

EDINBURGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SOCIETY

Scottish Charity No. SC006520

News

Issue 191 – January 2013



A belated Happy New Year to all our readers! 2013 already promises to be a busy one for members of the Society, with up to a dozen fieldwork projects in the pipeline, starting with more fieldwalking at Mumrills Fort in February. We also have a special members' offer - the opportunity to buy a newly published book on Trimontium at a substantially discounted price. Details inside!

Mumrills Roman Fort

Let's start at Mumrills in Falkirk, the biggest Roman fort on the Antonine Wall. A large part of this fort lies under an open field, which is frequently ploughed, turning up more Roman material. Geoff Bailey, Keeper of Archaeology and Local History at Falkirk Community Trust, organises regular fieldwalking days, the last on 18 November 2012. Below are photos of one of the finds from that session.



It is a denarius of Nero (54-68AD). It shows a bust of the emperor on the obverse and a statue of the goddess Vesta standing in a domed hexastyle temple on the reverse. In addition, one other unidentified Roman coin – possibly a copper alloy sestertius - and three sherds of decorated samian ware were picked up.

Geoff has just spoken to the farmer at Mumrills, who has ploughed his field, but will not be sowing it until mid-March, so there will be another opportunity during February to fieldwalk and metal detect it. Geoff is finalising a date, which will be announced to members through the e-mail alerts system.

Society Lectures

The spring lectures are as detailed below. In February, we have Martin Cook of AOC Archaeology talking about the pre-development dig on the site of the new Tesco store at Camelon. Members visited this site in the summer of 2011 while the excavation was in progress, so this is an opportunity to hear a comprehensive report on the findings.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
Wednesday 13 February	Martin Cook <i>AOC Archaeology</i>	Excavation at Camelon
Tuesday 12 March	Gordon Ewart <i>(Kirkdale Archaeology)</i> and Dennis Gallagher	Stirling Castle: Recent Archaeological Work
Wednesday 10 April	Dr Stephen Carter	Wind Farms: Good or Bad News for Archaeology?
Tuesday 14 May	James Simpson <i>Simpson and Brown, Architects</i>	The Restoration of Penicuik House

ShoreUPDATE

This seems to have been a long time in gestation, as the Society's AGM in December 2011 heard Joanna Hambley of the SCAPE Trust at the University of St. Andrews tell us what was planned (see Newsletter 186). The problem seems to have been to secure the required funding, but that now appears to have been resolved and the project is set to run to 2015.

The project, known as [ShoreUPDATE](#), will update and improve information on SCAPE's current register of coastal sites at risk. With the help of volunteers, it aims to visit every one of the 940 sites in the highest risk category on the register to assess their present condition. SCAPE are also interested in updating information about the remaining sites on the register – as well as receiving new information about sites they don't know about.

Things are now beginning to fall into place, starting with a two-stage training programme to prepare us for the work. [Stage 1](#) is computer-based training on the evening of Wednesday 27 February, at an Edinburgh venue to be announced. [Stage 2](#) will be practical site-based training at a coastal location. If you have not yet put your name down for the training sessions, please contact Christine McPherson as soon as possible.

This project has the potential to run for a long time, but members should not feel that by undergoing training they are committing to regular long-term participation in the surveys. You will be able to dip in and out as you choose.

St Mary's Nunnery, Haddington

In April, we will be taking up an invitation from Haddington's History Society to join them in the search for Haddington Abbey, by making a geophysical survey of an area of ground at Abbeymill Farm, about a mile east of Haddington.



This aerial photograph from RCAHMS shows the site, with some interesting cropmarks. In consultation with East Lothian Council Archaeology Service, an area has been identified for geophysical survey. The ground to be covered is extensive, and will require at least two days of survey work, some of which will no doubt be on a weekend, offering plenty of opportunity for members to participate. Further details will appear in the March newsletter, with information on taking part.

