

## NEWSLETTER December 2012

### Dates for your diary

Friday 14th December, 6.30 for 7 pm  
NOSAS Christmas Dinner at Coul House

Saturday 15th December 10.30 am start  
Post Dinner Activities at Strathpeffer - John Wombell (If you are not going to the dinner, further information from John tel. 01997 423273)

January 2013

Beaully Denny Power Line Development

Possible invitation to open day at Balblair, near Beaully, to site of dig of hut circles, prior to transformer station expansion

Tuesday 29th January - all day and evening  
morning: workshop about working with the Scottish Coastal Heritage at Risk Project (SCH@RP)  
afternoon: visit to Cromarty Firth coast  
evening MAD: More about SCH@RP  
- Jo Hambly



Tuesday 26th February

MAD: The Rising Tide Project: recent archaeological fieldwork on underwater Orkney  
- Caroline Wickham-Jones, Aberdeen University



end March

Field Day for members - to be led by Steve Boyle and/or Piers Dixon, both of RCAHMS

### NOSAS Development Plan

As discussed at the AGM in October AOC have been instructed to prepare a Development Plan for NOSAS to help us to form a strategy for the Society covering the next 5 years. This should also assist us with raising project funding. The first draft of the plan was issued a few days before the AGM and Andy Heald of AOC made a brief presentation at the meeting.

Since early October the committee has had extensive discussion on the draft document. The final document should be available on the members pages of the website shortly.

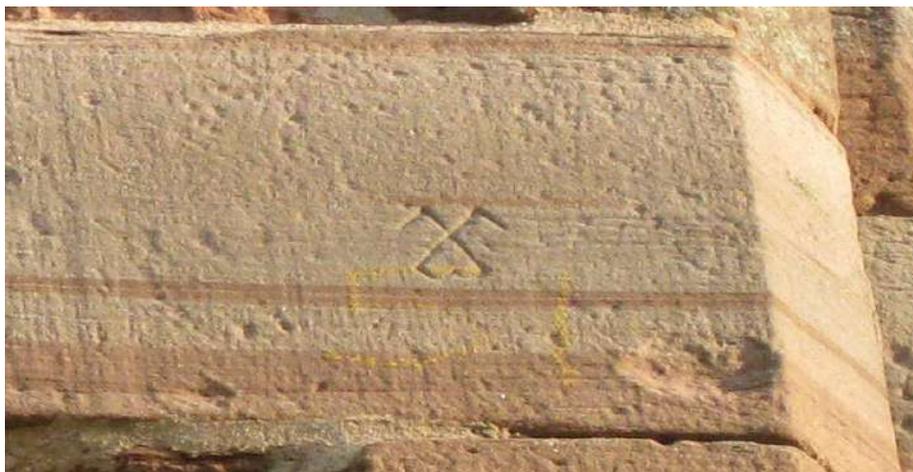
The Plan outlines suggestions to streamline the operation of the committee by adopting a strategy of making more use of sub-committees and having fewer meetings of the full committee. The Plan also covers in some detail suggestions for the way forward in prioritising and funding future projects. This area has already been tackled by the projects sub committee and progress is being made.

A proposal may be made to change the constitution of the society so that we can become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). This would require discussion and approval by the full membership.

### **Recording masons' marks in Highland**

Aberdeenshire Council as part of its outreach programme started a 'Masons' Marks in NE Scotland Project' a while back. This link will take you to the single web page that tells you a bit about it.

[www.aberdeenshire.gov.UK/archaeology/projects/MasonsMarksProject.asp](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.UK/archaeology/projects/MasonsMarksProject.asp)



*Mason's mark at Beaully Priory*

*John Wombell*

Having been intrigued by the marks found on the Old Salt House at Brora in 2010 and 2011, and whilst on guiding duty this summer at Castle Leod on a very quiet day I recorded all the masons marks I could see inside and outside the castle. Subsequently Jo Hambly of SCAPE put me in touch with Aberdeenshire Council. Since her retirement Moira Greig, the former senior Aberdeenshire Archaeologist, has taken over the Masons' Marks Project and has established a data base that is soon to go active on line.

NoSAS has been invited by Moira to record masons' marks in Highland and submit the data to her to add to the NE Scotland data base. A simple recording method has been established. Recording masons' marks ideally suits a single person or small group out for the company as well as the interest. Costs are nil apart from any travel involved and we can think of it as an activity rather than a project. If any member would like to participate please get in touch with me and I'll send you more information, examples of masons' marks and how to record them. We would need to keep a register of buildings and structures recorded and that's about it.

