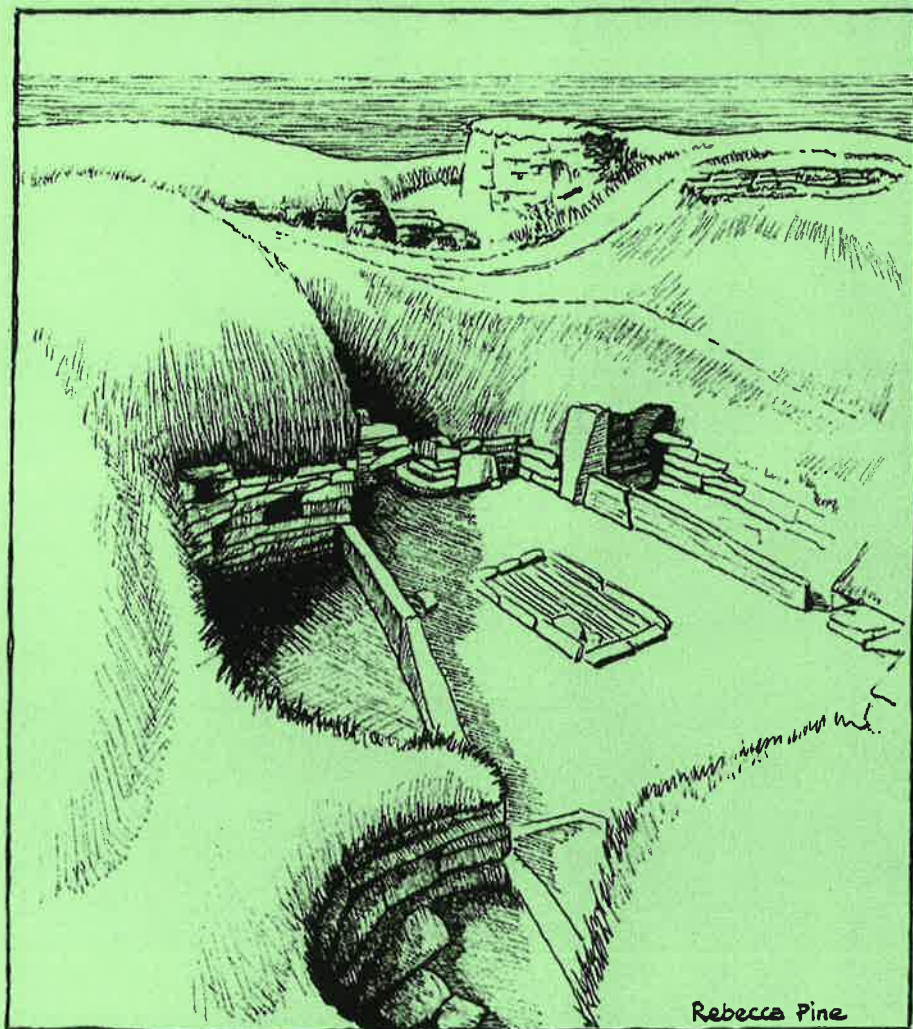


# SKARA BRAE ORKNEY



## KIST, 70

# **THE KIST**

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## **Editorial**

I am using new computer software to compile this edition: Serif page plus. This means that future contributions should be in text only format not Word. Please send non-text items (e.g. Photographs and drawings) separately. Ideally phone or email me beforehand so we can discuss your proposed contribution (handwritten contributions still welcome) A big thank you to all our contributors: please keep on writing! Thanks also to Scot an Sgeulaiche and Rebecca Pine for help with this edition.

Please note new prices: from 1 Sept. 2005 subscriptions to NHASMA will be £5 individual, £7 for couples and copies of the Kist £1.50.

Would you be interested in purchasing binders for your back copies of KIST? You may know of such binders; indeed, your back copies may be stored in them. They are still available from a firm in Blackburn who can supply us with a minimum order. They are plum-coloured, the spine carries our cross logo and the words KIST and NHASMA. If you are interested in purchasing (cost likely to be approx. £5 for a single binder holding 12 copies) from us please contact me. If we get a good response we can make a bulk order (we have to order at least 50).

This edition will contain the first of what is likely to become a regular slot: a digest of fresh discoveries and excavations in our area. It is gleaned from the Journal of the Council of Scottish Archaeology and the focus this time will be on crannogs.

We are all deeply saddened by the news of the sudden passing of J. N. Graham Ritchie. Members will recall that he spoke at our 50th anniversary dinner; he had also recently contributed an excellent article for our anniversary edition of KIST. Our thoughts are with his widow Anna (a well- respected archaeologist in her own right) and family.

## **PLATFORM EXCAVATION AT TAYNISH**

J. Atkinson and B. Ballin-Smith

### **Introduction**

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) commissioned Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD) to carry out partial excavation of a charcoal burning/recessed platform on the Tainish Nature Reserve, Argyll, during September 2003. This involved the removal of topsoil and charcoal layers onto the platform surface and an investigation of the platform construction that identified possible different phases of use. Nearly all of the platform was uncovered, revealing a revetting wall, evidence of charcoal production and artificial banks surrounding most of the site.

The excavation of the platform formed part of an overall plan by SNH that would involve the reconstruction of a charcoal burning hearth and the presentation of the excavated site to be viewed by members of the public. The platform site and reconstruction would then form a part of the recently opened Barr Mór trail and would draw attention to the historical importance of the area. An integral part of the project was the use of local volunteers, supervised by two members of GUARD, to help with the excavation work.