The Abbey – also known as St Mary's Nunnery - has some importance in Scottish history. It was founded in the 12th century by Ada de Warenne, Countess of Northumbria and Huntingdon, the mother of Malcolm IV and William the Lion. It was burned by the English in 1335/6. During the siege of Haddington (1548), the French army was camped nearby and the treaty by which Mary, Queen of Scots, was promised as bride to the Dauphin was signed at a parliament held in the Abbey. Burned again in 1554, it was secularised in 1621. Though no trace of it was visible by the time of the Ordnance Survey mapping in 1853, remains had been extant within living memory, and, as the OS Name Book records, the site was pointed out by local informants who could remember them.

Bannockburn

It will not have escaped your attention (or it will not for long!) that next year is the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn. Derek Alexander, Head of Archaeology at the National Trust for Scotland, is seeking the Society's help with a two-week-long 'Big Dig' in the vicinity of the battle site in July 2013. The exact dates are not settled yet. Derek is proposing to do some excavation on the Carse, and also to investigate some gardens near the Bannock Burn. Further details to come!



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Annual General Meeting 2012

The Society held its AGM on 12 December 2012. The occasion was notable for the appointment of a new Honorary President, following Dr David Caldwell's decision to stand down after his retirement from NMS as reported in Newsletter 186. On the recommendation of the Committee, the AGM agreed to adopt as the Society's new Hon. President, John Lawson, the City of Edinburgh Council's Archaeology Officer. John, who was present, made a short and graceful speech of acceptance! In accordance with what has become something of a tradition for retiring Hon. Presidents, the meeting also agreed to confer honorary membership on Dr Caldwell.

New committee member

The AGM also elected Antony Buxton to fill the vacancy for an ordinary member of the Committee. The other Committee members were all re-elected to their positions.

Subscriptions

Membership subscriptions for 2013 became payable as from the 2012 AGM, which left the rates unchanged for a further year. The Treasurer thanks those members who have already paid their renewal subs, and invites those members who have not done so to send him a cheque as soon as possible! Society membership cards for 2013 are issued on receipt of payment.

Comely House excavation

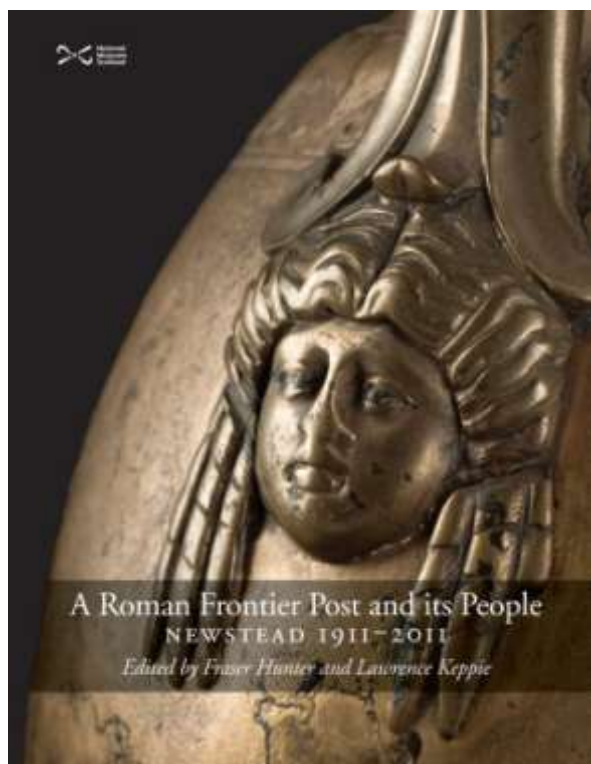
As reported in Newsletters 189 and 190, in July 2012 Society members took part in an excavation at Comely House, Falkirk, where sections of the Ditch of the Antonine Wall were found on a line at variance with the Ordnance Survey map. Charcoal found on a "floor" in the Ditch infill has now been identified as a mixture of birch, oak and gorse / broom. The presence of the latter suggests use as fuel, as it burns at a higher temperature and was often used in ovens and kilns. This would also account for the fired clay which formed the "floor". The radiocarbon date for this material is 748AD +/-29. As suspected, the Ditch was already half filled by that time due to its proximity to the important settlement at Falkirk.

