

Highland Archaeology Festival 2010

As usual NOSAS members will be playing an active part in this year's HAF and Meryl Marshall and John Wombell will be leading a walk to Mulchaich on October 12th.

The Mulchaich HAF walk will visit two settlement sites that were almost certainly associated with the production of Ferintosh whisky in the 18th Century and an interesting and unusual chambered cairn that has a cup marked stone in its kerb.

Meet 1.45pm at the Free Church Car Park at Mulchaich NH 574568. Help from NOSAS members would be greatly appreciated for things like organising car parking, "bringing up the rear" and generally keeping people happy.



**Mulchaich
The East Settlement**

The Society's AGM will be held at the Spectrum Centre, Inverness, on Saturday, October 16th, following the HAF seminar session, about 4.50 pm (note - there will be no charge for entry to Spectrum session if you are just coming to the AGM) The agenda for this AGM and last years minutes have already been circulated.

NOSAS Annual Subscriptions were due on September 1st: if you have not already paid somebody will be available to collect them at the AGM

Details of HAF events involving NOSAS members are listed at the end of this Newsletter.

Craggie Bloomery – a serendipitous discovery.

Over the 4 days of September 10th – 13th a team of NOSAS volunteers under the direction of John Atkinson from Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD) evaluated part of a site at Craggie in Glen Oykel, Sutherland, where extensive spreads of iron slag had been noted during field walking earlier this year. It was a ‘Time Team’ style of investigation but without the JCBs and the TV cameras.

The outcome was the discovery of the remains of a shaft furnace for smelting iron. The coincidences began with Gordon Sleight seeking volunteers for the Historic Assynt fieldwork. A curious feature of Inland Assynt is the high concentration of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments but no known rock art. I agreed with Gordon to come over with a small team and field walk targeted areas of Inland Assynt specifically prospecting for rock art. In mid March, Beth Blackburn, Linda Lamb, Trina and myself stayed for a few days at Inchnadamph when we tramped the hills far and wide checking out many hundreds of outcrops and boulders in likely places – all to no avail. The mystery of the apparent absence of rock art in Assynt continues, but we did discover 3 probable new burial Cairns and several other bits and bobs including the spreads of iron slag at Craggie in Glen Oykel.

Shortly before our trip Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) had mounded areas of derelict grassland at Craggie ready for tree planting, and it was on some of these mounds that we discovered the iron slag. On one particular mound was discovered a slab of slag too heavy to lift in one piece. Through the good offices of Matt Ritchie, FCS Archaeologist, John Atkinson of GUARD was engaged to direct the recent evaluation. 2 trenches were set up – one centred on the large slab of slag and the other at right angles to it. Whilst we are used to the ubiquity of small pieces of slag on many archaeological sites none of us had ever experienced excavating a potential iron bloomery site, so we were all delighted to discover that the mechanical excavator had punched a hole through the lava like spread of slag around the base of the remains of a shaft furnace, missing the intact bowl by a matter of inches. Several good samples of charcoal were obtained from secure contexts and we look forward to news of the dates in a few months time. In the second trench an

oval pit packed with charcoal was discovered and a stone tool, about 10cm long with 2 polished faces turned up.

A more detailed article will appear in a later newsletter and the story of the technically challenging shower knob and the embarrassment it nearly caused back at base, must also wait for another day. A few photographs must suffice meantime. Note the natty native headdresses being modelled by the diggers. As ever we had many good laughs. The Friday was fine and sunny, then it drizzled off and on for the other days and the midges were a real nuisance.

Thanks go to FCS for funding the dig and for help with logistics, also to John Atkinson for his excellent direction and for dealing patiently with our endless questions, then last but not least to the happy band of NOSAS volunteers.

John Wombell

Assynt’s Hidden Lives

This Historic Assynt project (see April’s NOSAS News) is now virtually complete and has proved to be a remarkably successful piece of work - in spite of last winter’s weather causing so many problems. The results of all the survey work have been condensed into a very full report (157 pages), and a shorter, more accessible guide to Assynt’s archaeology has been created utilising some of that data. We’ve also produced a Teacher’s Pack, which is being made available to schools locally and nationally, and currently a touring exhibition is doing the rounds of local community centres in conjunction with a series of illustrated talks.

