value of quartz in prehistory may have been important in portable material culture; one suggestion is that the small decorated pebbles may have been used as charm-stones. Painted pebbles may have been one element of a Pictish shaman's equipment, attributed with ancient magic powers. Others have proposed they

were used as sling-shots; their differing markings making them instantly recognisable to their owners. Another, more recent suggestion concerning the function of painted pebbles is that they were produced and used in conjunction with metalworking. This discussion continues today as more of these enigmatic pebbles are unearthed.

The majority of painted pebbles in Scotland have been found in Shetland where they form an important collection within the Shetland Museum. Experimental study of this collection by the authors was carried out to understand their decoration, the material used in painting the pebbles, the methods of application of the design and consideration of its survival.



*Painted pebbles clockwise from top left: Catalogue No 27 (ARC 1993.438) Sandsound; No 25 SF 4017 Upper Scalloway; No 26 (ARC 1997.95) Balta; and No 16 (CLN 7057) Clickhimin (@ Shetland Museum and Archives)*

One of the authors, Robbie Arthur, a stonemason by trade, observed that external gable walls containing the unlined, stone-built flues for open hearths often show a dark, blackish-brown stain, very similar to the colour of the spots on the painted pebbles. The staining penetrates right through the stonework. The distillation of vapour, from the burning of peat, occurs when the flue cools. This produces a sticky deposit which is a natural bituminous substance very like coal tar. When a fire warms the chimney again, this tar dries to a dark and shiny substance resembling pitch. It was this substance which was used for the authors' experiments.

In an attempt to replicate the original designs, various methods of application were tried. In this experiment it was decided to use natural resources

to recreate the motifs. At first, a straw was used, and this replicated dots, S-scrolls and lines similar to those on the Scalloway pebbles used as examples. As more dots were applied to the stone's surface, and as the paint on the straw lessened, the dots became fainter, which was reminiscent of some of the original designs.

To reproduce the perfect circles seen on the Buckquoy pebble, two 'tools' were used: the shaft of a large seagull feather cut in half, and the hollow stalk of Wild Angelica, both of which were used with good precision to duplicate the original designs. The rings produced on the experimental pebble, using the bird's feather, were almost identical to the markings on the Balta example. The pebbles were left to dry overnight before the stability of the pigment was tested by scrubbing the stone with a coarse pot-scourer in hot water. The marks on the pebbles remained exactly the same and did not fade with further scouring. The stones were also rubbed together with no effect on the new painted symbols.



*Painting the pebbles using a straw (@ Laurie Goodlad)*

These experiments using distilled peat tar reveal a substance, which was readily available as a resource and much easier to find than haematite. In most areas where painted pebbles have been found, peat was generally used for domestic fires and also for smelting and smithing, due to the dearth of wood resources. This was especially the case in Shetland from the early Iron Age onwards. The process of peat burning produced considerable quantities of pitch, which could have also been used to waterproof ropes and fabric coverings. With no chimneys from which to retrieve the distilled tar during the Iron Age (as used in the author's experiments), peat

tar was probably produced by cooling back stones around an open hearth.

Whatever their function, painted pebbles were probably significant in some way or form as a portable entity, perhaps highly valued by the people who carried them. Their numbers in the archaeological record appears to have been limited perhaps suggesting they were of revered significance, held by a certain few within communities. A new catalogue of painted pebbles records the location of these finds throughout Scotland, with single examples from as far south as Dumfries and Galloway and west to the Outer Hebrides. It also highlights predominant clusters of finds within the northeast regions of the Highlands and Islands. Why they appear more frequently in Caithness and the Northern Isles remains a mystery to be resolved, and while their purpose remains enigmatic recent excavation has offered us new information about when they were in use. Excavations at Old Scatness and Sandwick, Unst present us with reliable dates obtained from secure archaeological contexts, establishing their use from the middle Iron Age, through the late Iron Age and into the Pictish period.

As more archaeological sites are investigated in the future we may yet find further clues about the origin and purpose of these intriguing artefacts. The decorative motifs may have specific meaning and further research is needed into their type and distribution across the surfaces of these mysterious stones.

The full results of this research, *ARO12: Painting the stones black: solving the mystery of painted quartz pebbles*, which includes a new updated catalogue of all recorded painted pebbles in Scotland by Anna Ritchie, has just been published and is now freely available to download from the ARO website - <http://archaeologyreportsonline.com/>.

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Membership of the Scottish Group is free for IfA members, and attracts a small fee for non-IfA members. Please feel free to circulate this newsletter and we would ask you to encourage your friends/colleagues to join the Group.

For more information on the IfA's Scottish Group please see our website, where you can download copies of meeting minutes and past newsletters, and keep up-to-date with the work of the Group and training courses, and our facebook page: [www.archaeologists.net/groups/scottish](http://www.archaeologists.net/groups/scottish)

Keep in touch with us via the Scottish Group's Facebook page, where information about events and the work of the Group will be publicised. Search for 'Scottish Group of the Institute for Archaeologists' and 'like' us.

Newsletters are published 3-4 times a year and contributions from members are welcome. To make a contribution to forthcoming editions of the Newsletter please email: [mel@cfa-archaeology.co.uk](mailto:mel@cfa-archaeology.co.uk)