John Wombell

## A day near Tomatin

Following a few 'knock backs', our Farigaig project group have moved to the Tomatin area. On 30th November six of us met on a cold bright morning at the old Raigbeg school just NE of Tomatin. We hoped to continue surveying a couple of townships we'd found earlier in the year. On discovering that rough shooting was due to take place anywhere on the Corrybrough estate, we had to change tack once more. Using George's local knowledge we headed a few miles up Strathdearn to the old township of Banchor (NH 762 240), within a meander of the River Findhorn. A number of buildings have been recorded on the 1st Edition OS map and on the HER but we were able to find several more.

The main L-shaped building with some walls to over a metre in height was, on inspection, more likely two buildings of different dates. Also footings of a barn, a large enclosure and a well-preserved corn drying kiln were found. Close to the main track were footings of two further buildings, one cut through by the track. To our delight we also found a well-preserved lime kiln on the south side of the track, as well as footings of a building.



*Lime kiln*

*Bob Jones*



*The cairn field*

On a flattish-topped knoll crossed by the march fence we identified the two cairns marked on the current OS map but also several more. Lengthy discussion took place as to their origin and use, concluding they were more than likely burial cairns, as the surrounding ground showed no signs of clearance or cultivation. The largest of the cairns measured 10m in diameter.

Near the junction of the fence boundaries, overgrown with broom and rushes, we discovered the footings of 5 or 6 buildings, two of which measured 10m x 4m with an outshot on the north side, and a particularly large enclosure. Heading down towards the river again another settlement was found consisting of three buildings and another very well preserved corn-drying kiln. An uncertain day had turned into a most successful one - we plan to return.

Elspeth Kennedy

## A day out at Urchany, 5 miles west of Beaulieu

Not another cup-marked stone! Well, three actually! It quite made John's day.

For some years I had known about the deserted settlements of Urchany. There's something quite magical about the setting – a scatter of ruined houses, cairns and round-houses on a south-facing slope with hills all around. And a long way from anywhere! I had wanted to walk an archaeologist out there for some time, and then today (9th December) I had the opportunity to walk 10 of them! We walked past the round houses and cairns of Allt na Criche, up to the well-known cup-marked stone at the top of the green fields of Urchany and then beyond to an area that doesn't seem well known. It's not well represented in the HER.



*Urchany cup-marked stone* Alan Thompson



*Roland lifting the moss*

*Jonie Guest*

our attention. Was that shallow dimple a cup-mark? We scraped away bits of obscuring moss and I lifted up a large slab of earth and roots to .....

"Amazing, oh wow!" In a line under the lifted slab were three perfect cup-marks. A real find. So, that made three new cup-marked stones to add to the record. Not a bad day! Even John was impressed.

And it just makes us realise that the whole area should be properly surveyed and recorded. There may be more cup-marked stones. We need to record all the ruined houses. And we need to make more sense of that large round earthwork. There is always so much more to do!

A few showers along the way didn't really detract from a basically sunny day. Lunch was sheltering behind a wall, with our backs to the wind and the sun on our faces. And then on to a ridge and a valley that represents a fine Bronze Age landscape. While some of us on the ridge were trying to make sense of a large round earthwork, a shout from John in the valley told us he had probably found a cup-marked stone. When we got down to see it, we found another stone with probable cup-marks. And then a third stone caught



*to find cupmarks underneath*

*Jonie Guest*

Roland Spencer-Jones

## Conon House Ringed Earthwork – is it a henge or some sort of fortification?

Located about 200m to the SW of Conon House in woodland which is part of the designed landscape around the house, this site was surveyed using plane tables in the Spring of 2011 by members of NOSAS and is something of a mystery. But first the site had to be cleared.



The site is centred on NH 5320 5372 and is previously unrecorded. It appears on an estate plan of 1830 as a complete circular earthwork and on an estate plan of 1791 it has been respected and not taken into the enclosed and improved landscape. The row of planted beech trees which fringes the south side of the earthwork is seen on this plan of 1791.

At least half the site, which is 50m in diameter overall, has been grossly disturbed and only an arc of at least one third of the original earthwork remains on the SE side. The west part of the site has excavated hollows and prominent mounds of dumped material containing stones and charcoal rich material. The intact sector of the internal bank is 8m broad x 1m high, with a possible entrance, 2m in width, in the east. The external ditch is about 4m width. It can be estimated from this arc of that the complete earthwork would have been 30m in diameter from top of bank to top of bank.



Is it a henge? – Henges usually have an external bank and internal ditch; however there are some with internal banks and external ditches and many henges have “entrances” in the SE or E sectors. There are several henges in the vicinity of Conon and this one lies more or less equidistant between two of them, Conon and Dugary/Logieside. Conon henge is much smaller but Dugary and Culbokie henges are a similar size to this one.