We’ll be reporting more fully on our findings at the HAF Seminars in mid October and the some aspects of the project will feature at the SRP Conference at the end of that month.

We are now working to develop a new project, which will build on both Hidden Lives and the work already done at Clachtoll Broch. If we can get funding then over the next few years we hope to conduct three major excavations across the parish and across time, focussing on a Neolithic cairn, the Broch and one or two buildings within a Pre-improvement township. The Broch excavation will be part of a major programme of stabilisation.

Gordon Sleight

Ruined Building above 900m on Ceannacroc Estate

Whilst hill-walking in 1980 I was surprised to come across a ruined stone structure high on the Munro Top, Tigh Mor na Sealga, in the range of hills between Glen Affric and Loch Cluanie. The remains lie at 910m, a little below the skyline as seen from the north and are easy to miss, amongst the rocky terrain. The OS grid reference is NH 14075 16670 (1:50,000 sheet 34; 1:10,000 sheet NH11NW). I surveyed the ruins in May 2006; my sketch plan and some photographs accompany this report.



The main ruin is rectangular (4m x 7.5m external dimensions); the maximum height of the remaining walls is 1.7m off footings. It is constructed from the schist readily available on site, split along its natural grain and well built with squared corners in neat courses. The walls are generally 0.6m thick. The north-facing front elevation includes a surviving window opening with sill and lintel. There is a suggestion of a further window and door on this same elevation. Most of the walls have fallen into the interior, the south elevation and gables to a greater extent than the north. At the northeast corner a thick wire loop has been incorporated into the footings, presumably to help secure the roof, of which there is no remaining evidence. Though there is some rotting wood lying in the interior, its origins are not readily evident.

There is also an 'outbuilding' set back in line from the main building but runs parallel to it, the rear walls of

both being roughly in line. A number of artefacts were noted around the ruins: a grey, fairly crude, ceramic pot, an iron pot and, perhaps of more recent origin, an iron cauldron.

The ruin is just within Ceannacroc Estate, owned by Martin Girvan. When I spoke to Mr Girvan about the ruin in 2001, he could not recall anyone having known of the building being in use.



Despite a search of standard mountaineering and local history works, as well as RCAHMS Canmore database, I have found no reference to the site. However, thanks to Meryl, my find has been brought to the attention of Noel Fojut of Historic Scotland. He thinks it looks very much like a 'Colby Camp'. These were named after Major-General Thomas Colby (1784-1852), Director of Ordnance Survey 1820-46. The Principal Triangulation of Britain was undertaken in the mid-18th century but the Treasury agreed the need for a Six-Inch survey to be undertaken of parts of Scotland in 1840. Tigh Mor may have been a secondary survey site during that project, having excellent intervisibility with the primary site on Mam Sodhail to the north. It has typical Colby features in terms of location, being on a broad shoulder accessible for men and ponies. A water supply is available from Loch a'Choinich downhill to the northeast. The main triangulation work required very precise readings in clear weather so involved periods of residency. Colby was also responsible for the earlier survey of Ireland; he travelled with his men, helped build camps and arranged mountaintop feasts with huge plum puddings at the end of each survey season, which may account for the cauldron!



I gave another presentation at the British Rock Art Group's annual conference, this year held at the University of Cambridge in May, and got some nice encouragement from the right people. We must get cracking again on fieldwork soon so for the members on the RRAP contact list look out for the call in the next week or two.

Some things have been happening though, and on our way home from Skye a few weeks ago we dropped in again at Carr Brae overlooking Loch Duich and obtained some nice photos. There are two cup marked stones there with spectacular prospects over the loch, one has about 84 cups on it, and some linked by grooves and the other has about 20 cups on it.

My hunch is that the 20 or so cup marked stones in Wester Ross are a vital element in trying to understand rock art in the wider Ross-shire context – a theme I shall attempt to explore further at the upcoming HAF conference.

John Wombell

SRP Conference Events 2010

Saturday 30 October

Workshops and events will be held during the day.