Using a previous numbering system for the platforms of the Tainish peninsula (Rennie 1997), the platform reported on here is number 18. The western side of the peninsula contains a ridge known as the Barr Mór, which reaches a height of 110 m. The platform is situated on the steep southern slopes of Barr Mór within an area of coppiced oak woodland.

The site was accessed by the Barr Mór Trail, which leads off the western side of a single file track approximately 300 m to the south-west of the Gate House. The site is positioned approximately one third of the way up the slopes of Barr Mór. The trail runs between two platform sites, with the excavated one detailed here towards its eastern end. The ground cover within the oak woodland consists of grass and moss with the occasional holly bush and oak sapling. The ground is relatively free of dense undergrowth, despite the penetration of good light through the oak canopy, due to the grazing of local deer herds.

Upon arrival at the site it was covered with grass and ferns. It was clear that a level platform had been built into the hillside, with a retaining wall faintly visible on the eastern side under grass and moss.

## **Archaeological Background**

The sites noted by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland on the Taynish peninsula include the charcoal platforms situated on the slopes of Barr Mór, the grouping includes the site reported here; an excavated platform (Rennie 1997) located on the shores of Loch Mhuirich, a deserted settlement to the north of Barr Mór; a crannog site on the shores of Lochan Taynish, and a rock shelter on the eastern shore of Loch Mhuirich.

Previous archaeological work on the Taynish peninsula appears to have been limited to the platform sites. These sites are widespread throughout Argyll and the west coast of Scotland as a whole and are so called because they frequently appear as sub-circular platforms that have been built into the hillside. They often are built up on the down slope side and cut into the higher slope at the rear. This creates a level platform, sometimes on a very steep slope. A stone retaining wall is often, although not always, found on the down slope side.

The platform sites in Argyll and Bute have been thoroughly and extensively documented by E Rennie (1992, 1997). She has previously excavated two sites on the Taynish peninsula that fall within the broad category of platform sites. These were platforms 4 and 16, using the numbering system she developed (Rennie 1997). The results of these two excavations suggested that the platforms had two phases of use. Postholes identified beneath the charcoal burning layers have been interpreted as a base for timber structures that pre-date the platforms' use as charcoal burning platforms (Rennie 1997).

Lindsay (1975, cited in Rennie 1992) has researched the use of charcoal in the iron smelting process and charcoal production itself. It appears, from excavation and historical sources, that the platform sites were used as charcoal burning platforms in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century to produce the vast amount of charcoal required for industrial processes. The main destination of charcoal produced on the Taynish peninsula platforms would have been the iron smelting furnaces at Bonawe and Furnace.

## **Conclusions**

Clearing and partial excavation of Platform 18, Taynish, revealed a well built structure with clear evidence that it was used to make charcoal.

The platform consisted of a level surface created by the partial



levelling of the natural hill slope at the rear (west) and the building up with rubble and redeposited sub soil to the front (east). The built-up material was retained by a coarse dry stone retaining wall on the eastern (down slope) side (see plate 1).

A substantial bank was created from large boulders and earth on the southern, south-western and western sides, which gave protection from the prevailing winds on the unprotected, slightly down slope, side of the structure. The northern and north-eastern sides were sheltered by the natural hill slope, which had been exaggerated by depositing rough cobbles and soil.

A crude entrance way was uncovered on the WNW side of the platform (see plate 2). Rough cobbling was present in front of the retaining wall and continued beyond the excavated area. There was no evidence of features on the platform surface.

The charcoal layer (002) and the scorched areas on the platform surface provide clear evidence that the structure was used for burning charcoal. The thin lens of redeposited silt (006) present within charcoal layer (002) may have resulted from the last firing of the charcoal burning stack, where the stack of wood was covered in turf to allow the necessary reducing conditions for charcoal formation.

The formation of the charcoal is a delicate process. The stack must be in a sheltered position to prevent over burning of the wood (Rennie 1992). Once started, the burning process would need to be attended 24 hours a day. The substantial bank on the southern side of Platform 18 would have provided the required shelter to allow the controlled burning to take place. In some documented cases more than one platform was in use at the same time, attended by one or two individuals (Walker 2001) who would build a temporary shelter in the woodland. This gives an insight into why no artefactual material was recovered from the excavation, as the likelihood of finding artefacts such as pottery on the burning surface is slim. These are more likely to be recovered where the temporary shelter was located. This may also explain why Platform 18 is in close proximity to two or three other platforms. This would allow tending of more than one charcoal burn by one or two individuals.

No evidence for numerous burning cycles was revealed during excavation. This is to be expected, as all the useful charcoal would have been removed after each burn and the surface cleared in preparation for the next one. The construction of the platform suggests that it was, or

was meant to have been, used over a relatively long period of time.

Overall, Platform 18 differs from other excavated examples in the area in that no evidence for occupation or use prior to the charcoal burning was found. It is feasible to suggest that Platform 18 is an example of a structure built for the sole purpose of charcoal production, while the other examples of charcoal burning platforms were utilizing earlier platform sites.

### **Test pit in second platform**

At the request of John Halliday of SNH, a test pit was excavated over a second platform situated approximately 30 m to the west of Platform 18. The purpose of this was to investigate the potential for features existing on the platform surface that were not apparent on the main excavated platform. A test pit measuring 3 m square was opened over the platform surface against the north-eastern bank. Beneath the topsoil was a brown sand/silt deposit with high organic content and frequent small charcoal pieces. Beneath this lay a bright orange silt with evidence of burning patches. This was taken to be the charcoal burning surface. No evidence of any features, for example post holes, was identified. The platform appears to be of similar construction to platform 18, in that it has a level surface bounded by a bank to the north and north-west and a retaining wall to the south. The bank and wall were less substantial here than on Platform 18.