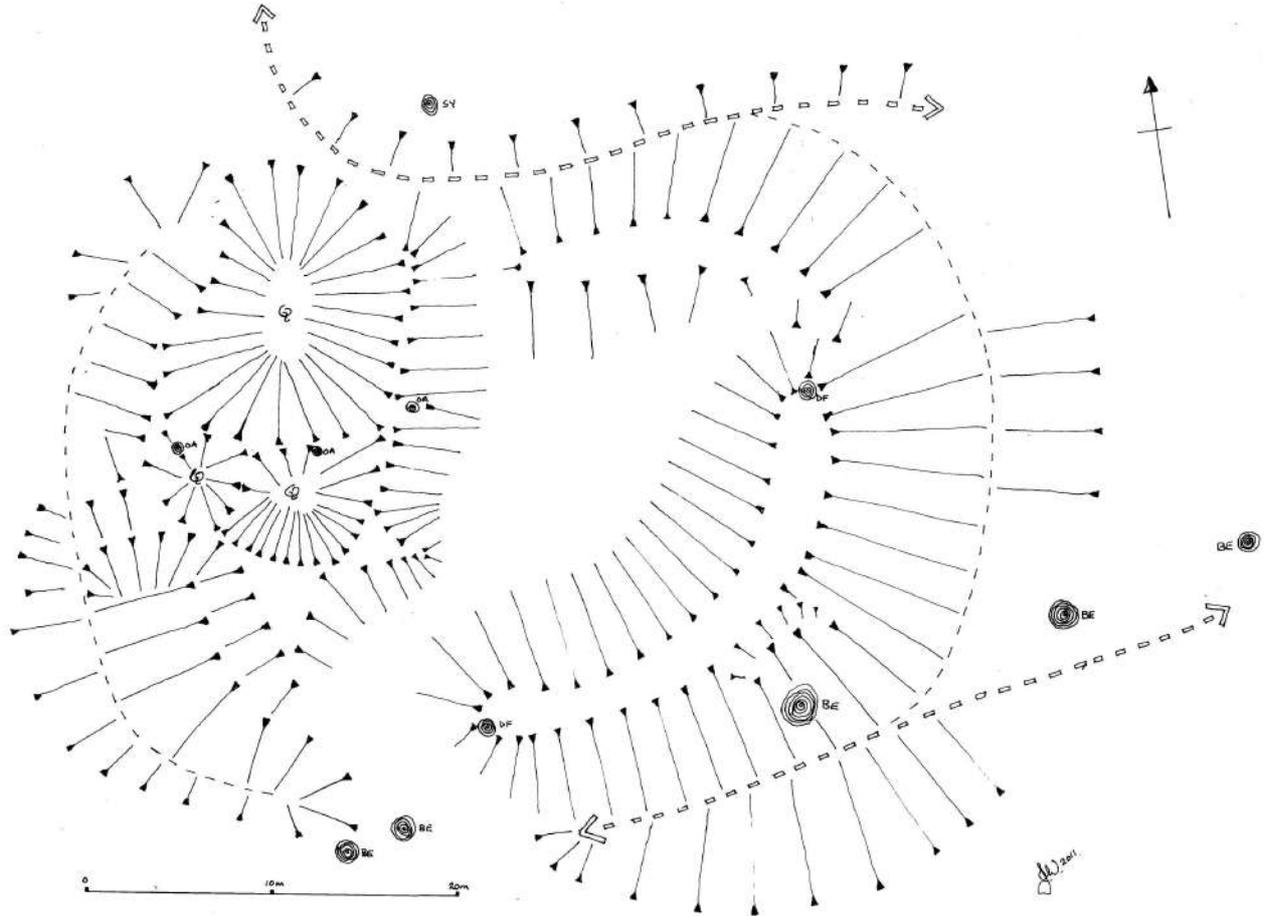
Is it a fortification? – As with many fortifications this site has an internal bank and external ditch. Its situation next to Conon House may indicate that this was a long established centre. Certainly it is in a very strategic position, at a river crossing and a few hundred metres below the medieval ditched earthwork of David's Fort. In addition the battle of Lagabraad (Logiebride) was fought here in 1481; Angus Og Macdonald, son of John, the fourth Lord of the Isles defeated the army of James III led by the Earl of Atholl and the Mackenzie of Kintail at the ford of Conon.