Workshops include:

- Project funding for the future
- Working with schools
- Horrible hachures
- Oral history recording

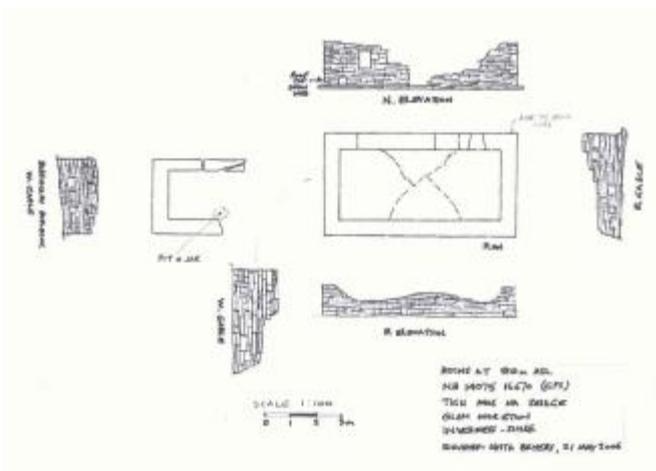
There will also be lots more going on, including a wide range of SRP projects on display, book stalls, a preview of the new SRP training videos, and special SRP clinics to deal with specific data entry issues, all in the wonderful setting of Crieff Hydro.

Sunday 31 October

SRP and RCAHMS will run two guided walks to local rural settlements in the area. The walks are free, but places need to be booked in advance and will be allocated on a first come first served basis if demand is high.

The conference programme and registration details are now available on the SRP website (www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk). Please book early as places are restricted (especially on the guided walks).

Tertia Barnett



I think, besides the Ben Nevis Observatory, this must be one of the highest, once-inhabited building in the British Isles.

Besides Mam Sodhail, there were Colby Camps on Ben Lawers and Ben Alder, amongst many others. This would make a very interesting research project.

Keith Bryers

Ross-shire rock Art Project update

We were badly held back on field work by all the snow in the latter part of the winter, then, once the sun was high in the sky – not good for rock art photography, and lambing started, we more or less gave up for the summer.

Road through Ross-shire' Project

It's been a bit quiet on the 'Road through Ross-shire' Project front for a wee while now, but don't despair. We will be in touch with news of a forthcoming programme of NOSAS activities for winter and spring, very much cheered on by the success of our sister project, ARCH's - 'Pathways into the Past', which both Allan and I have been planning and developing, along with Janet Hooper.

The ARCH courses - exploring the route of the road, the road fragments as measurable features and the very closely associated, mostly, medieval sites that dot the landscape from Tarradale to Tain - are progressing north, this time reaching and teaching in Evanton and Dingwall. To find out more about the ARCH courses and survey days contact Janet at

info@archhighland.org.uk

As I mentioned, the NOSAS arm of investigations, looking at the bigger picture and this year concentrating on the strategic sites along the route, will be continuing with some field trips, survey and targeted research. We will turn to exploring the association of, possibly defensive, features situated at vantage points along not only the Easter Ross littoral route, but also, we hope, along the Black Isle. More on this at a soon forthcoming date.

Cait MacCullagh

New Members

NOSAS membership continues to grow and we would like to take this opportunity to welcome the following new members.

Andrew and Fran Deuchar and Gordon Ross Hugh Woodham

Details of members and membership can be found in the Members' section on the Society's website.

Trina Wombell

ACFA visit the Black Isle

In the autumn each year, between summer digging and winter surveying, The Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists usually embarks on a 'jolly', the maps are rolled out and we plan a long weekend around places, sites and hostelrys to be visited. Several years ago during an expedition based in Helmsdale, we spent two days 'raiding' down to Portmahomack, Tarbat, Nigg and Shandwick - and it was then decided that the Black Isle looked tempting. So in mid September a convoy of sixteen arrived in Cromarty, set up our HQ at The Old Brewery and hit the archaeological hot spots (actually the wet spots - we were assured that this was the first rain in weeks).

We know that this is NOSAS country and most of you are probably well aware of its treasures, but here are some of our best memories.

An afternoon around *Cromarty* with John Wood, in his home town - all the well known gems, the most poignant perhaps the abandoned Old Dairy at the edge of Victoria Park, revealed as a late 17C substantial burgess house, awaiting a lot of TLC and a banker whose bonus survived the recession. What a beauty - and, according to the poster 'Under Offer', so fingers crossed for reprieve and restoration.