### **Acknowledgement**

Thanks go to Eland Stuart, who supervised the excavation, and John Halliday, whose interest and help during the excavation were much appreciated. All the volunteers worked hard and enthusiastically, and without their help the clearing and excavation would not have been possible.

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Retaining wall and partially uncovered platform surface

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## **THE MAGIC OF MAPS: Timothy Pont's manuscript sketch map of the Mid Argyll area** by Fiona Campbell Byatt

Four centuries ago one of Scotland's lesser known heroes left St Andrew's University in 1583 and embarked on a walking tour to draw



and make maps of his native land. His name was Timothy Pont. Although nothing can detract from Pont's amazing achievement in mapping the whole of Scotland, it is interesting to consider how he did it and what information he might have had access to.

While at University and in Edinburgh he could have seen the first printed maps of Scotland. *The Early Maps of Scotland* (edited by D.W. Moir, The Royal Geographic Society 1983) lists four available sources: Claudius Ptolemaeus (known as Ptolemy, c. AD 150). This map was printed in 1482 in Germany and gives a rough outline of Scotland. Of more use was the map made by Gerard Mercator (1512-94). This was published in Paris in 1595 by Mercator's son and owes a great deal to a "Rutter" or sea chart published earlier by Nicolas de Nicolay in 1583 and based on a manuscript first known in 1546. There is a letter from Nicolay to Henry II of France which explains the origins of the sea chart. Nicolay had been shown it while in London at the court of Henry VIII. It contained an account of *The Voyage of King James V of Scotland made round his Kingdom under the guidance of Alexander Lyndsay an excellent pilot and hydrographer*. This journey took place in 1540, sailing from Leith in June and arriving at Dumbarton at the end of July. In *The Early Maps of Scotland* we find that Alexander Lyndsay's name is recorded as one of the crew of the *Great Michael* built at Newhaven for the earlier James IV in 1513. Could this be the same "Excellent Pilot" that we hear of in 1540 and who wrote the following about Corryvreckan and the west coast of Argyll.

Betuixt Scarba and Dura is the most dangerous stream knowing  
in all Europe, for manie of the seas whiche flowethe  
betuixt the Mulle of Cantyir and Yla passeth throwe  
this narrow channell and in the passyng they fall with such  
a great violence upon the cost of Scarba that they retourne  
to the cost of Dura with a great noys, making in thair  
returning a depe horlepoole quhairin if schippis do enter  
thair is no refuge but death onlie. Notwithstanding the  
best tyme that may be had of it is the tyme of full sea and  
low watter. This passage is callit Correbreykin.

Item the Tarbat of Dura is a good road for shippis, and also is  
the Sound of Ylla, except it is a stronge dangerous stream.

## (Transcription of Alexander Lindsay's rutter of the Scottish Seas)

We can imagine young Timothy poring by candlelight over these maps and rutters in the dark winter evenings and planning his next spring's work: walking many miles over the ground, being passed from friend to friend, staying at inns or change-houses, like our own home Learnahension, first mentioned as a change-house in 1483. He would have drawn the rivers and asked the names of the settlements he passed. St Andrews University in 1580 had leading Scots intellectuals and churchmen of note among its teaching staff. He would have known of the work of Andrew Melville of Glasgow University and the mathematician John Napier. Map-making and geography were both taught.

Why did he do it? His father, Robert Pont, was an important figure in the new Scots kirk. Catholicism had given way to the Protestant movement in Scotland by 1550 and it was a time of great change and turmoil. Robert Pont was elected Moderator of the Kirk for the first time in 1581. A system was introduced establishing Presbyteries – administrative districts based on geographical regions – and was only partially successful. By 1583 when young Pont had graduated, his father may have asked him to undertake the sketch mapping of some parts of the country and his work over the next years could have grown out of that. Pont travelled around Scotland from 1583 to 1600. He left notes and descriptions of his work and 36 manuscript maps which are in the Scottish National Map Library. By 1601 he was Minister of Dunnet in Caithness and he died between 1611 and 1614.

There is very little information about how he accomplished his extraordinary task. After visiting Argyll in the spring of 1596, Dionise (Dennis) Campbell, Dean of Limerick, wrote to Sir Robert Cecil in London: "I have heard of one Pont who has compassed the whole of Scotland [and] purposes to set forth a perfect description of that land" (Calendar of State Papers relating to Ireland, 1893/40). Such detailed maps would have been of considerable interest to all sides, in particular the English, for intelligence purposes.

After Pont's death, the fragile maps were stored by his family until 1629 when they were sold to Sir James Balfour, Lord Lyon, King-at-Arms. By the time they were sold they may already have been in poor condition, as Blaeu writes: "the papers were badly and carelessly

cared for, partly chewed to shreds by worms and moths". Pont's manuscripts only arrived in Amsterdam fifteen years after his death and a further twenty-four passed before they became part of Blaeu's 1654 *Atlas novus*. It was during these years that a letter from Blaeu reports that some of the originals had been "lost by the violence of the sea" as they were shuttled between Amsterdam and Edinburgh. Finally, after the famous *Atlas* had been engraved and printed in 1654, a fire destroyed the workshops in Amsterdam and Pont's map plates did not survive. But the manuscript sketch maps that had been returned to Scotland are still in the Map library and although they only represent half of what was attributed to Pont in Blaeu's *Atlas*, nevertheless we are so fortunate to have them.