Meryl Marshall

Conan House  
 Ringed Earthwork  
 Surveyed by NOSAS  
 Date 21 04 2011  
 MM, BB, MR, TW, JW  
 Scale 1:200

⊙ = Mature Tree  
 BE = BEECH  
 DF = DOUGLAS FIR  
 OA = OAK  
 SY = SYCAMORE

⊕ = Quanned Area  
 □ □ □ = Footpath  
 - - - = Bottom of Ditch



## SURE Caledonian Canal Project

Scottish Canals have set up a pilot project to review and update the information recorded on CANMORE covering the Caledonian Canal. The project is being lead by Dr Sabina Strachan, Heritage Advisor Scottish Canals, as a pilot scheme with the intention of then carrying out similar projects on the other Scottish canals.



Canal basin at Clachnaharry

SURE (Specialist User Recording Environment) was launched by RCAHMS in December 2011. It allows up to the minute archaeological and heritage data from partners in national, local and third sector organisations across Scotland to be held and updated in one place, online. Partners can enter information directly into the RCAHMS Canmore database and instantly publish the results of their work for public and professional access – any additions or changes are live and visible as soon as they are made. SURE was highly commended in the Best Archaeological Innovation category of the British Archaeological Awards.



*Wreck near Clachnaharry*

The project started in mid October with a training and familiarisation session in Fort Augustus with representatives of Scottish canals and RCAHMS, this was followed by a similar session based at the canal offices at Muirtown Inverness and included a visit to the Highland Archive.

The group includes 7 NOSAS members, 3 from ARCH and 4 students. We have now split into small groups so that we can target specific locations on the canal to do detailed investigation and

survey work. Our findings are being used to update, correct and expand the existing CANMORE records. The project is scheduled to run for a year.

David Findlay

### **Tarradale Archaeological Project Update**

The Tarradale archaeological project got off to a very good start last year with test pit investigation of a large shell midden that in addition to containing millions of shells (construed to be food wastes) also yielded potentially datable pieces of antler and bone. The field walking programme was also very successful in recovering a large number of lithics, including a tanged and barbed arrowhead, and more pieces of medieval pottery scattered throughout the fields than had been expected. This points to a significant medieval presence at Tarradale.

It is proposed to carry on field walking this winter (some of the fields have just been ploughed) - look for an email early in the New Year - while the project steering group is putting together the research design for the next phase of the project.

Eric Grant

### **Mulchaich Work Party - Saturday 1st December 2012**

The project to prepare the distillery and the chambered cairn at Mulchaich for visits from the public and to present it under the Adopt-a-Monument scheme is now in full swing. On Saturday we had a successful work party, although, as usual, we were over-ambitious and failed to achieve all our objectives! Thirteen people turned up to help on a cold but bright sunny day. Broadly speaking we had two aims: firstly to investigate the bog which we thought might originally have been a pond used to provide water for the distillation process; and secondly to clean out the bowl of the kiln.

We thought that the pond, which is supplied by a well, might have had a dam holding the water back and so the first task was to remove the coppiced willow stools that had split off and fallen onto what we were speculating was once the dam of now tumbled stones – the result of this action was inconclusive! So next the overgrown rushes were cut down as close to the stones as possible – again inconclusive! But it did display the change in slope to better advantage: the upper part of the bog, which had a "suspicious looking" change of vegetation, seemed to be on a more gentle sloping platform.



*Clearing the willow*



*Lunchtime was a welcome break*



*Grid across pond*

*David Findlay*

On a previous visit we had probed the bottom of the upper part of the bog ("supposed pond") and it seemed to "bottom out" on a firm surface - was this natural or manmade? We needed to investigate. In the afternoon a grid was put over the bog/pond and both surface levels and depth levels were taken – not a nice job! The feet soon got cold when standing in wellie boots in freezing cold water. However it produced rewards! We were surprised to discover that the readings for the firm surface under the pond were

shallower at the lower end and this coincided with the change in slope of the bog; we interpreted this as a dam of material as yet to be determined.

Meanwhile the "kiln-bowl team" were getting to grips with removal of the fill in the bowl and it wasn't long before the nice stonework of the internal face began to appear. The bowl itself was much smaller than we had anticipated and working in it was a bit cramped so we took turns. The kiln team made good progress on the bowl in the afternoon but failed to complete the work and we packed up at about 3.30pm as the day got colder and the light began to go.



*The kiln bowl at the end of the day*

We plan to return in the New Year to get to the bottom of it, to find the flue exit and also to expose the front wall and the flue entrance. There are plans too for more investigation of the pond.

All in all a good day and we were so lucky with the weather.

Meryl Marshall

### **Webmaster**

Roland Spencer-Jones has now taken over as webmaster.

The committee and I would like to Alastair Morton for all his hard work on the website over the last few years.

Anne Coombs