On the Saturday, off to *Ormond Castle* above Avoch (very impressive - is there a decent survey of this? There has to be something better than Beaton's 19C muddy sketch), then *Balnagie*, a fine O-C chambered cairn atmospherically sited in a natural wood with attendant rare sheep picturesquely nestled around the massive monoliths, then *Canon Bridge Henge* (sweet, but a shame that absolutely no archaeological monitoring seems to have been done when the surrounding houses went up), and *Carn Mor Dun* (a big fellow but very overgrown with Willow Herb, although we thoroughly enjoyed grazing the brambles and blaeberrys all around!)

Probably an even more magic place before the residential creep of 'luxury' developments began lapping around the wood - we were told there had been a recent excavation here so would be interested to be directed to the results, if published.

Lunch at the excellent Culbokie Inn, then the *Cloutie Well* at Munloch (avoided by some of the party who had been before and preferred to keep their lunch down) and then the wonderful *Groam House Museum* with the stunning Rosemarkie Slab.

We were very concerned to hear that there may be question marks over the funding of independent museums in the Highlands and urge all locals in the NOSAS country to rally to the cause – GHM also has the best selection of Early Historic publications for sale in the country.

From here to *Fortrose Cathedral* with some merry tales from Norman Newton who had joined us for the day, and finally a walk out to the settlement at *Eathie*, clearly a multi-phased deserted settlement remarkably preserved between the forestry and the improved fields below in the valley. Another candidate for a NOSAS survey perhaps, with half a dozen very early looking turf longhouses, field systems and structures, and the shell of the later lone longhouse that replaced this once vibrant community.

A great day, rounded off with a splendid meal and jollification in the Sutor Creel in Cromarty (ACFA Four Trowel recommendation).

On Sunday, up the hill to *St Regulus Graveyard* at the back of Cromarty, with its wonderful collection of table tombs of Black Isle gentry among engulfing pine and yew - and the creep with our torches into the little subterranean mausoleum with its rather sinister small white grave stones. Some very interesting military gentlemen buried here, worthy of a monograph all to itself.

Finally, as the rain really set in, up to the *South Sutor* where our RCAHMS guide, Allan Kilpatrick, took us around what was clearly his labour of love, the stupendous World War fortifications which guarded the channel into the 'inland sea' of the Cromarty Firth – vast gun batteries, mine stations, subterranean magazines, engine houses and encampments gradually being engulfed and sinking back into the scrub. Most amazing, the tiny search light stations on terrifying rock stacks at the foot of the cliffs - what a place to be manning on a heavy night with a huge North Easterly running in! And to think that pre-Allan, some of us thought that Concrete was just – well concrete !

Disbanded in the early afternoon for the run home – some looking in at the Clava Cairns, others heading west to a guided walk around *Knockfarrel Hill Fort* in Strathpeffer. An excellent weekend despite the weather and much more left for a return 'jolly'.

We send you greetings and hope you have had a successful year – we have had teams digging for the fourth Year at the Strathearn Royal Forteviot Project as usual, with GUARD, Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities; at Paisley Abbey Drain to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Cluniac Order and at

community archaeological digs at Kilwinning Abbey and on Bute.

Our regular survey programmes in Glenlochay on Tayside continue; we have begun a two year survey of the island of Rona off Skye and continue with a three year Coastal Survey of Bute with the Buteshire Society as part of the Bute Landscape Project – and we have just published our 103rd survey report, on the huge Shieling Settlement at An Riol in Perthshire, so the work staggers on.

We already share some members and always recommend potential settlers going north to get onto NOSAS.

Ian Marshall

*(Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists,
University of Glasgow)*

NOSAS at HAF, a diary of events

The Archaeology of Strathconon.

Daily, 9.30-4.30pm FREE

Dingwall Auction Mart

Exhibition exploring the results of the NOSAS project to survey and record sites in the glen. 200 years ago, Strathconon was one of the most densely populated areas of the East Highlands. Come along to Dingwall Auction Market (NH546575) and find out how the people survived, about the early prehistoric peoples of the glen, the cattle economy and the shieling system (the NOSAS display is running alongside the Highland Drovers exhibition).

Dr William MacLean - a forgotten collector; the man, his sites and finds.

Monday-Saturday, 10am-5pm Sunday, 2pm-4.30pm

Groam House Museum

Special exhibition at Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie (NH737577). Museum also features a fine collection of Pictish sculptures.

