

EDINBURGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SOCIETY

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News

Issue 198 – May 2014



Society News

John Urquhart has stood down after many years as the Society's treasurer. Anthony Buxton has kindly taken up this baton by co-option until the 2014 AGM. Our thanks go to both for supporting the Society in this important office.

Field Activity Updates

Corstorphine Hill

Don Matthews reports that, having dug five test pits last year at the north end of Corstorphine Hill, looking for evidence of prehistoric occupation, plans for 2014 have now been developed. This part of our Corstorphine Hill project arose from the reported finding in 1894 of "shells, bones, bone implements, hammer stones, cup-marked stones, upper rubbing-stone of a saddle quern, whorl, and fragments of pottery" in material "found about the NW end of the hill, having been moved there when the rock surface was being cleared as part of quarry operations".

Last year's five test pits found no prehistoric material so we reviewed the situation during the recent winter and came up with two questions that we could seek to address this year.

- a) Can we establish where the 1894 material was found?
- b) Can we find any other evidence of prehistoric occupation on the north end of the hill?

The first of these questions has already been partially answered by Richard Gillanders' discovery of potential stone artefacts on the slope at the far north end of the hill, a natural place for the quarry workers to have dumped surface spoil. We visited this area and also the slope on the west side of the quarry with Richard on 19 April. The north slope is too steep for test-pitting but there is some potential on the west slope, though we will need to seek permission for this as it is outside the previously agreed areas.

It has been decided that the second question justifies the continuation of our test-pitting on the spine of the hill and the top part of its eastern slope. Although last year's five test pits drew a blank, 5 square metres is only a tiny sample and we are still hopeful and are planning to organise some test-pitting sessions for the late summer and autumn of this year.

Leith Fort

Charlotte Douglas of AOC has advised that the full archaeological reports for last year's excavations at Leith Fort are now complete and will be presented at the meeting on Wednesday 18th June 2014, 7pm Thomas Morton Hall, Ferry Road, Leith.

SCAPE Trust SCHARP Training Weekend

A number of the Society's members participated in a SCHARP training weekend in East Lothian on 29th and 30th March. The first meeting was at the Scottish Ornithologist Club Centre at Waterston House, Aberlady and, following a short briefing on the shore Update software two groups were formed, one going to record St Baldred's Cave at SeaCliff and the other visiting Lime kilns and other features at Skateraw Harbour. Sunday morning began at Kilspindie to visit the fishing boat hulks on the mudflats near the shore. After this one group went to Belhaven to view eroding sites among the dunes and the remains of the site of a 19thc Spa Well. The second group returned to SeaCliff to record the tower. In the afternoon the groups returned to Waterston House to upload their results and conclude a very interesting weekend. The Society now has a list of sites to revisit at Gosford, Aberlady and Belhaven so, when tides permit, it will be off to the seaside again.

Cramond Heritage Trust

Val Dean reports that the Cramond Heritage Trust's Exhibition is now open for the summer season. This year there is a special display on the impact of World War One 1 on the parish of Cramond. There is information on the proposals for a ferry crossing to Dalmeny Estate, as well as the main exhibition which tells Cramond's Story. The Maltings Interpretation Centre, situated by the harbour, is open on Saturday and Sunday afternoons between 2pm and 5pm until the end of September and on every afternoon during the Edinburgh Festival. Admission is free.

Rock Art site at Tormain Hill

Alan Calder reports that, following the visit to Tormain Hill on 1st December 2013 as related in the Society January Newsletter, a group of members returned to the site on 6th April to start formal recording. The recording methodology followed that used to record the Rock Art on Corstorphine Hill (Ref. Newsletter Issue 193) - measured drawings, written description and photography. Although a dull day, it was noted that the absence of the very fine low sunlight, which was present during the December visit, resulted in a much poorer set photographs and in particular the spirals on one rock surface were almost invisible.

A further visit was made on 29th April in order to make a start to the scale drawing of the whole rock surface - the method chosen for this was tape and offset. This has yet to be completed and another visit to Tormain will be required.

The best of the photographs from Tormain together with some of the measured drawings and a short history of the site (mainly taken from the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (PSAS)) were put on display at the British Rock Art Group (BRAG) conference in Edinburgh held on 3rd May 2014.

British Rock Art Group Conference

Several Society members attended this conference on Saturday 3rd May in Edinburgh University School of Archaeology. There was a very good range of speakers on British and more exotic sites, as well as some hands-on carving experience. Our thanks are due to member Tertia Barnett for her excellent organisation of a very good day. On Sunday 4th a number of delegates were hosted by the Society on visits to the Corstorphine Hill cup marked stones and on to Tormain Hill rock art site.