Wester Carmuir

If a week is a long time in politics, a decade is the blink of an eye in archaeology! Geoff Bailey reports that, ten years on, he has just received a carbon date for the large irregular circular enclosures excavated in 2002 at Wester Carmuir in advance of the construction of the car park for the Falkirk Wheel. Those who took part in that dig may recall that there was no pottery – indeed no finds of any kind! It was assumed that, being aceramic, the site was either Early Iron Age or Dark Age (or since that term now seems to be frowned on, Early Mediaeval). Given the type of enclosures, the former was thought more likely. The enclosure had been rebuilt at least three times on the same spot and was clearly long-lived. Geoff reports that the radiocarbon date comes out as 878AD +/-28, and asks was this King Arthur's Round Table next to Camelot/Camelon? (*Editor's Note: Hrrrump!*)

SPECIAL OFFER TO MEMBERS

A Roman Frontier Post and its People: Newstead 1911-2011 edited by Fraser Hunter and Lawrence Keppie (288 pages 163 b/w photographs, drawings and maps, hardback RRP £30.00)



Just over a century ago, James Curle published an account of his excavations at Trimontium (Newstead, near Melrose), at one time a key frontier post for the Roman army. This new book, from National Museums of Scotland, with contributions by a range of experts, is a celebration of that landmark excavation, looking back to James Curle and his work and looking forward to how the picture is changing.

Until 30 March 2013, members have the opportunity to buy this book for £21.50 + £5.00 p/p (UK only) by going to www.nms.ac.uk/books. Put FHNEW under Coupon Code on the order form.

OR

For an even better deal, avoid the p/p charges by picking the book up from the publisher's office in Chambers Street Edinburgh, by telephoning your advance order to 0131 247 4026.

FROM OTHER SOCIETIES:

West Lothian Archaeological Trust

The Trust now has its own Wikipedia page

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Lothian_Archaeological_Trust#Work

Trimontium Trust Spring Lectures

<u>DATE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
Thursday 18 April	Dr Ciara Clarke <i>AOC Archaeology</i>	The Lewisvale Park Altars Project: 'The unconquered Sun, and partner.'
Thursday 25 April	Dr Matt Symonds <i>Editor, Current Archaeology</i>	'Doomed to fail, or failed tactics? Roman fortlets in SW Scotland.'
Thursday 2 May	Colin Wallace <i>University of Liverpool</i>	'Headhunters in Roman Iron Age Scotland.'

Peebles-shire Archaeological Society

EAFS members who helped at Shootinglee's may be interested in this report received in November from Joyce Durham of PAS:

The Shootinglee's project has progressed well since we started work last March. We have sketched, metal-detected, plane-tabled and helped the Edinburgh Archaeological Field Society with a Resistivity Survey; the results of which corresponded very nicely with the plane table plan.

We also opened a trench across a prominent rectangular walled feature towards the south end of the site. From the upper soil layers of this trench we have recovered mostly 17th-19th century objects - pottery, clay pipes etc along with two sherds of Medieval glazed pottery, all typical midden material. The Medieval sherds are important to us in that they date activity on the site to the Medieval period. Outside the south wall of the feature there is a cobbled surface which needs further investigation.

From the results of the surveys it became obvious that there was more archaeology over the wall in the forest and removal of the lower branches of the trees revealed the footings of two more buildings and the boundaries of three garden plots or tofts. Plane-tableing amongst the trees is a challenge but we are persevering and hope to finish before the snow arrives!