Applecross Broch Conference.

Saturday October 2nd

11am-4pm

The conference programme includes a guided tour of the broch site, led by Cathy Dagg, Cait McCullagh and Mary Peteranna; presentations from Professor Ian Armit, Steven Birch, Dr. Fraser Hunter, Dr Beverley Ballin-Smith, Tanya Romanciewicz, and an open forum chaired by Dr Noel Fojut of Historic Scotland. Registration: 10:30am - 10:55am at the Flower Tunnel Cafe, Applecross Campsite For more information and conference bookings please contact Cait at applecrossbroch@googlemail.com.

Exploring Carn Irenan Chambered Cairn.

Monday October 4th

2pm-3.30pm

A guided tour of Carn Irenan chambered cairn, one of a cluster of Neolithic burial cairns on the Black Isle. Meet on the lane leading to the cairn (NH566522). For parking arrangements, contact ARCH office. Free event, children welcome if accompanied by parent/ guardian.

ARCH Tel: 01349 868230

Ledbeg

Wednesday October 6th

10.30am - 3.30pm -

Exploring the archaeology of an area dominated by the largest concentration of burial cairns in the NW Highlands. Meet at lay-by on A837 just north of Ledmore Junction NC247 126

tel. 01571 855207 01571 855207

The Picts that were in Edderton.

Wednesday October 6th

10am-12.30pm

Join Reay D. G. Clarke for a tour of the places where the Picts left their mark in Edderton - including a standing stone, a stone circle, and Pictish carved stones in graveyard and East Church.

Meet at Edderton East Church car park (NH719842).

Walking a Pathway into the Past in Dingwall.

Thursday October 7th

2pm-4pm

Join ARCH for an opportunity to discover part of an ancient and historic routeway from Tarradale to Tain as it passes above Dingwall. Walk this pathway and visit a possible early Christian chapel site.

Meet at Tulloch Castle (NH547603).

ARCH Tel: 01349 868230

The Hill of Edderton - A Former Crofting Community.

Friday October 8th

10am-12.30pm

Join Reay and Jane Clarke for visit to Hill of Edderton to see old croft sites, cruck-framed cottage, and photos and records of former crofts.

Meet at Edderton East Church car park (NH719842).

Reay and Jane Clarke Tel: 01862 821206

Clyne Parish Townships Walk.

Sunday October 10th

10.30am-5pm

ClyneHeritage Society, under the leadership of Nick Lindsay, will be leading a trip to the cleared townships of Muimore, Foik and Achness, on the banks of the River Skinsdale, in the parish of Clyne in Sutherland. In these townships there are the fascinating remains of longhouses, enclosures, corn-drying kilns, tattie pits and cultivation strips, extremely well preserved and not touched

since they were vacated 190 or so years ago. There might also be the possibility of visiting one of the most spectacular brochs in the Highlands, Castle Cole, precariously placed high above the gorge carrying the Skinsdale. A visit not to be missed!

Approx 3km walking over rough terrain. Meet at Brora Heritage Centre (NC897043) or by prior

arrangement at Balnacoil in Strath Brora. Stout footwear, all-weather gear and a packed lunch essential.

Nick Lindsay Tel: 01408 621338 or nicklindsay@btinternet.com

Glenleraig

Tuesday October 12th

10.30am - 3.30pm

Exploring the archaeology of a glen, which contains possible round houses, a well-preserved souterrain and an extensive pre-clearance settlement. Meet at lay-by on B869 between Glenleraig and Ardvar NC159 317

Bring a packed lunch. Historic Assynt Tel. 01571

833246 01571 833246

Prehistoric Inverness

Tuesday October 12th

2pm-3pm

Past finds and recent excavations have shown the importance of Inverness, particularly the Culduthel area, in prehistoric times, although little remains to be seen on the ground. This illustrated talk explores many of the interesting sites and finds.

Hilton Community Centre, Oldtown Road, Inverness.

ARCH Tel: 01349 868230

Pre-Improvement Settlements with a Whisky Connection at Ferintosh.

Tuesday October 12th

2pm- 4.30pm

A visit to an unusual chambered cairn with cup marked stones and two pre-improvement settlements, both of which probably had a part to play in the production of Ferintosh whisky in the 18th century.

