
**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
 MARCH 2017**

I just happened to come across the NOSAS November 2008 Newsletter for the 10th anniversary where NOSAS celebrated in style with a buffet at the Kenneth Street Church Hall and the notable guests were Professor Martin Carver, Noel Fojut and Trevor Cowie. Presentations given by Ronnie Scott, Anna Welti and Gordon Sleight, John Wombell. Anne Coombs' presentation "Digging Deeper into the Archaeology of the Highlands" that served to underline the outstanding contribution made to Highland Archaeology by NOSAS over the last 10 years.

Well next year NOSAS will be celebrating 20 years and more time has passed and lots more contributions have been made to Highland Archaeology, more about this later.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

Date - 2017		Time	Place
4 and 23 April	ScRAP familiarisation	14:00	Clava Chambered Cairns
7-11 April	Long Weekend		Central Belt
11 April	Lecture Martin Carver	19:00	Inverness Town Hall
12 April	Lecture Professor Iain Stewart	17:30-21:00	Millburn Academy
19 April	T. Learning Group	19:00-21:00	Dingwall Community Centre
22 April	Spring Walk	10:00-16:00	Glenshie (Kintail)
26 April	Highland Vernacular-Buildings Malcolm Banger Jones	19:30	Dingwall Community Centre
24-28 April	Excavation Dig It	10:00 -16:00	Inverewe Gardens
27 April	Inverewe Conference 10:00 16:30	Dinner 19:00	Gardens & Poolewe
28 April	Symposium for Prof. Arch.	10:00	Inverewe Gardens
5-8 May	SCAPE Between the Brochs		Skirza to Nybster survey
16 May	ScRAP 1	13:00-17:30	
17 May	ScRAP 2		
19 May	ScRAP 3		
19-22 May	Archaeology Scotland Summer School		Based in Garve
22 May-3	Wilkhouse Excavation	09:00-17:00	Brora

June			
24 May	Lithics session	14:00-16:00	Library, Tarradale House
27 May	ARP Conference – Steve Birch		Edinburgh
27-28 May	BRAG Conference		Anglesey, Wales
31 May	Martin Cook Dun Deardail	19:30	Dingwall Community Centre
3-10 June	Tiree week	15:30 on 3rd	An Talla Community Hall Crossapol, Tiree
28 June	Discoveries at Tornagrain Lachlan McKeggie	19:30	Dingwall Community Centre
July-Sept	Clachtoll Broch Excavation		Clachtoll
9-10 Sept	The Old Red: Hugh Miller Conference		Victoria Hall, Cromarty
14-17 September	Our Past Conference Archaeology Institute	12.00 noon	U. of the H. & Islands

Check out the web site Archaeology for the Communities in the highlands

www.archhighland.org.uk/calendar

Introducing Rosemarkie Man: A Pictish Period Cave Burial on the Black Isle

The Pictish period skeletal remains, c.430 - 630 AD, of a robust young man with severe cranial and facial injuries was found by archaeologists in a cave on the Black Isle in 2016. As has been widely reported, a facial reconstruction of the man was later produced by Dame Sue Black and her team at the University of Dundee. This is an account of the story from a digger's perspective.



Rosemarkie Man fully revealed.

The Rosemarkie Caves Project (RCP), founded and led by Simon Gunn as a part of NOSAS, has since 2006 investigated the archaeological potential of a range of 19 caves on a 2.5 mile stretch of coast north of Rosemarkie. Activities have included comprehensive surveys, test pitting and fuller excavations. In September 2016 it was decided that a full two-week excavation would be carried out at "Cave 2B" where previous

test pitting results had been revealing some interesting results. Here animal bone and charcoal excavated from depth of over one metre had yielded calibrated radio carbon dates of 600 - 770 AD, which is generally regarded as the Pictish period in Scotland. In addition, this particular cave also had an unusual built wall structure spanning its entrance. It was felt by the RCP Committee that these factors made it a prime site for more detailed excavation.

View of the cave towards of end of the 2016 excavation. The excavation area had now been divided into quadrants. Note the substantial wall in the entrance.



The Rosemarkie Caves Project was extremely fortunate to have experienced professional archaeologist Steve Birch volunteer to direct the excavation full time. In addition, Mary Peteranna was also in attendance on a number of days when her duties as Operations Manager at AOC Archaeology would allow.

I had signed up as a volunteer for almost the full term along with the rest of a small but enthusiastic team.

What was meant to be the final day of the dig started like any other. We had already had a successful two weeks, having identified a potentially important iron working site. That morning I was hoping to be able take out a section in the wall entrance in pursuit of a possible slot feature there. However, I was somewhat disappointed to be deployed in the NW quadrant at the back of the cave, where a cobbled surface had previously been removed and a depth of midden material still remained to be worked back.



Area of laid cobbles in the North East quadrant dating to c. 19th C. Little did we know at the time what was beneath!



Volunteers Robin and Janet Witheridge digging in the North-West quadrant.

The area had already yielded one piece of medieval pottery and was continuing to throw up significant quantities of butchered animal bone. This was a part of the cave where light from the entrance barely reached, so hand and head torches were needed to see what we were digging properly. As I continued to trowel down conditions became drier and sandier and it felt as if I might be getting close to "the natural". I now began to find a few beautifully preserved small bones, which I took to be the phalanges of a fairly large mammal. I remember thinking "they could almost be human. What if they were?" However, I quickly dismissed these as idle thoughts borne of over enthusiasm.

As the day progressed I uncovered the crown of a large boulder plus the tops of larger bones to either side. It was at this point I really began to think we had something interesting here and I remember discussing it with the rest of the team. Deer bones were initially suggested as one possibility, but as the sand was carefully peeled back and more was revealed it soon became apparent that this could only be one thing - human remains!

The large boulder between the legs of Rosemarkie Man, perhaps designed to "hold him down" in his grave.

This diagnosis became ever more compelling as smaller in situ bones began to appear amidst the larger ones. A careful analysis of the finds tray revealed also what looked very much like two patellae's, indicating that these were indeed a pair of knees sticking up out of the sand.



Excitement levels were now building steadily among our small merry band; this was certainly more than any of us had expected. We also knew that the police would need to be informed of our discovery. At that point, none of our contexts were dated, but due to the depth we were now working at we were pretty confident these remains were not remotely recent. We also knew that earlier test pitting results from approximately this level in other parts of the cave had given early medieval dates.

At this point I was fully expecting Steve or Mary to take over excavation of the body, indeed I would not have held it against them if they had. However, I am extremely grateful that I was given the opportunity to continue for the rest of the day. Needless to say, for an amateur archaeologist this was a rare opportunity!

It was decided the boulder would have to be moved in order to continue, so with great care Steve and I carried it to the spoil heap. That afternoon saw a couple more painstaking manoeuvres, where some largish stones had to be moved from around the periphery without disturbing the bones. Under Mary's expert tutelage I had now abandoned the trowel largely in favour of finger tips, but it was still tricky removing material without moving the smaller bones. The sequence of pictures below pretty well shows how the excavation progressed that afternoon.



Boulder from between legs now removed and smaller in situ bones beginning to appear.



A later stage in excavation, with parts of right arm, left hand and pelvis now uncovered.



The extent of excavation at the end of the discovery day. Note the group of butchered animal bone on a raised section above the skull area and another smaller group above the right shoulder.

At the end of the day much of the skeleton was uncovered and it appeared to be largely complete. However, the skull was still covered by a deposit of butchered animal bone on a small island of sand.

Due its possible significance to the burial,

this deposit needed to be properly recorded before it could be removed. The remains were covered with a tarpaulin to await the arrival of the police.



Unfortunately for me this was the last day I had scheduled for digging and normal working life now threatened to resume. Consequently, I was offsite the next morning whilst Steve managed to convince the constabulary that the remains were definitely historic and not the result of some recent skulduggery. Nevertheless, the Procurator Fiscal still had to be informed, and this would in turn lead to the involvement of the Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification in Dundee - a crucial

later development in the story.

Meanwhile, I could not resist juggling my schedule around to come back in the afternoon to see how things were progressing. As my wife put it "you've got to go back, you may never get a chance like this again!" I arrived to find the police long gone and Steve busily finishing off excavation on the skull. I remember being initially slightly disappointed at the condition of the skull with all its fractures compared to the

remainder of body. However, at the time we did not realise what a gruesome and compelling story these fractures would tell.