We began the project with archival evidence which showed that Shootinglee's was a forest stead (farm) within Ettrick Forest. We end the season with evidence on the ground of a medieval settlement of four, possibly five buildings, with a later phase of two buildings: something which will keep us happily occupied for some time to come.

We have finished working for the winter and will restart as soon as the weather conditions allow.

Border Archaeological Society

The BAS spring programme is shown below. Lectures are held in The Parish Centre, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1DF (opposite Berwick Barracks).

4 February – Prof. Ian Haynes and Tony Wilmott - “ <i>Altars in Cumbria</i> ”
4 March - The Durham Western Isles Team - “ <i>Hunter-gatherers on the edge: the earliest humans in the Western Isles of Scotland</i> ”
1 April - Dr. Nyree Finlay – (probably about Scottish Mesolithic Geophysical Survey Project because she is its Director)
13 May - Dr. Fraser Hunter (NMS) – “ <i>Traprain Law Updated</i> ”

First Millennium Studies Group

5 February 2013

Unit round up

Jennifer Proctor: Needles Eye enclosure, Berwick;

Ross Murray: North Kessock

Rob Engl: Beechwood

at 5.30 pm

in Lecture Theatre **270**, Old College, Edinburgh

Gondar, Ethiopia



Your Editor enjoyed an interesting trip to Ethiopia last November, a country with a long and fascinating history and a huge potential for archaeology at sites such as the late mediaeval imperial castle complex at Gondar (illustrated), the Christian religious centre at Axum, and Emperor Theodore's stronghold at Magdala, where the British-Abyssinian War of 1867-68 reached its dramatic climax. If anyone knows of any archaeological opportunities in Ethiopia, jump at the chance (and tell the Editor!)

Family history taster session with ScotlandsPeople - Monday 25 February 2013, General Register House, Edinburgh

The next ScotlandsPeople family history taster session takes place at General Register House on Monday 25 February 2013, from 1.00pm to 4.30pm. The session starts with a brief presentation about the ScotlandsPeople Centre, followed by a taster session using the computer search system. To round off proceedings, there is a brief talk about the records that are held in the Historical Search Room. Light refreshments (included in the ticket price) are provided during the session.

This informal event is ideal for people who are new to genealogy or the facilities at the ScotlandsPeople Centre. You will also be able to learn all about the newly-launched 1905 Valuation Rolls at this session. There is a charge of £5.00 per place, which must be paid in advance, and seats can be booked by telephone from Tuesday 5 February (9am) onwards. For further information and to reserve a place, please call 0131 314 4300 (option 1).

Archaeologists helping police with their enquiries

Archaeologists from Dundee University are to investigate a human skull found earlier this month by council workers carrying out winter maintenance in a sand bunker by the fourth hole on Musselburgh Links Golf Course. Officers from Lothian and Borders Police despatched the remains to Dundee University, who sent their archaeologists to look at the site. They believe the skull, which belonged to a mid-to-late teenage female (nicknamed 'Betty'), is around 2500 years old - possibly part of an Iron Age graveyard. As there is no pressing archaeological reason to remove the rest of her remains, East Lothian Council have no plans to investigate further.

Letter to the Editor

Sir,

Susan Robertson in the last Newsletter, is irritated by the exclamation when plough-soil is removed: "There is the archaeology!"

Can I suggest that it might be replaced more correctly by the wise and sober remark, (stroking the beard if there is one to stroke) "Ah, there is the archaeostratum!". And how about "archaeo-matter" to resolve the quandary about 'archaeo-things' – would that not include artefacts from woad to walls?

Yours etc

Hugh Dinwoodie

Editor's Note: I agree that a beard is a clear sign of wisdom and sobriety (e.g. our Chairman), but that is not to say that our female and clean-shaven male members are drunken fools. Also on the subject of Susan's letter, John Wells draws attention to: <http://www.bajrfed.co.uk/showthread.php?5934-What-is-the-point-of-Archaeology>

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(Opinions expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Society, its Committee and Members, or the Editor).