



PAST

Peebles Archaeological Society Times
November 2012

Bribes for the barbarians!

Romans, Natives and Coins in Late Antonine and Severan Scotland

A report on our September talk by Nick Holmes on Roman coinage in Scotland in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries AD

As first speaker in our autumn programme, the Society was delighted to welcome Nick Holmes (former Curator of Numismatics, National Museums Scotland) who gave a talk entitled '**Cash or Cache: Romans, Natives and Coins in Late Antonine and Severan Scotland**'.

In his lecture, Nick explored the significance of Roman coin hoards and site finds dating from the 160s AD to 230 AD, representing the period following the abandonment of the Antonine Wall and the re-establishment of Hadrian's Wall as the northern frontier of the Empire.

Up to about 180 AD a limited number of forts, such as Newstead (Trimontium) remained occupied, but the only forts in Scotland known to have been occupied later than this are Cramond and Carpow. It appears that during the period up to about the middle 190s AD the imperial policy was to pay subsidies to the native peoples to ensure peaceful co-operation.



Birnie hoard no 2 showing two bags of coins within pottery vessel: one contained 160 silver denarii and the other 150. © NMS

Twenty hoards dating from this period have been found in Britain to the north of Hadrian's Wall. Although most are 17th- to 19th-century finds, and provide little information with regard to context etc., a few modern finds such as those at Birnie have been properly excavated and conserved.



Hoard found in 2011 at Synton near Ashkirk in Selkirkshire. Although this hoard still awaits detailed analysis, apparent similarities in composition to recorded finds such as the hoard from Rumbling Bridge, Kinross, suggest it may be associated with military activity in the early 180s AD. © NMS

Comparison of the composition of most of the Scottish hoards with those of hoards from within the province of Britannia and from continental 'barbaricum' indicates that the coins probably came from the same pool of coinage as the latter group, and that their supply to native tribes or individuals in Scotland was part of a much larger distribution to similar recipients in an area stretching from NW Germany to Russia.

However the Scottish hoards differ in a critical detail (the lack of legionary denarii of Mark Anthony) from hoards in England, suggesting the payments were not brought from south of the border. Given the limited finds of single coins in Scotland, and the lack of wear on the later coins in the hoards, it is unlikely that coins were used as currency in Scotland. It seems most probable that they were regarded simply as high-status possessions.

The situation in Britain differed from that on the continent to the extent that there were military campaigns of some sort to the north of the frontier in the early 180s

AD, and the hoard from Rumbling Bridge, Kinross-shire, may be associated with these, as may a hoard found in 2011 at Synton near Ashkirk in Selkirkshire, which still awaits detailed analysis

The evidence of the site finds from Cramond and Carpow and of a hoard found at Kippilaw (Roxburghshire) in 2010 seems to indicate that Roman armies were operating in Scotland for a number of years prior to the traditionally accepted date of AD 208 for the campaigns of Septimius Severus, and indeed there is an almost complete absence of coins struck in that year or later. There are, however, two hoards – from Falkirk and Edston – the deposition of which postdated the death of Severus in 211, suggesting that the process of supplying coins to native leaders in Southern Scotland may have been resumed for a while after the conclusion of military action against the Maeatae tribe (who occupied what is now central Scotland).

Jeff Carter (with grateful thanks to Nick Holmes!)

Skara Brae: reflections on a visit

A parchment sky over a quiet firth. Tiny waves washing in and out along the curved bay of silver sand and rocks - the silence of the shallow beach under the low cliffs, broken by the lonely mewing of seabirds and the occasional voices of the women calling to each other as they collect shellfish, of the men spear-fishing, of the children playing along the shoreline. All ages comb the beach, collecting material to use in tool- or furniture-making or to burn on the hearth. Driftwood – a precious commodity - is a gift from across the ocean.

The day wears on, the sky darkens and the wind rises – the sea sends white horses washing onto the shore – abrasive sand grains are driven over the cliffs and the rain suddenly is torrential. Everyone is driven to find shelter.

Is there enough food to last several days till the storm blast blows itself out? Or will they go hungry again?

The daylight grows less each day, the weather harsher. The old ones are getting sick; the young ones are weakening. How will we manage? What can we do? Must we move on? This seemed such an ideal place but even the birds are fewer. What shall we do?

Skara Brae...

Skara Brae just 'blew me away'!

People lived here?

Never! Really?

5000 years ago you say

Amazing, wonderful...