Whilst Steve continued work on the body, I helped out by half sectioning some post hole features. Later, whilst Steve planned elsewhere, I used my tripod to take a range of photographs of the skeleton from all angles, hoping they would produce some good photogrammetry results. I had previously done the same with the built wall at the front of the cave (see below), but here tucked away in an alcove at the back, light conditions were considerably worse. I did not wish to risk distorting the results by using flash, so lengthy exposures were needed to get anything usable.

RCP veteran Bob Jones was also on hand with his camera, so in the end I combined some of his pictures with mine to build a 3D model.

Three views of the photogrammetry 3D model. Below: The results are not as clear as I would have liked, but due to the significance of the find I include them anyway.



Rosemarkie Man 3D Model Sept 2016 by jamesmcc on Sketchfab

I left that evening with the remains of Rosemarkie Man still in situ. Steve would return yet again the following morning to finish off on site and lift the bones. There was still a possibility that there might be grave goods or further deposits beneath the bones, but in the event this proved not to be the case. Despite very careful excavation and sieving of spoil, only the bare skeleton was found. This led to some conjecture that he may have been partially or wholly naked when buried.

During the ensuing weeks, the Rosemarkie Caves Project Committee kept up a steady stream of detailed email correspondence. This was principally from Steve to tell the rest of us what was happening with the bones and other finds. Here we had the enormous good fortune of having Dame Sue Black at the University of Dundee agree to handle the skeletal analysis of our man.

It was only later I found out that the Procurator Fiscal had contacted Sue Black for a forensic opinion since the skeleton seemed so complete and in such good condition for an historic specimen. Sue, although convinced Rosemarkie Man was not a modern murder victim, was so intrigued by our find that she agreed to take on the full analysis as a teaching vehicle for her students. Indeed, when she laid out the skeleton it proved be complete aside from a few small bones. As she later put it, "it doesn't get better than this!" It was certainly a relief to me that we had excavated carefully enough to recover so much, even though some of the first bones went straight into a finds tray before we realised that we were dealing with human remains.

Rosemarkie Man was probably in his early thirties and powerfully built with particularly well developed upper body muscles. Aside from some rather poor dental hygiene he appears to have been very healthy. The real news however was his skull. Sue confirmed 5 separate severe facial and cranial traumas (I have paraphrased in some parts):

1. A penetrating trauma to the right side of mouth where teeth were broken by an implement which was round in cross section. He was certainly still alive following this since one tooth fragment was inhaled and later recovered from beneath the sternum.
2. A blow to the left side of jaw, cracking the mandible with great force. This may have been made with the same the same implement, used like a fighting stick at close quarters.
3. Contact fractures on the back of the skull that are likely contra coup caused by a fall where the head hit a hard object such as rock. This was probably a direct result of the man being knocked down by injury number two.
4. Whilst on the ground an implement, possibly the same one as before, was driven through the side of his head from the left through to the right just in front of the temple region. This was likely the cause of death.
5. The top of the skull was penetrated with tremendous force causing massive fracturing. It was made with a different implement to that used previously, creating a larger hole. This injury does not fit in with the pattern of the earlier ones. This final blow could have been the coup de grace or it could have been done after death in ritual - this cannot be confirmed either way.



*Two close ups
of the skull.
Right image by
Bob Jones.*



It is open for conjecture whether the initial attack on the man was carried out by multiple assailants, or whether it was a single attacker with one weapon. The facts, as Sue Black confirmed, could support both hypotheses. There is nothing to say either whether this was the result of interpersonal conflict - more likely if there was single assailant - or if the attack had a sacrificial element.

The last injury is interesting in that there might be a suggestion that the skull was fractured to let the spirit out after death, as seen in some Iron Age examples. The level of trauma inflicted, far more than would have been needed to kill him, also raises comparisons with Iron Age bog bodies where high status individuals, who may have been willing or at least compliant, suffered a "multiple" death. These bodies were typically deposited in watery pools where, as Steve pointed out, they were sometimes held down using wooden stakes and hurdles. These deaths are sometimes thought to be sacrifices made to propitiate deities during times of poor harvest.

The location of Rosemarkie Man's burial placement, set into an alcove in the back of the cave, plus the unusual positioning of the body with boulders and butchered animal placed over the top, may all indicate a particular significance to this individual and to his death. Conjecturally the cave itself may have been regarded as a liminal space at this point, like the watery pools bog bodies were placed in, and the boulder holding him down might have served to ensure he did not return to trouble the community after death.



A "photoshopped" attempt to put the boulder back into position found with the entire skeleton exposed.

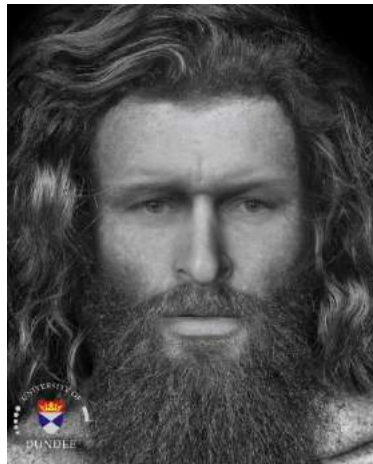
The news on our man's injuries was fascinating if grisly, however what really put the tin lid on it was the radiocarbon date which arrived just in time for Christmas. This result was obtained from one of Rosemarkie Man's ribs and was one of two free samples dated through the CARD fund. At 430 - 631

AD it showed that the skeleton dated to the start of activities in the cave, pre-dating or contemporary with the early medieval occupation and metal working horizon (RCP 2016 DSR).

The date was a great Christmas present putting Rosemarkie Man in the early to mid Pictish period. Pictish human remains are generally poorly preserved and finding a well preserved and almost complete example like this made the find especially significant. I had some brief correspondence with Dr Adrian Maldonado, an authority on Pictish burials, to ask him about the best examples of Pictish skeletons he was aware of. Adrian told me these were probably the remains found at Portmahomack by Martin Carver, the next best being those from Hallow Hill in Fife.

I next contacted Dr Shirley Curtis-Summers who has recently published her analysis of the Portmahomack skeletons. Shirley told me that of 13 skeletons dated c 550 - 700 AD, only 2 are near complete and these are in either poor or fair condition. Rosemarkie Man, as we have already established, is almost complete and in very good condition (for further discussion on early medieval human remains see [SCARF Report 4.5.1](#)).

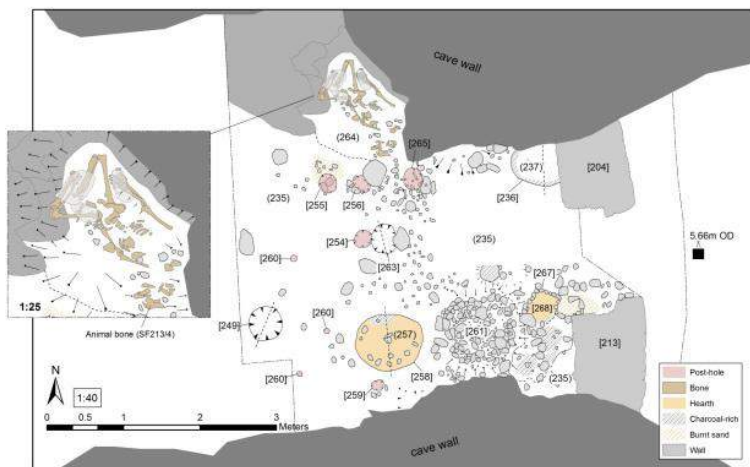
The most recent development has of course been the striking facial reconstructions by Dame Sue Black and her team, which serve literally to put flesh on the bones of the story (see versions with and without hair below). Combined isotope analysis is now also being carried out and these results should tell us if the man had local origins or came from further afield. If he is from the highlands we can be more confident about labelling him a Pict. There remains the possibility though that he



could be Scandinavian, or from a different part of (what is now) Britain or Europe. Ancient DNA analysis will now also be undertaken, but it remains to be seen whether this will yield any usable data.

Iron Working

Samples to be analysed from the dig also included iron working slag and vitrified furnace lining that we had recovered. This material was found close to the suspected remains of a bowl furnace in the South-East quadrant of the cave, opposite the body and at a similar level in the stratigraphy. The piece of vitrified furnace lining was later found to have part of a pipe-like hole passing through it. This was half of the tuyere - the hole where a bellow pipe would have passed through the furnace wall to introduce air.