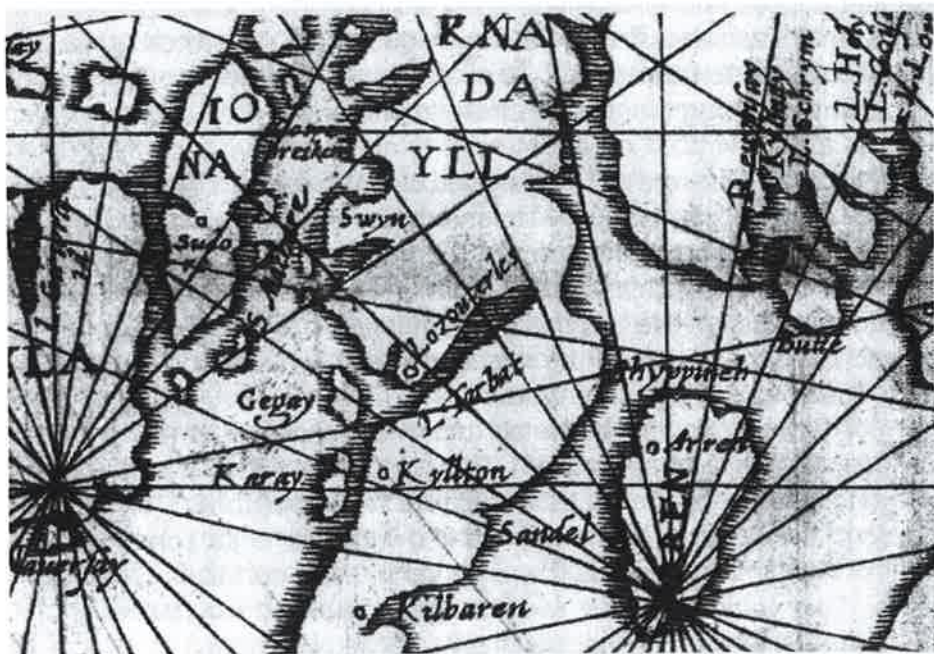
The surviving manuscripts include one of our area of Mid Argyll. There is a note written on it: "Mem, I think I cam ovr Loch Fyinn [from] Otter to Silvercraigs". This gives us an idea of his journey, first by boat, then walking up Loch Gilp and crossing towards Dunadd and Kilmartin, jotting down names and settlements as he went. The manuscript has "Sowth" written at the bottom and a charming drawing of Dunadd as a castle. We can find so many place names still in use today and trace the course of the rivers and Loch Fyne on one side and Lochs Crinan and Craignish on the other.

The word "Sowth" at the bottom of our sketch map raises the question of the use of a compass. The compass is widely thought to have originated with the Arabs who called it "Beit-el-Ibrak", or the "House of the Needle", and it was marked with the "eight points of the wind" or the "Wind rose", as it was called in early portolans or sea charts. Pont could also have used the position of the sun, but very little is known of the instruments that he carried with him.

The drawing of Dunadd is interesting as on many of Pont's sketch maps it is possible to work out where he had rested to draw. The paper he used has lines drawn on it, in parallels or in rectangles, in ink and in pencil. The place names have little drawings beside them; on our map mainly rectangular, which is thought to represent a settlement or "Fermtoun". There is also a cross on a church at Kilmartin. In all, 102 place names are drawn in. There are also notes written by Pont. The longest is in the lower right hand corner (transcribed by J. C. Stone): "Heir is a herbory for a ship at ylen Damein and also the throat of the river". This refers to Crinan and the mouth of the river Add (J. C. Stone, *The Pont Manuscript Maps of Scot-*

land: *Sixteenth Century Origins of a Blaeu Atlas, Map Collector Publications, 1989*).

Our sketch map is one of the smallest left behind by Pont (13 by 15 cm) and records a remarkable journey of exploration. A picture of a fascinating person emerges from a study of all Pont's different sketches and the notes that he wrote, and we can only wish that more may come to light about him and the methods he used.



Detail from: Nicolas de Nicolay, Vraye et exacte description hydrographique des costes maritimes d'Escoce c.1580



### Pont's sketch map for mid-Argyll

## Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to Christopher Fleet (Deputy Map Curator, National Map Collection, NLS) for the help he has given me and for the use of the National Library Maps. A detailed study of Pont's work can be found in Ian Cunningham, ed., *The Nation Survey'd: Timothy Pont's Maps of Scotland* (Tuckwell Press in association with the National Library of Scotland, 2001).

## THE CRANNOG IN LOCH A BHAILLIDH

Fiona Campbell-Byatt

The first record we have of the Crannog in Loch a Bhaillidh, north of Carse in South Knapdale, is on a map called *Knapdalia*, engraved and printed by Blaeu in his Atlas of 1654. According to Blaeu, this map is based on Timothy Pont's work but we have no manuscript sketch map of this area among the collection held in the National Map Library of Scotland.

Pont called the crannog "Oilen Loch na Vaylle" and has drawn a settlement symbol on it. Comparing Blaeu's map of Knapdale with the manuscript map of Mid Argyll, there are lochs and an island, but the only crannog found much later on Loch Glashan is not marked.