Peggy Ferguson

One of the best preserved groups of prehistoric houses in Western Europe, Skara Brae forms part of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site



Bay of Skail © RCAHMS



Aerial view of the Neolithic village at Skara Brae © RCAHMS



View of interior of House I at Skara Brae © RCAHMS

Shootinglees Project 2012

Progress report

The Shootinglees 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 - all typical midden material. However we were also delighted to find two sherds of Medieval glazed pottery - important to us as an indicator of earlier activity on the site.

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.

We began the project with archival evidence which showed that Shootinglees 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.

Thank you to everyone who has helped over the season - we look forward to resuming work next spring.

Joyce Durham



L: members of the Shootinglees team admire their handiwork. R: plane-tableing amongst the trees is a challenge but we are persevering and hope to finish before the snow arrives!

Maritime Musings

After a slight hiccup at the start of our October meeting (when we found ourselves locked out of the Community Centre!!), we were very pleased to welcome as our guest speaker **Bob Mowat** (formerly of the RCAHMS).



Bob Mowat goes Forth!! © R Mowat

In a thought-provoking and frequently amusing talk entitled **'Maritime Musings'**, Bob ranged widely through time and space as he explored various aspects of maritime archaeology. In particular, he showed the considerable ingenuity and expertise our ancestors would have employed in building effective craft to meet the wide variety of conditions they would have faced in order to travel by river and sea.

Bringing his talk right up to the industrial era, Bob ended by linking the ingenuity of maritime construction pioneers like Marc Brunel (father of Isambard) with the advances in machinery that created the conditions for the wider industrial revolution (emphasising in particular the importance of the naval dockyards at Chatham in Kent).

The talk closed with a brief survey of the great advances in underwater archaeology in recent years that promise a bright future for maritime discoveries.

Jeff Carter

Carpow Logboat Exhibition

One of the most significant Scottish maritime finds in recent years was the discovery of a near complete 3000 year old logboat on a sandbank at Carpow on the Tay near its confluence with the River Earn.

After a complex excavation and recovery operation and several years undergoing conservation at the National Museums Conservation Laboratories, the Carpow logboat finally returned to its home locality in March 2012 when it became the centrepiece of a temporary exhibition in the Perth Museum & Art Gallery.

Although the boat now forms part of Perth Museum's archaeology collection, having been allocated via Scottish Treasure Trove, the museum currently does not have the space to display it permanently. As an interim solution, the boat will therefore be going on loan from next March to Glasgow Museums Resource Centre at Nitshill, where it will be housed for the next five years.

Meantime, don't miss Perth Museum's excellent exhibition, which tells the story of the excavation, recovery and conservation, and places the boat in the context of the Bronze Age of the region.

Exhibition ends 3rd March 2013

Opening hours:

**Monday-Saturday 10:00am to 5:00pm
(apart from Christmas & New Year
public holidays)**

Perth Museum and Art Gallery

George Street

Perth PH7 3NF

Tel 01738 632488

Dates for your diaries ...

--- PAS meetings---

FRIDAY 16 November

Nick Card (Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology)

Excavations at Ness of Brodgar, Orkney

A special guest lecture on this amazing site set right in the heart of the Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site - as seen on TV & recent winner of the Research Project of the Year Award

Thursday 17 January

Daniel Rhodes (NTS)

Historical Archaeology in East Africa

Meetings commence at 7.30pm and will be held in the Community Centre, Walkershaugh Peebles, unless stated otherwise. Guests/non members welcome (there is a charge of £3 towards expenses)

Scotland's Community Heritage Conference 2012

**Birnam Arts and Conference Centre,
Birnam, Perthshire**

10 November 2012

A weekend of talks, workshops and displays and the chance to meet like-minded people. Learn about active community archaeology projects such as those on Mull and North Uist; hear about architecture and designed landscape projects in Wanlockhead and Kingussie and find out about the work of volunteers in NTS Thistle Camps and in recording Perthshire's graveyards. Guided walks on Sunday 11th to chat and network with fellow heritage enthusiasts and see the local sites.

More details and booking information can be found at

<http://www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/?q=node/2774>

Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders Archaeology Conference 2012

**Queen Margaret University,
Musselburgh**

17 November 2012

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders Archaeology Conference. It will be an exciting day of talks about recent discoveries, as well as a look back at some of the most important archaeological sites uncovered over the last ten years in the area.

Come along to hear about recent discoveries and excavations, including Broxmouth Hillfort, St Abbs Head, the new Forth crossing, highlights from ten years of Treasure Trove, and much more.

For full details and to book see website

http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/844/archaeology/929/archaeology_whats_on