Plan of the metal-working features, post-holes and pits and the inhumation burial in top centre; inset: mid-excavation of the inhumation showing the location of the stone placement over the body (Mary Peteranna).

Below: Piece of vitrified furnace lining and the site of the bowl furnace.



Iron working finds analysis by Gemma Cruickshanks of NMS is currently still ongoing. However early conclusions point to the sample material being representative of smithing, rather than smelting. Later radiocarbon dating of a sheep rib excavated from the context immediately covering the metal working horizon gave a broad date of cal AD 718-941. Therefore, it seems metal working was almost certainly taking place during the Pictish era, although from the evidence we have it would appear to postdate Rosemarkie Man. Dating of other horizons during test pitting suggest that the main period of early medieval occupation in the cave relates to the early 8th century AD. The metal-working industry could be earlier than, or contemporary with, this period (RCP 2016 DSR).



A series of post and stake holes in the metal working area may have indicated that the space was enclosed on three sides by screens and the cave wall, leaving only the way through to the cave entrance open. As Steve and Mary argue, "this interpretation, along with the location of some of the post-holes, also suggests the possibility that the burial location was known and respected by the

smithing area". It could also be argued that Rosemarkie Man was related to the iron working industry in some way. With his well developed upper body he may even have been a smith himself, and his burial could conceivably have inaugurated the start of smithing in the cave (RCP 2016 DSR).

The Cave Entrance Wall

This substantial mortared wall, which would have stood over 1 metre high, likely had a wooden door for which door checks survive. It may also have been surmounted by a screen, increasing the height further. The precise dating of construction remains uncertain but it definitely post-dates the early medieval occupation and predates the last 19th C. horizon. In terms of function it may have helped the define and secure the cave as a dwelling, store, or animal shelter, but this remains conjectural (RCP 2016 DSR).



The cave entrance wall towards the end of the excavation.

The images below are from a photogrammetry 3D model, made up of multiple photographs from different positions.



Excavated wall at Learnie 2B Cave, nr Rosemarkie by jamesmcc on Sketchfab



Outside the cave during lunch break: L to R Allan MacKenzie, Tim Blackie, Simon Gunn, Steve Birch and Mary Peteranna.

References:

Steve Birch and Mary Peteranna - RCP 2016 Data Structure Report (DSR)

The Rosemarkie Caves Project [Website](#).

Many thanks to Steve, Mary and Dame Sue Black who I have all paraphrased liberally in the above article. Thank you and congratulations also to Simon Gunn and the rest of the RCP team on the fantastic results of this excavation, I am fortunate to have been a part of it.

James McComas

Adventures in Arbol: A NOSAS Ad Hoc Walk from Inver to Portmohomock

NOSAS members John Wombell and Jonie Guest have been organising a series of Ad Hoc coastal walks. The purpose of these walks is to observe and survey sections of coastline particularly after winter storms in order to interpret, record and note the condition of newly exposed archaeology, also to revisit and record possible threats to known structures and update the Scotland's Coastal Heritage at Risk Project (SCHARP) data base.

There had been a great deal of Second World War (WW2) activity along this section of the Coast. Military activity continues even now with proximate areas requisitioned as bombing ranges.

In January 2017, we walked between Dornoch Golf Course Car Park and Dornoch Bridge mainly recording the WW2 Anti Glider Poles.



On 1st February 2017 John Wombell and Meryl Marshall led a group between Inver and Portmohomack, Tarbatness. Tarbat derives from the Gaelic for Isthmus but the area it comprises is perhaps better described as a peninsula.

The day commenced at Inver where David Findlay informed us how an area of 15 miles East of Fearn was particularly affected by WW2 when in 1943 the entire

community of more than 900 people were evacuated at short notice to the nearby towns of Portmohomack and Tain in order to allow the armed forces to take over the area and rehearse with their new swimming tanks in advance of the D-Day landings.

The social history and impact of war on these evacuees and the towns they were evacuated to has parallels with contemporary times and reading witness reports is poignant. Three years later the Inver and proximate area evacuees finally returned to their homes therefore more fortunate than residents of the coincidentally similarly named town of Imber near Trowbridge in Wiltshire (also evacuated in December 1943 when US troops requisitioned the area to prepare for D-Day). Those unfortunate people were never allowed to return home and to this day Imber remains a ghost town open to interested members of the public a handful of days a year.

Thankfully Inver escaped that fate as evacuees reported how after three years confined to towns they were desperate to return to their own homes and possessions and a preferred environment of beaches and fields. At least one evacuee and a notorious, persistent Collie dog (eventually fed and cared for by the military) are reputed to have returned long before permission was given. Upon return some residents discovered that their homes had been destroyed. Further information about

the social and military history of Inver during WW2 may be found, amongst other sources, on a board in the main Inver car park. David Findlay also referred us to an excellent article published in **The Scotsman in 2004, 'The secret beach where Britain rehearsed D-Day'**.

WW2 was not the first time Inver found itself under threat as in 1832 large numbers of the population and those of surrounding townships succumbed to cholera. An unmarked burial ground outwith Inver is marked by a memorial.

One township of particular interest to us was the proximate long abandoned Arboll which can be seen on Google Earth reasonably well. Meryl Marshall and NOSAS volunteers had part recorded this in 2003. Meryl was keen to continue with her re-creation of the township. Arboll now refers to several scattered farms 10km East of Tain a short distance inland from the Dornoch Firth. Information with respect to the township of Arboll's early history and eventual abandonment is sparse however, David Findlay, NOSAS member and proximate resident, kindly sourced some maps and historical references. **The 1984 Ross-Cromarty Book of the Northern Times Ltd** suggests that the name Arboll derives from the Old Norse 'bolstadr' meaning a homestead with the first element of the name, also Norse, meaning Ark or Seal. **Place names of Easter Ross** also informs us that Arboll (Arkboll 1463 and 1535) is Norse ork-bol or ark-stead but perhaps orkin meaning seal.

Early references to Arboll appear in **Calendar of Fearn 1471 – 1667** whereby a judge delegate Abbot Donald was instrumental in dividing Arboll into thirds in November 1539 and a certain Robert of Balloan bought two-thirds of Arboll in June 1647.

The earliest **Valuation Roll for Tarbat** is 1644 where Alex Corbet of Arboll was main landowner. The principle historical reference for this article particularly with respect to estates and heritor's is the informative and well researched **Tarbat: Easter Ross** published by Ross & Cromarty Heritage Society in 1988. In 1506 James IV granted two thirds of the lands of Arboll to John, Bishop of Ross and the ownership changed hands many times over the ensuing century. In 1721 Colonel Alex Urquhart III was forced to sell part of the lands of Arboll when he found himself in debt resulting from his involvement with the South Sea Scheme. By 1770 Alex Ross of Pitcalnie owned Wester Arboll and the Heirs of Colonel Urquhart owned Easter Arboll. In 1793, a large portion of the lands of Arboll were acquired by the Macleods of Geanies with Naomi Ross 'liferentrix of the lands of Arbol' occupying the House of Arboll. The Rosses and Macleods of Geanies did not co-exist well and I first found reference to the Fishertown of Arboll in 1769 when Donald Macleod of Geanies wrote to Naomi Ross complaining that "round the lands of Arboll there are several new fisher houses erected at your express desire". It appears that the construction materials were taken from the best of the Geanies ground close to the corn fields. Feisty Mrs Ross retaliated and complained that the Geanies fishing boats were reported in the Fisher Town and that Geanies tenants were taking 'seaware' from the shore and cutting

'feal and divot' in the vicinity thereby damaging the land. NOSAS member Anne Coombs explained to me that seaware refers to seaweed (used as fertilizer) and that feals and divot are different types and quality of turf used as material in building construction, feal for the walls and divot for the roofs. In 1834 Sheriff Macleod (Geanies) encountered financial difficulties and in 1837 his trustees sold off much of the estate including the Links of Arbol, Mill of Arbol and the Fisher Houses to a George Murray. When the Murray family in turn disposed of these holdings there is reference to Arbol Mains but not to the Fishertown.

With respect to Arbol and the Kirk, in 1771 there is reference to Messrs McKay Cumming and Corbat "fishers in Arbol" allocated 5 seats in the Kirk for themselves and their crew. These seats were paid for by the "poor's money".