In 1893 we have a record of Robert Munro, a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in Edinburgh, visiting Loch a Bhaillidh. He was informed about a possible crannog by a local antiquarian, Hugh McLean, while he was staying near Tarbert. Robert Munro had already explored several crannogs and was interested in the history of lake dwellings in Argyll. There is an interesting account of his visit in the Proceedings of the Antiquarian Society for 1893. He explains the difficulty of reaching the loch from Carse House, the nearest place to the "Carriage Road". They brought a boat with them and finally made the journey on 20 April 1892. As soon as he landed, he realised the island was man-made; it was made up of local stones but with no wooden piles, such as he had seen elsewhere. He found the outlines of two buildings and the remains of ash and charcoal in a hearth. They also explored the submerged causeway to the shore but concluded that it was a natural formation. Munro finds it difficult to establish the reason for an artificial island in such a place.

A recent suggestion has been made that rather than being a place of retreat in time of danger, such an island could have been used as a storage place for oats and other foodstuffs, safe from rats and robbers.

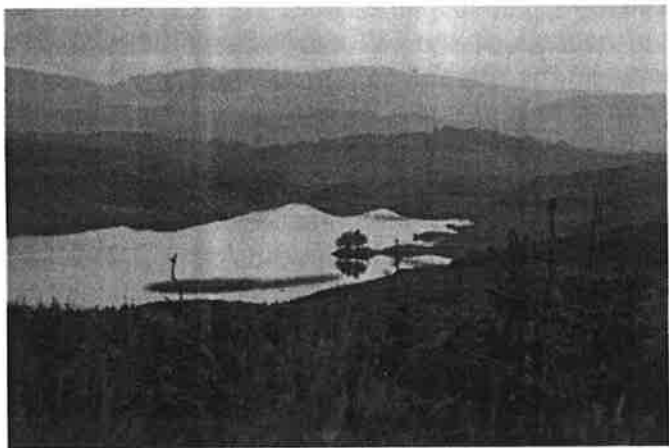
In August 1984 Ian Fisher of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland came to visit the island and his report is published in Volume 7. He confirms what had been found by Munro.



The dam at the south end of the loch has increased the water level but the island is still clearly visible as the accompanying photograph clearly shows.



Blaeu's map: Knapdalia, 1654



Photograph of Loch a Bhaillidh (author)

## **CRANNOG SURVEY AND EXCAVATION (2003-4)**

Edward Tyler

In June 2003 nine crannog sites were surveyed by M. G. Cavers, five of which are located in our part of Argyll and are described below. The sixth (Loch Glashan) was surveyed by J. C. Henderson in the same year.

### **Dubh Loch, Glen Shira (Inverary Parish)** Grid Ref. 1138 1078

It has a basal diameter of 14m and a height from base to tip of 1.2m. 90% of the site is submerged. There is a stone causeway (of rounded boulders) running NW from the crannog to the shore, which appears to continue under a reed-covered peat bank. A second causeway, which runs from the closest point on the peat bank to the crannog, is probably of recent origin. In the N.W. corner of the stone mound several large horizontal timbers were visible protruding from the site, and surrounding these were organic deposits containing bracken, hazelnuts and twigs.

### **Loch Avich (Kilchrenan and Dalavich)** Grid Ref. 9211 1418

This site is on a large bedrock reef SW of the entirely natural island Eilean Fraoch and consists of a large boulder mound, 40 x 32m at its base, with a dry summer area at summer water level of 14 x 20m. From the base of the site to its highest point is more than 3m and it is located 65m from the closest point on the shore.

The dry area of the site is supported by a revetment wall, which retains the main grass and tree-covered boulder mound visible above water. Stone structures have been constructed on this dry area. A stone-built causeway connects the raised area of the stone mound to a raised area of bedrock at the SW extremity of the site. There is no causeway between the site and the shore or Eilean Fraoch.

On the east side of the site, below water, are very well preserved timber and organic deposits of bracken, woodchips and hazelnuts.

### **Loch Ederline (Kilmichael Glassary)** Grid Ref. 8672 0253

It can be seen as a tree-covered boulder mound, the dry area being c 7m in diameter at summer water level. Approx. 75% of the site is submerged. The mound is 1.5m high from base to tip and is 55m from the modern western shore of the loch. A raised area of the loch bed runs between the site and the shore, and it is possible that a causeway is concealed beneath the silt.

### **Loch Leathan (Kilmichael Glassary)** Grid Ref. 8745 9835

It is visible above water as a large boulder mound, with trees and bracken growing on the dry areas. The island is 119m from the western

shore of the loch; approx. 20% of the site is submerged. The basal diameter of the mound is 22m; the height from base to highest point being 3m. There is no causeway between the site and the shore, and no evidence of natural foundations to the mound, which is in 1.2m of water.

Snorkel and diving inspection revealed many structural timbers around the site. One, approx. 4m long, was hollowed and resembled an unfinished log boat; many other horizontal timbers could be felt beneath the shallow silt deposits.

Several stone structures have been constructed on top of the mound, some of which are cellular in shape. Three boat noosts have been constructed on the site.

**Loch Coille-Bharr (North Knapdale)** Grid Ref. 7788 8949

It is completely submerged. The site was described by Mapleton in 1870 and is located at the end of a bedrock shoal which continues underwater off the southernmost headland of the small bay in the SE corner of the loch. It sits upon this shoal on a flattened area close to where the rock drops off sharply into deep water and comprises a stone mound with a basal diameter of 11m, 14m from the rocky headland.

The "well made walling" referred to in Mapleton is visible in two places - at the SE and SW corners of the site - where the walls act as revetments for the main stone mound.