Meet at Ferintosh Free Church car park (NH574568) for walk of 3kms (including some rough stretches). Numbers may be limited - call to book. NOSAS Tel: 01349 861824

World War II Mica Mines of Scatwell.

Wednesday October 13th

10am-1pm

Explore the Mica mines of the Scatwell area and learn of their importance and use during WWII. A bit of geology and archaeology in one.

Meet at the Luichart Power Station, Strathconon (NH 393571).

Walking over steep rough ground but not too far from vehicle tracks. Suitable for teenagers and adults. Adults £3 / Children £2/ Conc £2.

Easter Ross Ranger Tel: 01349 868563

**Dr Maclean and the Excavations at Caird's Cave,
Rosemarkie.**

Wednesday October 13th

12.30-1.30pm

Lunchtime talk by Chris and Dave Rendell at the Averon Centre,
Alness. Admission £1.

WEA North Highland Local Association Tel: 01463 710577

**A Walk on the Dark Side - in Black Rock Gorge,
Evanton.**

Thursday October 14th

1pm-4pm

Join Bob Pegg from Walking the Stories and Susan Kruse from
ARCH for a walk through Black Rock Gorge in Evanton,
exploring the legends and heritage of the area, including the
sinister tale of the Lady of Balconie. We'll finish off at the
Cornerstone Cafe for refreshments and a look at their heritage
displays, including one created by participants on an ARCH
Community Timelines course. Children welcome if accompanied
by parent/guardian. Meet at Cornerstone Cafe in Evanton.
Public parking across the street. Bus stop close by.

ARCH and Walking the Stories

Tel: 01349 868230

What's New in Highland Archaeology?

Saturday October 16th

10am-5pm

Seminar at the Spectrum Centre, Inverness. Organised by The
Highland Council Archaeology Unit, this event provides a
platform for archaeologists who have recently been working in the
Highlands to present the results of their work to local people and
visitors. Booking essential – admission £15 per day or £25 two
days, including lunch. Highland Council Archaeology Unit Tel:
01463 718505

**The Medieval Moat of David's Fort – Conon
Bridge.**

Saturday October 16th

10am-1pm

Explore the mysterious medieval moat and fort situated close to
Conon Bridge along with other features. What went on here
during medieval times? Meet at Forest entrance on Bishop Kinkell
road just off Conon Bridge to Muir of Ord road (NH 539535).
Walking over steep rough ground but not too far from vehicle
tracks. Suitable for teenagers and adults. Adults £3 / Children £2/
Conc £2.

Easter Ross Ranger Tel: 01349 868563

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01463 718505

A Walk Along an Old Moidart Track

Sunday October 17th

11am-3.30pm

Join Moidart Local History Group for a walk from Brunery to
Dalita, examining evidence of agriculture, arboriculture, funeral
practices and hydraulic engineering.

Meet at Brunery lay-by (NM727718). Bring a packed lunch and
binoculars.

Comann Eachdraidh Muideart

Tel: 01967 43122

Brora's Contribution to Scotland's Salt Industry.

Wednesday October 20th

7.30pm-9.15pm

A public lecture by Jacquie Aitken, Archivist of Clyne Heritage
Society, at Millburn Academy, Victoria Drive, Inverness.

**Old Inverness - The Paintings of Pierre Delavault
1859-1907.**

Thursday October 21st

12.30pm-1.30pm

In 1903 the Inverness Courier published a book of watercolour
drawings of Inverness Buildings, with accompanying
text. Pierre Delavault was born in Paris, but came to Inverness as
the Art Master at Inverness Royal Academy in 1890. His book is
an important source of information for buildings that have now
disappeared. Illustrated talk by Norman Newton at the Highland
Archive Centre. Admission £1.

WEA Inverness & Area Local Association Tel: 01463 710577

KILLEARNAN MEMORIES

Do you have memories, stories and knowledge of local
buildings, past and present, archaeological sites,
roadways and other landscape features in and around
the parish of Killearnan?

Would you like to share your memories, stories and
knowledge?

Come along to one, some or all of the sessions at
KILLEARNAN CHURCH HALL
on Tuesday 16th, 23rd and 30th November
and 7th December
10am to 12.30pm

Further information and help with transport from
Sandra Bain on 01463 811273 or Sbtore@aol.com