With respect to farming there is reference to boundary disputes around Arbol in 1779 ("the march betwixt my lands of Arbol") and again in 1860 during one period of land improvement when tenants (also known as mealers or cotters) were provided with small portions of land, wood, tools, seed etc in order to encourage them to build houses and sow seed on ground deemed suitable, paying their rent in produce. Before improvement the land was poor and merely provided subsistence living supplemented by farm labouring and fishing. By 1884 there is reference to 25 farming families living comfortably in the vicinity of Arbol. Mains of Arbol is still farmed by one such family.

With respect to fishing the Factor for Arbol wrote to the Laird in 1752 requesting help after a boat was damaged leading to fishing families in his area starving. Ling, halibut, turbot, cod and lobster were fished. The lairds of coastal estates were principal entrepreneurs. In 1892, there is reference to the decline in the fishing around Portmohomack. This was due in part to commercial fishing by steam trawlers and the building of new harbours elsewhere to facilitate them. Consequent overfishing led to a decline in cod and herring. In 1896, there is reference to the crew of Arbol being prosecuted for being prevented from retrieving their leaders (the part of the net which guides the fish into the bag) during a severe gale on Saturday. This was a legal requirement to prevent salmon being fished on a Sunday. Non-commercial salmon fishing was from shallow draft cobbles where access to a harbour was not required. The later 18th century saw a population drift away from the parishes including emigration.

With respect to health there was heavy mortality from diseases such as Typhus and Smallpox (1756-8) especially amongst children. The cholera epidemic (1832) almost depopulated the Tarbat Peninsula. It hit the fishing villages especially Arbol particularly hard and apart from mortality led to hired men fleeing the area, virtually putting a stop to the fishing. There was a shortage of doctors and few midwives. Some of the medical staff also died and in any case the cost of medical attention was prohibitive. As a retired midwife, I found the descriptions of the dire conditions from the medical folk compelling. Florence Nightingale's famous quote referring to health and

nursing practice “what it is and what it is not” seems pertinent to archaeology and history. Overcrowding and poor sanitation in the fishing villages, lack of food (especially that winter as the potato crop had failed), consequent poor nutrition and no income compounded the problem. There was a call for “adequate supplies of lime” for cleaning. Other charitable resources were also requested. In 1894 a cholera hospital was eventually established in Portmohomack which recovered from the epidemics due in part to the Clearances with displaced land based folk seeking employment in coastal areas and ports in order to emigrate.

Hugh Miller writing about the results of these epidemics noted that half of the population of Inver died and survivors from Portmohomack and Inver took shelter in the dunes bordering Arbol only to die from exposure in the winter conditions. This led to the long held and still prevalent belief throughout the district that the links of Arbol are haunted. Perhaps superstition led to the area being less attractive to potential inhabitants.

It seems likely that a combination of events including Arbol's relative isolation, inhabitants being marginalised onto poorer ground, the encroachment of sand dunes and a decline in good fishing led to the eventual total abandonment of the township. The subsequent hammering sustained from ongoing military activities particularly during war time would no doubt have made it a less viable place to return to or develop in the future.

The route we walked from ‘Fishertown of Inver’ is shown on this Gazetteer map. Note the Mill and Mains of Arbol, House and Castle of Arbol and other structures of interest to us. The Roy Highlands map (1747-1752) also shows two small mills below Arbol on Arbol burn but not on the 1843-1882 version. This coincides with a steam mill being started at Rockfield, more reliable than waiting until there was enough water filling the dams to start milling. Road improvement allowed grain to be transported to Rockfield.



The Tarbat Peninsula. Groomes Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland. (David Findlay)

*he Vegetation Covered Site of Arbol
Looking Towards the Coast (Meryl
Marshall)*

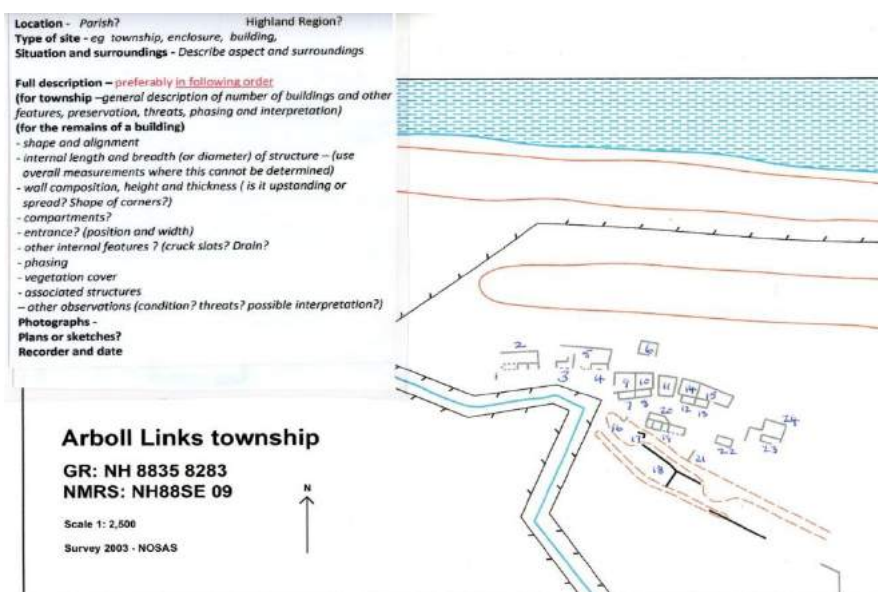


En-route between Inver and Arbol our group separated into smaller groups. Some folk walked the shore looking for fresh erosions and noted further upstanding poles exposed by low tide. Others ventured further inland to the surrounding dune and field area where there was previous evidence of Iron Age activity hoping to discover more pre-historic evidence.

Upon reaching Arbol the first thing Meryl commented upon was how woefully covered with vegetation the site had become despite it being the winter season. This was due, in part, to the lack of grazing animals.

Nevertheless, provided with Meryl's 2003 plan we were still able to get a good general idea of the township and make out most of the structures shown which included possible buildings, platforms and enclosed areas which may have been kale yards or used for flax preparation for linen production.

There were also pits suggested to be middens. The stone used in construction appeared to be of good quality, well prepared and dressed. Meryl's crib sheet gave guidance on how to record the structures.



The site clearly did not lend itself to ground photography however Alan Thompson had recently invested in an interactive pole camera set up for capturing aerial views of archaeological sites which may then be processed with photogrammetry and with Frank van Duivenbode in control of the pole they set off to photograph the area.

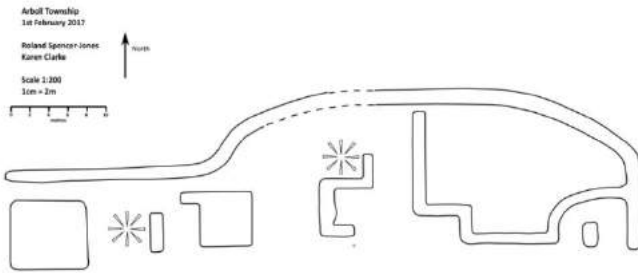


Alan, Frank and the Pole Camera in Action (Meryl Marshall)

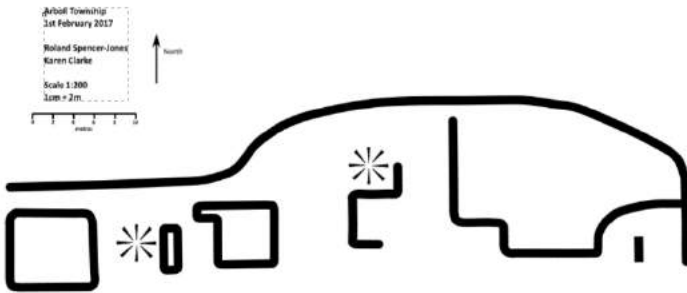
The rest of us as part of a recording and training exercise to measure and draw changes in the structures were organised by Meryl (who on a voluntary basis has been instrumental in training, mentoring and encouraging many NOSAS members over the years) into groups of two where an

experienced member mentored a novice or less confident individual. We were particularly interested in the features outlined in the full description guidelines on the plan.

Roland Spencer-Jones produced these drawings of a large complex of structures numbered 1-5. The first gives a diagrammatic, stripped-down version of the structures surveyed on the day which he described as “representing two, possibly three, structures retained within a dyke to the north with each of the walls of the structures approximately 1m wide and up to 0.25m tall. The lower drawing provides a better idea of the dimensions and margins of the structures. The rank grass made it difficult to identify whether any particular ridge was associated with any other. There were definitely two platforms on the west side of this congregation of structures and two round pits”. It was suggested that these might be middens.