**Loch Glashan (Kilmichael Glassary)** Grid Ref. 9160 9247

A survey was carried out to try to locate and sample the crannog excavated by J. G. Scott in 1960. The site was under 16m of water and a further 2m of soft reservoir silt. The nearby submerged medieval island settlement, thought to be the site of an early Christian church, was also located 10.4m down.

In July 2004 a trial excavation was carried out by Henderson and Cavers at **Ederline boathouse crannog** (Grid Ref. 8821 0394). Underneath the boulder capping area they found comminuted plant material, animal droppings, bracken, hazelnuts, twigs, charcoal, burnt structural timbers and fragments of burnt bone. Broken structural timbers were also found along with bones from all the main domesticated animals including red deer antlers. Pottery sherds were also recovered indicating that the above material dates from the late 6th or 7th centuries AD.

Notes: all the above taken from Discovery and Excavation in Scotland, Vols 4-5. See KISTS 5, 22 and 26 for earlier research on crannogs.

## **KILMARTIN HOUSE - RECENT AQUISITIONS - Part 2**

Dr Sharon Webb

### **The Castle Sween Axe Head**

A rather unusual axe-head was found recently on the shoreline near Castle Sween, lying below the high tide mark. It was donated to the museum by the finder. The axe dates to the Neolithic period, some 6,000 to 4,000 years before present. It was made by first knapping a suitable size and shaped stone. This would have produced what is known as a 'rough-out', which would then have been ground using fine sand to a smooth finish. Hafting would have taken place before use, although this particular specimen is so sharp it may never have been used or even hafted. The type of stone it is made from is porcellanite which is somewhat unusual. Porcellanite is a fine grained stone found on the northern coast of Ireland and on Rathlin Island. This points firmly to contact with Ireland and this part of Scotland thousands of years ago.

The Neolithic 'Axe Trade' is well documented (Edmonds, 1997). Porcellanite axes have been found all over Ireland with less than 200 found in Scotland and England (only 1 has been so far identified in Wales) (Sheridan, 1986). Scotland has two distinctive concentrations, around the Firth of Clyde and in Aberdeenshire (ibid.). Most examples are finished objects, although some roughouts have been found. Whilst we cannot be sure, it would be safe to speculate that the axe found at Castle Sween probably arrived in Scotland as a finished object. One might even suggest that it did not actually even reach its destination in the Neolithic period considering where it was found. Alternatively, there is a tradition beginning in the Bronze Age period and continuing through the Iron Age, whereby objects are deposited in watery places. It is possible that this is an early expression of this tradition and the axe was one such votive offering, as opposed to it being accidentally lost overboard during transportation. Whichever, it must have been a highly prized object and clearly demonstrates that the sea was not such a barrier as we tend to assume today.

There is other evidence of prehistoric occupation of the area close to where the axe was found. The remains of a much denuded cairn known as Druim a' Chladha stands close by. This is thought to be Bronze Age (RCAHMS, 1988). Nearer in date to the porcellanite axe are reports of a polished stone axe and a whetstone being found in a cave to the west of

Castle Sween. These artefacts were collected by Marion Campbell and are now in the Kilmartin Museum collection (RCAHMS,1988)

### **The Benderloch Urn**

In 1996 Robin Harvey (Lorn Historical and Archaeological Society) made an exciting discovery in his back garden at Benderloch, near Oban, whilst digging a hole to plant a bush. He uncovered part of what has become known as the Benderloch Urn. Harvey alerted archaeologists from Glasgow University as to his find and it was possible to excavate the assemblage archaeologically, thus preserving much information. The following is based on the published report of the excavation (MacGregor, 1998). The Urn is Bronze Age, dating to the middle of that period, some three and a half thousand years ago. It had been placed upside down, a flat slab of slate being used as a lid after cremated human bones were deposited inside. Researchers were able to identify two individuals from the remains; an adult aged between 20 and 25 years, who was probably female, and a child aged between 16 months and four years. The nature of the relationship between these two individuals is not known. Were they related, or buried together because they died at the same time? Analysis of the bones also showed that the adult had suffered anaemia (iron deficiency) in childhood and had sustained an injury to her foot. This anaemia might have been debilitating.

Further research revealed that the insides of the urn contained tiny traces of fatty acids. Acids are absorbed by the clay of a pot if it is used to boil water containing fats, for example. These could have come from meat. Concentrations of fatty acids were found near the middle of the vessel, probably indicating the level that boiling water might have reached. This demonstrates that the vessel had been used for cooking before it was used as a cremation urn. Perhaps this was part of a burial ritual associated with the deaths of the adult and child? The way in which the pot has been constructed might indicate a sudden death. Bronze Age urns are more usually made by coil method, the Benderloch Urn on the other hand was made by a slab method, perhaps indicating the maker was in a hurry or was un-skilled. This assemblage clearly demonstrates how much richer a story modern archaeology can tell. The urn is currently on

display at Kilmartin Museum, having been lent by Argyll and Bute Museums Service.

### **The Glennan Urn**

A similar find was made in the year 2000 at Glennan, near Ford, when some locals were clearing a rock shelter to use as a bird hide. It was noticed that flakes of burnt bone were amongst the debris being thrown out. This turned out to be cremated human bone. Archaeologists were called to evaluate the site and found part of a cremation urn in situ, which they then excavated. The following is based on the published account of the excavation (MacGreggor, 2003). The urn was very fragmentary and degraded further when it was being lifted. It had been placed in a small pit within the rock shelter – a retouched flint flake was also recovered. This proved to be a scraper, and it was not possible to tell if it had been placed inside the urn or not, as there was some disturbance to the site. The scraper was not burnt, so if it had originally been inside the urn, then it must have been placed there after the cremation pyre along with the burnt bones.