Excavations at Tantallon Castle

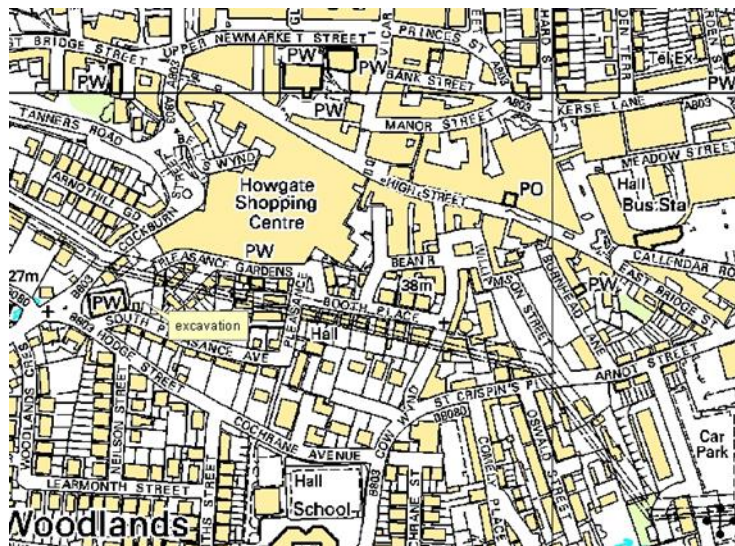
A further five trenches were opened at Tantallon Castle between 10th and 23rd May. The dig was run by Historic Scotland and by Kirkdale Archaeology. The Society's volunteers assisted with excavation with very good results, revealing possible iron working and prehistoric activity. Other finds, apart from masses of animal bone and shellfish were a significant number of clay pipes, both stems and bowls – I do not recall any being found on last year's dig.

Falkirk Summer Dig

Goeff Bailey has confirmed that this year's summer dig will be on the line of the Antonine Wall in Falkirk again. This time the site is located to the west of the Roman fort. It lies behind the Erskine Church off South Pleasance Avenue – see map (the church is marked "PW"). The map shows the line of the Wall as it was conjectured, but it is now known that it takes a greater deviation to the south in this area and so it is expected to find a reasonable length of it and perhaps the Roman road. There is no possibility of machine access – so it's going to be hard digging to begin – just for a change. However there have been no buildings on the site so at least it will be just soil. Usually when we dig in this part of the town we get a good crop of 17th century tobacco pipes from the upper levels.

The dates of this epic adventure are from 10.00am on Saturday 12th July to Saturday 26th. The 10am start is because I have to be at Glasgow Airport for 7.30am to pick up a couple of miscreants. Normally I'll be on site from 9.00am until 5pm – but you can turn up whenever you are available. Tools will be kept on or near to the site. Parking can be found on the side streets to the south. The toilets at the back door to the Howgate are conveniently close, as is the town centre.

So, with some good weather and a fair wind Geoff hopes to make up history and he is looking forward to seeing everyone in due course.



Geophysical Survey at Lindores Abbey, Newburgh, Fife

The Society was invited by the owner, Drew McKenzie Smith to carry out a ground resistance survey at the Tironensian Abbey at Lindores. The Abbey was founded by David, Earl of Huntingdon about 1190. The cloister and chapter house and other areas to investigate reputed

burial sites within the abbey precinct were surveyed. Dr Peter Morris of Blairgowrie Geoscience also completed a magnetic gradiometer survey. It is hoped to return soon to survey the Nave and some other areas at a higher resolution.

Archaeological Research in Progress

Alan Calder reports that the annual Archaeological Research in Progress (ARP) conference was held in Dundee on Saturday 31st May. This joint Archaeology Scotland and Society of Antiquaries of Scotland day conference provides an annual opportunity to hear up-to-date accounts of Archaeological Research in Progress in Scotland. For 2014 this event was organised by Archaeology Scotland and for the first time it was held in Dundee. The venue was The Steeple Church Centre and over the course of the day those attending were delighted with the wide ranging series of illustrated talks from several organisations and individuals actively engaged in recording Scotland's past.

From the discovery of a Mesolithic calendar in Aberdeenshire (Warren Field) to Scottish medieval deer parks, there was something for everyone. The Society (EAFS) was mentioned by the Forestry Commission with respect to their geophysical work at Castle Greg, Roman fortlet and throughout the day there was an opportunity to view Dundee's medieval carved stones in the adjacent steeple.

(The stones can also be seen at the new website www.aocarchaeology.com/dundee-medieval-stones)

The event was also the opportunity for Archaeology Scotland to launch their latest volume in the series Discovery and Excavation in Scotland (DES), and was available for members to collect on the day.

Archaeology Scotland's Summer School

Ann Kerrigan reports that few members of the Society travelled north to attend the Archaeology Summer School based in Brora and spent two days of visiting a variety of sites e.g. brochs, pre clearance townships with their associated structures, and many prehistoric monuments. A series of lectures in the evenings by SCAPE, Forestry Commission and RCAHMS added to the interesting sites visited. On Monday morning the weekend finished with a trip to the Pictish stones in Dunrobin Castle museum. As usual the weekend had been well organised by Geoff Waters.

Forthcoming Projects

Brunstane Castle, due on 29th June has been postponed due to fallen tree and excess weeds.

Kinneil Church in Bo'ness to clean the paving stones inside the building and make a record of the gravestones incorporated into it [Geoff Bailey]

Next Newsletter

The next Newsletter will be issued at the end of July 2014. All Contributions welcomed.

Until then, enjoy your archaeology!

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