Structures 1-5, Diagrammatic and Stripped Down (Roland Spencer-Jones)



Structures 1-5, Dimensions and Margins (Roland Spencer-Jones)

Once recording was complete some of us ventured further inland to investigate the castle and mill sites shown on Pont's map.



Pont's Map of Tarbat Ness, Easter Ross (David Findlay)

We were not successful in identifying sound evidence of these structures but did come across a large damaged ceramic object containing what appeared to be the remains of animal lick bearing the legend Hurlford of Kilmarnock.

We discovered another one on a walk between Portmohomack and Tarbat Ness the following week. A useful website (www.scottishbrickhistory.co.uk) a Scottish wide community based project bearing the great logo “I get my kick out of bricks” references the Hurlford Fire Clay Works owned by John Howie 1833-1897 (evident on the 1897 OS map) and features pages from the J & R Howie catalogue depicting variations in trough design for different animals (horse, cow, sheep, pigs and poultry). This one appears to be a square sheep feeder or oil cake dish, perhaps a cattle trough. It has a flat side presumably to facilitate transport and stacking and no drainage hole to prevent the valuable cake or lick trickling away in wet weather.



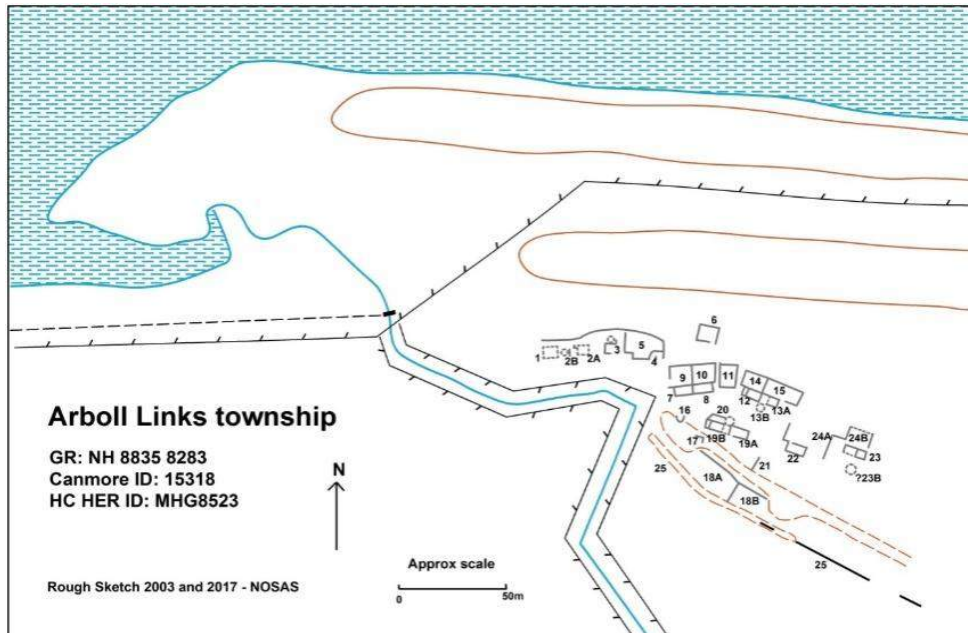
Ceramic Container (Karen Clarke)

Following the estate wall which led at least 1km eastwards we also came across two huge dumps of farming equipment , general detritus and animal bones but no obvious evidence for the castle.

A Portion of the Estate Wall (Meryl Marshall)



Reconvening at Portmohomack our group continued to puzzle over the location of the Mill and Castle of Arboll and the events which led to the eventual abandonment of the sizeable township of Arboll. However, despite the conditions on site being less than ideal with heavy vegetation cover Meryl was able to identify threats to the structures and better re-create them by producing an amended sketch of Arboll based on the 2003 findings and our recordings earlier in the day.



*Arboll Links
2003 and
2017
(Meryl
Marshall)*

One happy conclusion to our adventures in Arboll is that on 18th March 2017 David Findlay arranged and led a visit to the designed landscape of Geanies.

John Wombell led us around the surrounding cliffs and beaches containing salmon bothies, hill forts, caves, bait mortars, interesting geology and unknown structures and pits enthusiastically recorded by Meryl Marshall and others - but that is another story. However, imagine Meryl's and our delight when at Geanie's House our welcoming and informative host Willie Mackenzie told us about an estate map on one of the bedroom walls showing the Fishertown of Arboll. He kindly allowed us to view, photograph and use it for this article. The map is dated 1833, so was probably created before the 1832 cholera outbreak and shows a number of structures which compare favourably with Meryl's 2017 plan.



Estate Map 1833 (Willie Mackenzie and Meryl Marshall)

References:

Calendar of Fearn 1471 – 1667.

Mills of Easter Ross Peninsula. Douglas Gordon. ? date.

Place Names of Ross and Cromarty. Professor W. J. Watson. ?date.

Scotland's Brick Manufacturing Industry. Mark Cranston.

(www.scottishbrickhistory.co.uk).

Tarbat: Easter Ross. Alexander Fraser/Finlay Munro. 1988.

The secret beach where Britain rehearsed D-Day. The Scotsman. 2004.

The Ross-Cromarty Book of the Northern Times Ltd. 1984.

Valuation Roll for Tarbat 1644.

Karen Clarke

TARBAT NESS RETURNING

On the NOSAS walk from Portmahomack to Tarbat Ness on 9th February we omitted to check out a couple of sites near Tarbat Ness which appear on the OS first edition map. These were a pier at Port Ur and a cairn, Carn na Cailliche. A few days later Jonie and myself returned for another look.

Carn na Cailliche

This site lies at the cliff top only a short distance west of the lighthouse boundary wall. We found the plotted position by GPS easily enough but could find only scant evidence of a cairn. There are a few exposures of small stones but it is mostly grown over. The site is in Canmore and in 1972 was described as "threequarters

robbed” and in 1993 was not found by the OS. We can only agree that the site is no longer identifiable as a cairn.



Port Ur

Port Ur was another matter entirely. The “pier” is a most unusual site. It lies only a few metres further west from the previous site but is not easily spotted looking along the cliff top. It is not until you are in line with it and look along it out to sea that it becomes obvious. This is not, as expected, a built masonry structure but instead is a natural rock promontory which has been levelled along the top and excavated in a small cutting at the landward end to give a trackway of constant width and even gradient out to sea, where it would be possible to bring a small boat alongside the natural rock. It is possible but not certain that the natural rock has been cut back to form a more vertical berthing face.



At the landward end on the west side the trackway is supported by a masonry revetment whilst the east side is cut into the bedrock to maintain a level cross-section. The trackway is virtually straight over a length of 130m and is a constant width of 2.2m except for a short section around the high tide level where the west side has been washed away. It appears likely that this section was of masonry construction because the natural promontory is not wide enough at this point.



The site is not recorded on Canmore or SCAPE so we took photographs, made notes and paced out dimensions for recording using the SCHARP App.



Richard Guest

Rock Art Exploring

On 2nd March at Jonie's instigation and fired with enthusiasm by Tertia's talk on the Scottish Rock Art Project (ScRAP) the previous week, four of us set off to explore the potential of some sites close to Beaully. Research had started in The Proceedings of The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland volume 16 (1881-82) with an article entitled "On Cup-Marked Stones in the Neighbourhood of Inverness" by William Jolly. An itinerary had been drawn up of locations reasonably close to the road with, hopefully, reasonably easy access.

According to Jolly, the Chambered Cairn at Culbirnie is surrounded by an outer ring of standing stones with an overall diameter of 65ft. At least four of these monoliths are cup-marked, each having between one and five cups. One was not examined in 1881 because it was so ivy covered and permission to clear it was refused by Lord



Lovat. Cup marks on all these stones are on the surfaces which look outwards from the centre, as at Clava and Corrimony. Whereas the 1881 plan shows a garden wall abutting part of the west side of the cairn, the entire site is now incorporated within the garden of a recently built house. This obviously placed some restrictions on access. All the cup marks on the standing stones are illustrated as being fairly close to ground level and some may now be covered.

At Bruiach, on the side of the road between Kiltarlity and Culbirnie, is what is described by Jolly as a double circle of stones. The outer was 77ft and the inner 49ft. in diameter. He describes an innermost circle as having gone, leaving a space which had been "absurdly hollowed into a pit or basin". This hollow is still quite striking although the standing stones are not prominent. I must confess that we have driven and cycled past this site on countless occasions without giving it a second look. Two cup marked stones were present lying flat in the inner circle in 1881, one having two sets of cups linked by grooves as well as single cup marks. We took a series of photographs with the intention of practicing some photogrammetry.