The vessel itself is of a type known as an enlarged food vessel or vase urn, it had been decorated with impressed cords and other impressed marks. It was inverted like the Benderloch Urn, but no slab was found, so perhaps the vessel had been covered with a cloth or skin beforehand.

Stylistically the vessel was thought to date to around the second half of the second millennium BC, which places the find within the Bronze Age. The 'Dating Human Bone Project', run by the National Museums of Scotland, carbon 14 dated a fragment of the human bone to around 3600 BP, which confirms the stylistic date from the pottery.

Analysis of the bones showed that some belonged to a young sheep/goat. The rest were human and probably belonged to one individual, a male aged between 30 to 40 years old. The human bones showed some signs of iron deficiency anaemia and mild spinal joint disease, neither of which was thought to have been severe enough to be debilitating.

The excavator of the site speculated that the animal remains might have been part of the funerary rite – they showed signs of butchery associated with skinning – perhaps the scraper had been used as part of these rituals?

This find is very important as it is one of the few examples of a cremation and its associated artefacts being placed within a cave or rock



shelter away from what we have come to regard as the main centre of ritual activity in Bronze Age Kilmartin Glen. This is quite a different context to the other burials we are more used to in cairns and cists on the glen floor.

Other recent donations and Treasure Trove allocations to the museum include a Neolithic/Bronze age scraper and a shale fragment which might be part of a prehistoric bracelet, both found at Carnassarie Farm and donated by the finder. A very fine prehistoric flint knife was found recently at Kilmory by Achnamara. This was also donated by the finder. Last year a Bronze Age palstave (type of bronze axe) fragment was found at Dunbeg (Oban) by a metal detectorist along with a fragment of silver Viking ring money. These finds were allocated to the museum via Treasure Trove and we hope to display them all in due course.

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## **NHASMA REMINISCENCES**

A.O.M. Clark

After becoming members in 1981 or 1982 we spent the following years being most enjoyably educated in the prehistory, history and environment of Mid Argyll; especially in the summer expeditions which were often to sites either not open to casual visitors or extremely hard to find (the modern system of signage did not exist). Our bible was each successive edition of Marian Campbell's excellent Archaeological Guide to Mid Argyll packed with information and directions in a compact booklet form; it is still the easiest to use today (if a copy can be found). One became so accustomed to her apparent infallibility that it came as a considerable shock when she admitted in an article in the KIST to getting lost, with several other members, above Crinan on an expedition to Castle Dounie. The culprit was, I suspect, the Forestry Commission's earlier tree planting methods which often obscured useful features.

In those days our evening meetings took place in the badminton hall of the Community Centre. The seating we required filled only half of the space available, but we had the advantage of an open area behind where it was easy to move about and talk in small groups, and where we had a line of tables on which all the currently available issues of the KIST could be displayed for examination and sale; also many posters, information leaflets, books and exhibition materials; there was so much more opportunity to find out what was going on.

Eventually Edmond, my husband, found himself elected to the committee, not a very onerous task as there were only five or six meetings in the year. These were rather enjoyable occasions - the matters dealt with usually interesting, the tea and home-made scones supplied by Agatha Lewis and Dilys Hooton (the members in whose house the meetings were held) delicious, and the verbal sparring, gentle but occasionally barbed, between the President (Miss Campbell) and the Editor of the KIST (Dr Mackenna), a sort of intellectual flirtation, highly entertaining.

In 1984 Edmond became Membership and Publications Secretary in succession to Anne Keharne. He enjoyed the task, especially the correspondence that came with it, which often contained interesting

information. Only the two frantic fortnights in the year of getting KIST distributed by hand or post were occasionally traumatic. Incidentally in the course of this operation one of Dr. Mackenna's editorial practices came to light. It is mandatory that contributors to KIST receive a complimentary copy of the issue in which their article appears. Every now and then Edmond would find an unfamiliar name for which he had no address. On applying to the Editor he would get the answer "Oh, don't bother about him/her. I'll see to it". It transpired that when contributions fell short, or he had nothing of suitable length to fill an awkward page or two, he would himself compose a piece under a pseudonym.

Dr. Mackenna took over the editorship of KIST from Miss Campbell in 1972, at issue 4. By 1990 he had been wishing for a year or two to find a successor, and eventually in desperation he asked me if I would take on the task. With considerable doubt I agreed - how does one succeed a polymath like him? However he provided so much help and advice that I soon came to enjoy the job. His methods of working were unbelievably painstaking. He copied out each script he received in his own handwriting, then counted every letter space required for each line, writing the number of letter spaces above what would be the last word in each line. He numbered the lines for each page in the margin, and the pages likewise. This he did for each article. Sketches and diagrams he reduced or increased in size by redrawing them on squared paper. After all this he typed out the result on an old-fashioned typewriter; only later did he acquire an electronic machine with a two-line memory.

He also provided most of the cover illustrations for KIST, many of them with landscape sketches. In a number of these the foreground is marked by a slightly leaning rustic fencepost (or several). This post, which also appears in his watercolour paintings, travelled in the boot of his car wherever he went, in case he should get what he described as a "sending" prompting him to sketch or paint a particular scene; it served as a foreground marker, scale, perspective aid, filler-up of awkward gaps etc., and often found itself "artist's model" as well. It was one occasion accompanied by a sheep which he had found several times in his garden tramping all over, and worse, nibbling his newly-planted rhododendrons; escorting it over the wall and chasing it off had no effect. Recognising the Ormsary mark, he wrestled the animal into the boot of his car and

conveyed it round to Ormsary where he released it to the hill. Its state of health, mental or physical, after this experience, was not recorded.

