



PAST

Peebles Archaeological Society Times
January 2011

Camp Shiel Dating Delight!

We have recently received the results of the radiocarbon dating of samples of charcoal recovered from the Camp Shiel shieling site excavated by members of Peeblesshire Archaeological Society in 2009.

The three samples have been dated to the 14th and early 15th centuries AD - results that have been welcomed with great delight because well-dated small rural buildings of this period are extremely rare. Unlike castles and churches, relatively insubstantial, simple structures at the lower end of the architectural scale will all too often have been obliterated by subsequent activity.

Camp Shiel Burn was originally investigated to try to establish a connection between an illicit still known to be on the banks of the burn and the story of 'Smugglers on Minchmoor'. During the course of the survey, amongst other things, the remains of two turf- and stone-built buildings were found.

Because of their situation relatively high up in the hills, these buildings are interpreted as shielings where women and children would have lived during the summer, tending the sheep and cattle and making cheese and butter. The men-folk remained in the low-lying areas to grow crops on ground manured by the cattle during the winter.



Bob and Jack hard at work!

Both structures were badly degraded by time and the nearby burn and during excavation of the upper one no artifactual evidence was found except for two small pieces of corroded metal. What was found in copious amounts was charcoal, three samples of which were selected for analysis.

The first, taken from the 'hearth' proved to be *betula* (birch), a good burning wood; the second from the floor surface and the third from under a wall, were both *alnus* (alder), a good building wood resistant to rot. What happened to the building during its lifetime? It is possible that it burnt down and was rebuilt which would account for all the charcoal, but we cannot know for certain.

More information on the excavation of the shieling will be found in the forthcoming Camp Shiel Burn Report.

Radiocarbon dating is a complicated process. Briefly, almost all land-dwelling organisms take up carbon during their lifetimes. Part of this carbon is known as ^{14}C which stops being taken up on the death of the organism and is slowly released thereafter at a more or less steady rate. Calculation of the residual ^{14}C concentration can therefore be used to determine the approximate age since death. Expressed in terms of probability, we can say that there is a 95% chance that the Camp Shiel samples date from between 1290 and 1440 AD.

What was happening during this period? The 14th century was a turbulent time in Scotland particularly in the Lowlands which had been largely occupied by the English at the end of the 13th century. Robert the Bruce fought hard and succeeded in regaining much of the country, unifying it in the process.



The Camp Shiel Team!

However, after his death in 1329, there followed a succession of monarchs who were not so able. The Lowlands were yet again invaded in 1385 by Richard II; the countryside was ravaged and the Abbeys of Melrose and Dryburgh burnt.

Another notable event in the 14th century was the onset of Bubonic Plague which hit Scotland in the winter of 1349 and, it is said, claimed a third of all lives.

Locally, after being occupied by the English, Traquair Estate passed to Robert the Bruce who gifted it to his loyal supporter Sir James Douglas.

After the Douglas's tenure, it was held by various families until 1478 when it came to the Stewart family; that is, after the time our shieling was built and in use.

The Peeblesshire Archaeological Society gratefully acknowledges Scottish Borders Council (through the good offices of Rosemary Hannay, Tweeddale Museum and Chris Bowles, SBC Archaeology Officer) for contributions towards the overall cost of the radiocarbon dating.

Joyce Durham

General Maczek's great Polish map of Scotland: campaign update

Keith Burns, Secretary of the Mapa Scotland project group, has circulated a further brief update on the progress of their campaign to restore General Maczek's great Polish map of Scotland constructed in the grounds of the Barony Castle, Eddleston.

To summarise, the group was disappointed to learn that their application for grant aid to Waste Recycling Environmental (WREN) had been rejected. However despite this setback, work on continued cleaning and preparation of the map for conservation, with efforts being concentrated on the area of the Western Highlands and Islands.

The search is now on for other potential sponsors, while the group also intend to carry out trial repair work on the Isles of Islay and Jura, followed by trial total reconstruction of the Isle of Mull!

This work will allow the development of suitable techniques and materials. Signage has been commissioned (signs and stone carving in progress in-house by Bob Johnson and Dave Peck) while much help in kind continues to be provided by De Vere Hotel Group.

If you are interested in supporting the Mapa Scotland campaign, individual, family or group members are all most welcome (please see application form appended to this newsletter). Almost all the income is used to buy materials and contract work. Or, if you would like to join a working party then please let the group know and they will keep you informed. Training will be provided where required.

For details see
<http://www.makers.org.uk/place/Maczek>

Shining Lights: The Story of Scotland's Lighthouses

The Scottish coastline is one of the most dangerous in the world. Marking the 200th anniversary next year of the lighting of the world's oldest rock lighthouse - the Bell Rock near Arbroath - this exhibition explores the history of lighthouse technology and tells the story of those who designed, built and operated Scotland's lighthouses.

Open:

Until Sunday April 3, 2011

Cost:

Free

Venue:

Special Exhibitions Gallery

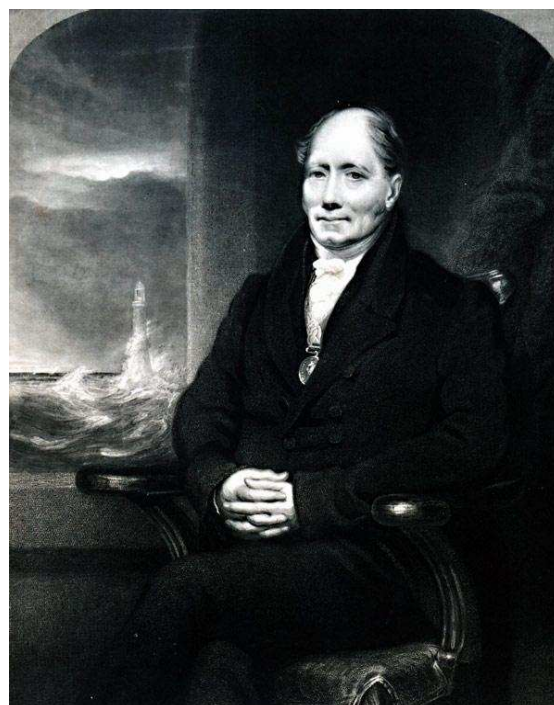
Level 3

National Museum of Scotland

Chambers Street

Edinburgh EH1 1JF

<http://www.nms.ac.uk>



Engraving by Dick after painting by Syme, showing Robert Stevenson (1772-1850), first of the 'Lighthouse Stevensons'. He designed and built 18 lighthouses, including Bell Rock off Arbroath which can be seen in the background.

A note from the Secretary

I would like to remind members that the Society is a member of **Archaeology Scotland**, the umbrella organisation for archaeology in Scotland, and as such we are entitled to a **magazine** three times a year and a journal entitled '**Discovery and Excavation in Scotland**' once a year.

These give an easily read, non-technical look at current archaeological work, concerns and thinking in Scotland. I will bring them to meetings, and members are free to peruse them, or take them away and return them as they wish.

Bob Knox

And a reminder from the Treasurer

In case you have forgotten to pay your subscription for the 2010-2011 session

£15 - individual membership

£20 - joint membership

Please pay at one of the meetings or by using the form appended to this newsletter

New members always welcome

Peter Barclay

Subscription reminder 2010-2011

Dear member

Please pay at meeting or detach the tear-off slip and send remittance as soon as possible to:

**Peter Barclay
Peeblesshire Archaeological Society
18 South Parks
Peebles
EH45 9DS**

Thank you.

PAS Committee

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