We were unable to find the cup marked stones at either of these sites despite a reasonably thorough examination of what could be seen on the surface. In sunshine rather than horizontal sleet we might have been more meticulous and perhaps had more success! Jolly comments that two of the cup marks at Bruiach were "very much worn" so perhaps the chance of finding them after more than a century of further erosion is remote. Despite our failure we came away quite excited about what we had seen, the precise nature of which seems unclear. Are they both variants of Clava type cairns? Even being sure that we had correctly located these sites on the basis of the 1881 information was quite difficult so we were happy to move on to the third location.



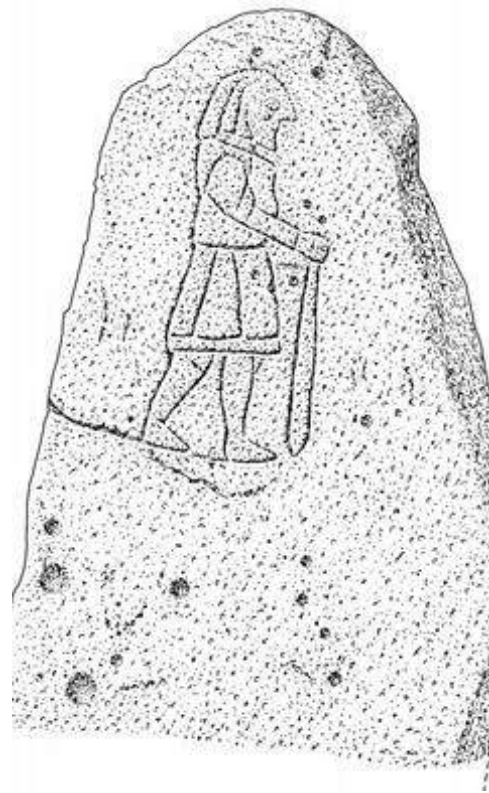
From Bruiach we drove to Culnakirk for a look at two cup marked stones, the first at the end of someone's drive and the second in a field beside a house, very easily accessible. The first stone was rather underwhelming but the second is large, with many cups.

Jolly placed our next stone as near Rivulich Farm, Abriachan. He described it as lying at the bottom of the march dyke and raised the suspicion that it had previously been moved. Fortunately, we had a reassuring GPS reference thanks to Jonie's previous investigations. Without this the chances of happening upon this stone would be minimal. Although only a short walk from a rough but drivable track, the terrain was very uneven and wet. The panel itself was partly overgrown but we were armed with soft brushes and water allowing us to clear enough to take reasonable photographs of this impressive panel before the blizzard started. We had our photographs of a "spoty stone" at last.



Our last visit of the day was to Moniack Castle to see the slab which appears to have been a prehistoric standing stone with several cup-marks carved on it. In Pictish times it was incised with a 'formidable man' symbol, seen in profile walking to the right, with a prominent nose and chin. He is wearing a short-gored tunic with a band at the hem. Belted at the waist and he carries a club in his right hand. We looked very hard but the deterioration had set in, and we could see nothing, yet from the record he had been visible when the

photos taken in 1990.



A thoroughly enjoyable archaeology day out had not only allowed us to do some preliminary recording of local rock art but will encourage me to further investigate cairns and stone circles.

Canmore entries exist describing the ring cairns at Culburnie and Bruiach. In 1963 the Culburnie cup marks were described as “unconvincing” although in 1957 the cup marks at Bruiach were clearly seen. The entry for Rivoulich seems simply to quote from Jolly’s description.

Our experiences also raise questions relating to location, access, deterioration of panels, weather conditions and recording that give plenty of food for thought - and we haven’t even got to the photogrammetry yet!

Canmore References:

Culburnie <https://canmore.org.uk/site/12397>

Bruiach <https://canmore.org.uk/site/12391>

Rivoulich <https://canmore.org.uk/site/12648>

[Moniack Castle https://canmore.org.uk/1472095](https://canmore.org.uk/1472095) photo and drawing [Canmore.](https://canmore.org.uk/1472095)

Moniack castle photo https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moniack_Castle

Madeline Robinson

Rockfield and Ballone Castle, Tarbat Ness

On the 7th March Richard and I visited Rockfield and Ballone on Tarbat Ness with a view to updating the SCAPE records for the area. It was a cold but bright day, pretty good for the time of year.



The masonry pier at Rockfield was very much as expected, in good condition with just a slight piece of erosion – a couple of stones missing at foundation level on the south side near high water.

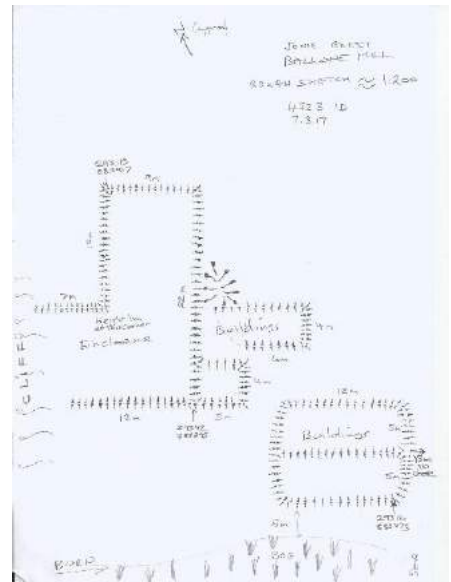
Just north of the pier is a site listed as a fishing station. There is a photograph in Canmore of a two-storey wooden building. This has completely disappeared and the site is grassed over with not even any foundations visible.

Continuing north along the shore the foundations of one building were located and photographed but another supposed building was too overgrown with whins to see if there was actually anything there.



We pressed on to a site just north of Ballone Castle described as a mill and mill pond.

The foundations of two or three buildings assumed to be the mill can be clearly seen but there is nothing on the ground to indicate it is really a mill. No wheel pit or lade could be identified. There are enclosures associated with the buildings.



We paced out the dimensions and sketched what could be seen.

Then we scrambled up the burn which cascades over the cliff at this point and found the pond intact at the top, with evidence of modern valves indicating it may still be used as a water supply. The bed of the burn itself was once concreted but this is now badly eroded and there are fresh scars indicating active erosion as the burn cuts its way back into the muddy cliffs – there is no solid rock to be seen.



On the way back we noted various enclosures.



We then began to search for a chapel known as Teampall-Earach and graveyard which are on the record. We found a tombstone, now split into two pieces on the grave yard site which the record says is dated 1682 and a number of enigmatic piles of stones which may or may not have been the chapel site. We did not find the well.



Ballone, Teampall-earach and Tobar Mhuire (St Mary's Well)



Rockfield Pier. <https://her.highland.gov.uk>
Record MHG8484

Ballone Castle. <https://her.highland.gov.uk>. Record MHG 8493

Ballone, Teampall-Earach <https://her.highland.gov.uk> Record MHG45100

Jonie Guest

GEANIES VISIT, TARBAT PENINSULA

On the 17th of March a group of 15 members were able to visit Geanies, an early 18th century house on the Tarbat peninsula which is still a private house but also houses three businesses. It is not normally open to the public so we are grateful to David Findlay for negotiating access and to John Wombell for organising the visit. We were met on arrival by the present owner Mr William Mackenzie, whose family have been there since 1983. David gave us a potted history of the house and Mr Mackenzie pointed out its salient features.

The house was built in two or possibly three phases, the first around 1742 (there is a date stone but it may not be contemporary with the construction) and the latest around 1830. Gardens enclosed by high walls and sheltered by trees were laid out in the early to mid- nineteenth century. Despite being on the highest point of the Tarbat peninsula with open aspects in all directions the mature trees and wall provide a surprisingly sheltered environment.

The white painted south facade sparkled in the sunshine. It is approached by an elegant oval carriage drive leading to a courtyard enclosed on three sides by the main house and its East and West wings. Across the full width of the main house is a single storey glazed colonnade reminiscent of a modern conservatory extension but with pretensions to classical architecture rather at odds with the vernacular style of the rest of the house.



As with all the best grand houses there is a legend of a tunnel leading from the house to the foot of the cliffs, ostensibly used for smuggling. This story has rather more evidence to back it up than is often the case. Mr Mackenzie lifted a tiny grill in the centre of a gravel footpath leading away from the oldest part of the house and about 30m from it. We took it in turns to peer down a 150mm diameter hole into the black void beneath. After much probing with trekking poles and flash photographs on selfie-sticks poked down the hole we established there was indeed a tunnel, with vertical stone walls either side, a flagstone roof and a dry gravel floor. It is roughly 1.2m deep and about the same width and appears to extend in a straight line away from the house in a north-easterly direction, parallel to the cliffs rather than towards them.



Mr Mackenzie told us there is an old staircase disappearing under the floor, inside the house, in line with the passageway but it has been backfilled with rubble. There is no evidence of where the passageway goes at the other end.

Speculation as to the purpose of the passage was as diverse and unlikely as you would expect from a group of archaeologists. It was generally agreed it wasn't a drain and the more credible suggestions were an ice house or a store for illicit whisky. An early owner of the house was known to be a sheriff who was not above selling his barley to illicit distillers so maybe he took payment in the finished product.

Meryl was invited into the house to photograph an old estate map which shows the village of Arbol which she and members of NOSAS have previously surveyed the Arbol Links township. (See separate article "adventures in Arbol")

After exploring the gardens, we headed through wooded policies to the cliff top where there are two enigmatic structures consisting of a single gable wall pierced by a door and topped by a cross. The verbal history suggests these were monks' cells associated with the nearby Fearn Abbey but they look suspiciously like follies. Two short paths lead a little way down from the clifftop to viewpoints with seats, very much in the Victorian designed landscape tradition.



There was once a third which has been allowed to be overgrown because it was too dangerous; this is one of the steepest cliffs in the area and over 200m high.



A short distance south-west along the cliff stands a summerhouse built by the house owner Donald Macleod in the early 1800s. A carved marriage stone above the door is dated 1760 and includes a sad-faced sun. This same symbol also occurs on the date stone



on the main house. Mr Mackenzie kindly unlocked the octagonal building and allowed us to eat lunch there; he told us the family still use it and had a party there at New Year. There is a working fire place well supplied with logs and a rustic table. We were very glad of the shelter.

After lunch three members left and the remainder descended a precipitous path down the cliffs to the salmon bothy, again still in useable condition. It sits on a narrow strip of good flat grassland between the base of the cliff and the sea. We headed northeast along the coast passing the foundations of numerous rectangular buildings, many subdivided by cross walls and upstanding to about 0.5m. Some were obvious but others were well hidden by dense whins. Where visible, the construction was good quality stonework. Photos and GPS co-ordinates were taken and some rough sizes paced out for comparison with the SCAPE database as some of these sites appear to be unrecorded.



The furthest point of the walk was Tarrel cave and dun, the latter excavated by Candy Hatherley in 2013. Although several walls were found the site's description as a dun was not proved. In the cave is a basin carved into the rock about 150mm in diameter, possibly for bait.

After a tea break we headed back the way we had come. We were now into the wind and a little light rain shower put a slight damper on proceedings. On reaching the salmon bothy, two members elected to climb back up the cliff to their car but the remainder opted for the less strenuous but much longer route along the shore to Cadboll where one car had been left to ferry the other drivers back to their vehicles at Geanies.

All in all this was a fascinating day out and allowed us to see an area which is normally out-of-bounds.

Richard Guest

Kinbeachie Castle or “Kinbeachie House”?

NOSAS members carried out a measured survey of a site at Kinbeachie on the Black Isle using planetables at the beginning of March, the project also included photographing the site using an aerial drone fly-over. The site is known as “Kinbeachie Castle”; it includes not only the amorphous linear banks thought to be the castle but also a farmstead of 4 buildings and a horse-gang. The remains of the farmstead were obvious, but our initial investigations of Canmore and the HC Historic Environment Record indicated that there was also a typical 18th century “lairds house” there; see photo right, taken in 1959. So was there a castle or a house at the site?

The small estate of Kinbeachie, amounting to “a half davoch”, is located in the northwest part of the Black Isle overlooking the Cromarty Firth. Today it is productive arable land but in the 16th century there are references to “the King (*James IV*) hunting in the woodland along the Kinbeachie Burn”. The area of Kinbeachie has almost certainly been associated with the Urquhart family of Cromarty from this time and the family of Urquhart of Kinbeachie itself from the mid-17th century. Research into this family was to be part of the project

Brief Description of the site

The site covers an area, 70m x 50m, of rough grassland in the corner of a field. It comprises 2 parts;

- A. The central part thought to be the site of the castle; the remains here are most substantial in the NW part where the footings of two walls up to 1m in height are at right angles to one another. To the SE there are two indistinct parallel banks which terminate in linear stone settings
- B. The farmstead comprises the footings of 4 (possibly 5) rectangular buildings, a horse gang and a semi-circular yard. The buildings have turf covered stone walls up to 0.5-0.7m height and measure between 10-14m x 4m internally. The horse gang platform is 11.5m diameter. The semi-circular yard is 50m NW-SE x 25m NE-SW and bounded on its curving SW side by a discontinuous sloping retaining wall which has stone facing in places and is generally 0.7m in height.

Above right – 1st Edition OS map
Below right – the site viewed from the SE



The evidence for a castle:

- The Robert Gordon map of 1636-52 (right) based on Timothy Potts map of c1589 has a substantial building marked “Kynbeachy”
- the first mention of a castle in the documents is not until 1876 on the 1st Edition map. The OS Name Book has 3 local people verifying that the building was known as “Kinbeachie Castle”.
- a carved stone with the date of 1546 (right) above a fireplace in the gable end of the lairds house on the photograph of 1959. But was the carved stone moved to Kinbeachie from elsewhere?



Another stone - the magnificent Cromarty Stone (right), sometimes known as the Kinbeachie Stone, was moved here probably in 1818. It was carved for Sir Thomas Urquhart in 1651 and originally above a fireplace in Cromarty Castlem but was re-used at Kinbeachie as a chimneypiece. The stone is seen here in a pre1890 photograph most probably “in the porch of a nearby farm cottage”. The stone was later transferred to the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh in 1923 (Level 1 Ref H.KG96).



The evidence for a lairds house:

- photographs taken by the RCAHMS in 1959 show the almost complete gable of a building. The 2 storey gable with “crow steps” is typical of a lairds house.
- a vignette on a 1769 estate plan (right, traced from a copy of the plan in Inverness Archives) of neighbouring Findon Estate with the annotation “Kinbeachie House”.
- research into the family of “Urquhart of Kinbeachie” on
- the <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> website produced a will of Thomas Urquhart of Kinbeachie (died 1840) which included an inventory and valuation of contents of “the Dwelling House at Kinbeachie”; the house is described as having a parlour, 3 bedrooms and a kitchen with servant’s bed above, typical of a lairds house.

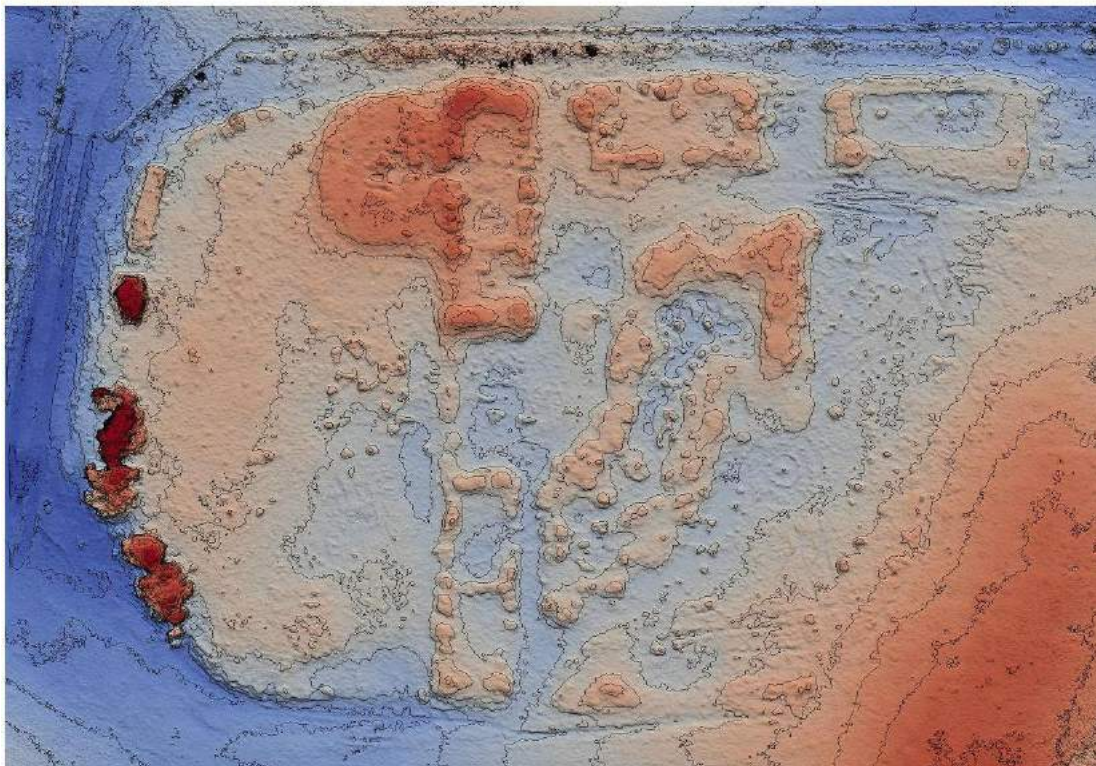
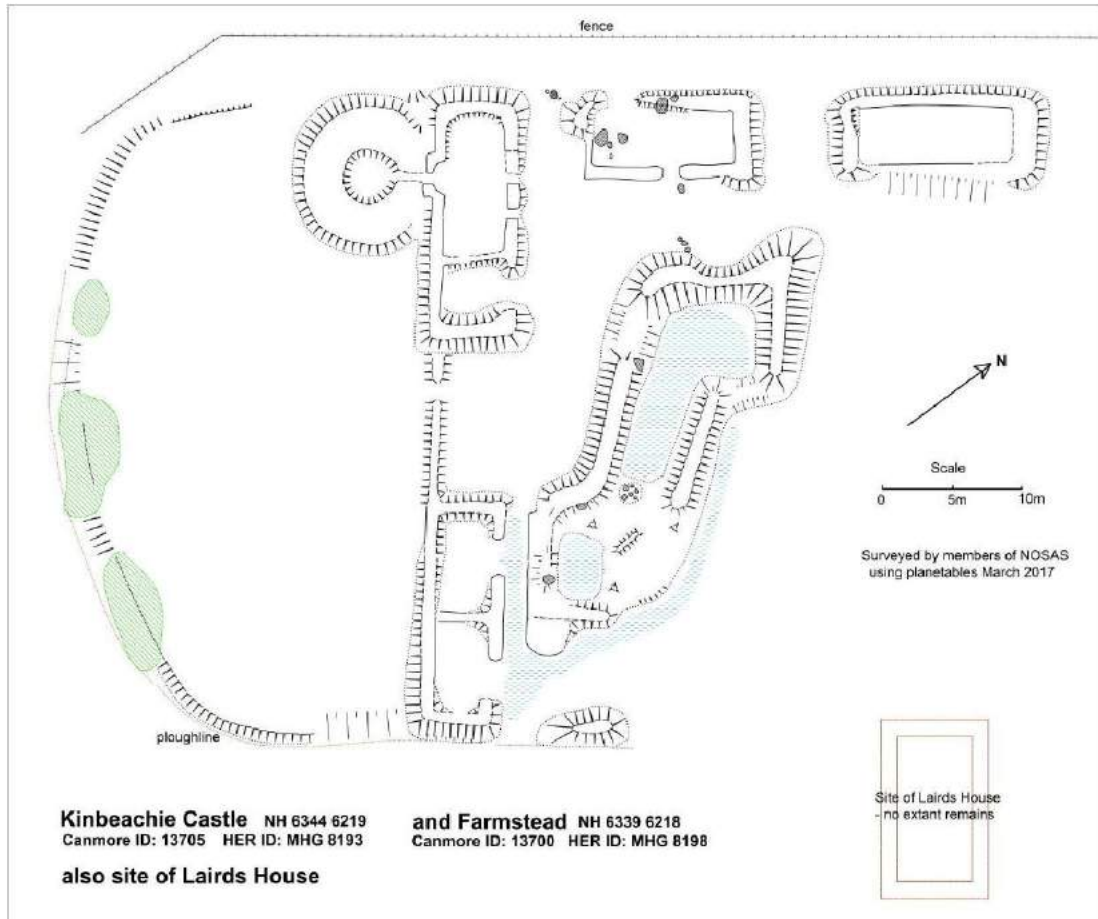


- A list of those paying window tax in the 18th century on the <http://www.scotlandspplaces.gov.uk/> website included Thomas Urquhart of Kinbeachie paying for 8 windows from 1762 to 1778.

This evidence was all very convincing for a “lairds house” but where were the remains of the house?

Results and Conclusions

The main outcomes were the plan and processed aerial photograph below



There has been significant destruction and stone robbing at the site, but after studying what remains there, and the documentary, photographic and map evidence it was possible to arrive at a reasonably confident conclusion.

The buildings of **the farmstead** were not difficult to identify. They are roofed on the 1st Edition OS map and may have been built as part of the improvements that John Urquhart carried out before at the end of the 18th or early 19th century; the sasines of March 1818 in the transfer of land from John have "Thomas Urquhart (*his heir*), Broker, London seised – in Kinbeachie principal Dwelling House, Office houses, and Mill and Mill lands thereof....." (it is probable that the "office houses" here are the farmstead)

By 1840 and the New Statistical Account The NSA of 1836 has: "(Kinbeachie) the property of Thomas Urquhart Esq, who has much improved the lands"

After a careful study of the surface remains at the site, the 1959 photographs and the 1st and 2nd edition OS maps we came to the conclusion that **the "lairds house"** was the

building seen on the 1st and 2nd edition OS maps of 1876 and 1904 as a ruin to the east of the site. There are no traces of it today, the land has been ploughed over and the building has disappeared completely. The building was on a slightly higher piece of ground; the OS maps of 1876, 1904 and 1937-60 (1:25,000) have a ruined building, but there is nothing on the current OS map. The building footings were however still extant in 1966 when the Canmore entry has "the remains of Kinbeachie Castle (*ie. the Lairds House*) comprise the SE wall and the foundations of the NE, NW and SW walls. The SE wall 1.2m in width is extant to a maximum height of 1.7m and total length of 6.6m externally. It is rubble masonry but the E and S angles have been constructed of dressed stones. The inside wall is obscured in a mass of tumble". No such remains are seen at the site today.

We are left, then, with the substantial remains in the central area of the site; this surely must be what remains of **the old castle**, much altered and re-used as one might expect. The two walls at right-angles to one another suggest the foundations of a small medieval tower house which is circa 10.5m x 7-8m. Newmore Castle (below left), near Alness, is similar in size at 10.9m x 7.3m and has a date stone of 1625 although it is said to have existed from 1580. Fairburn Tower too (below right, in 1890) has an even smaller ground plan but is 5 storeys high; it is reported as having been built in the 1540s



It is not unreasonable to think that the old castle would have been used as a byre for animals after it had been deserted; hence the additional remains to the south of the building.

So the answer to the original question “is it a castle or a lairds house?” is both! A report on the project with fuller historical background to the site and the Urquhart family of Kinbeachie will be produced in due course. It will be posted on the NOSAS website and on the usual databases.

Bibliography

David Alston, 1999 - Ross and Cromarty – A Historical Guide, David Alston, 2006 – My Little Town of Cromarty.

Elizabeth Beaton, 1992 - Ross and Cromarty - An Architectural Guide,

W MacGill, 1909 - Old Ross-shire and Scotland as seen in the Tain and Balnagown Documents, Charles Fraser MacIntosh, 1913 - Antiquarian Notes,

Mary Midgley – The Owl of Minerva – A Memoir

Ian Mowat 2003 - Easter Ross 1750-1850 – The Double Frontier, Henrietta Taylor 1946 – History of the family of Urquhart

Meryl Marshall

Now to the last item...



**Year 2018 is going to be very exciting
because its
our 20 YEAR CELEBRATIONS**

**A conference on Community Archaeology will be held
on the weekend of 23/24th March 2018.**

This is being supported by the Highland Council Heritage Team and will be held in the Council Chambers.

At the moment plans are still being worked out but it is hoped that on the Friday evening there will be a keynote presentation.

Saturday will be the Conference and a meal together in the evening.

Sunday, a possible field trip.

Watch this space for developments! Lots to happen.

Editor Jonie Guest