Opportunities for practical work were not so frequent in the second half of the Society's life as in the first. There were several expeditions to the Fairy Isles to clear foreign growth such as rhododendrons at an early stage before it could choke the native vegetation. When the new small car park beside Temple Wood was planned, a few members carried out an excavation of the area, which proved rather dull, but was successful in that it proved that there was nothing of interest that a car park would destroy. The only larger scale investigation carried out by the Society was that of the deserted village of Beldarroch above Tarbert reported in KISTS 43, 46 and 48. The site is now scheduled. Work, which the Society still carries out, was regularly done on the Craignish Stones and Chapel, and as now members reported new finds whether "Antiquarian" or "Natural History" and initiated appropriate action. The importance of past activity and research carried out by members can be gauged by the frequent references in the two Argyll volumes of the Royal Commission's Inventories on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland to articles in the KIST.

We wish all present and future members of NHASMA as happy a store of memories to look back on as we have.

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Members of the Natural History and Antiquarian Society of Mid Argyll (NHASMA) celebrated their half century with a **dinner at Stonefield Castle Hotel on Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2005**. A summary of the two **anniversary talks** is given below (thanks to M. MacVicar and D. Batty).

**Graham Ritchie**, Head of Archaeology for the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland, told those present of the late Marion Campbell's contacting the Commission with details of various historic finds in this part of Argyll. These finds included Duns, Kists, cup and ring markings on stones etc. All the details were meticulously documented and soon the RCAHMS took notice and sent staff to investigate. Miss Campbell went on these visits armed with tape measure and paper and into areas sometimes where there were few roads or transport.

Mr. Ritchie also spoke of many chocolate boxes full of bones from one dig near Ellery which Miss Campbell carried out with Members of

NHASMA. These bones were all placed in a well ordered manner, so much so that RCAHMS had no difficulty in setting out the bodies.

Miss Campbell was not academically qualified but nonetheless so much information was gathered, that RCAHMS had no alternative but to take notice. She had a manner which enabled her to obtain the information she required. The Inventories of Argyll were first conceived from these expeditions.

Mr. Ritchie emphasised how Miss Campbell was, through her contacts, an enabler in getting the right people involved in many areas, as in the case of Auchindrain; how she kept copies of all her correspondence, so that we have a good picture of what was said and done; and above all, a methodical way of working in going about the various digs.

After dinner it was the turn of **Peter Wormell**, to represent the Natural History element of our Society. His beginnings were in the Forest of Dean and after, qualifying, moved to work in forestry in Nyasaland (now Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). First looking to see what he had, and obtaining local knowledge, along with the local people, a plan was drawn up to manage the forests.

On leave, he saw an advertisement to work as Nature Conservancy Officer on the Island of Rum. He put in place a management plan similar to that in Africa. First he asked the people on the Island for their help in managing the Island. He then set about recording as much of the wildlife, ground etc as possible. He and his family stayed there for sixteen years before moving to North Argyll.

Mr. Wormell was involved in the creation of Taynish as an important Nature Reserve. Argyll has a diverse climate where flowers and shrubs which would be at home in Africa grow side by side with those which would be found in the Arctic. He stressed the important role of people in managing the land and the consequent benefits for the wildlife. In his retirement, he is back visiting Rum to continue his work and has identified hundreds of types of flies and insects. He is now involved in trying to ascertain the biting flies!

He recently found a document which showed that the Management Plan for the Island of Rum is being applied elsewhere in Africa. As already stated the Rum Plan was based on the Malawi Plan, and so it has come full circle with it being applied again in Africa.

## **J.N. Graham Ritchie (1942 - 2005)**

It was with great sadness that members of the Society heard of the sudden passing in April 2005 of Graham Ritchie. A man who enormously enriched our archaeological understanding of the area, and who knew and worked with our first President Miss Marion Campbell, he will be greatly missed.

We are indebted to F. and P. Ashmore of Historic Scotland for the following record (published in *Scottish Archaeological News*), which shows what an eminent figure he was.

Between 1965 and 1988 Graham Ritchie's professional life was devoted to field surveys in Argyll, and their publication. He conducted many small-scale excavations of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments, all published promptly and to an exemplary standard, usually in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*. He brought the results of fieldwork and excavations to a wider public through The Archaeology of Argyll, which included contributions from a wide range of colleagues and was published in 1997.

His publication in 1976 of excavations at the Stones of Stenness, in Orkney, is still used by Historic Scotland as an exemplar of reporting. With his wife Anna, eminent in her own right, he wrote a guide to The Ancient Monuments of Orkney published in 1978. It is still a standard reference.

In 1991 he became Deputy Curator to the National Monuments Record of Scotland. Between 1995 and his retirement in 1998 he was Head of Archaeology at the Royal Commission.

He and Anna wrote *Scotland: Archaeology and early history* (1981) and the *Oxford Archaeological Guide to Scotland* (1988). Between 1991 and 1999 he collaborated with Audrey Henshall on *The Chambered Cairns of Sutherland* (1995) and the *Central Highlands* (2001).

From 1965 onwards he was a dedicated and active Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. He was first elected to the Council in 1969 and continued to serve on, and convene, various committees for more than three decades, being President between 1999 and 2002. With typical modesty he regarded his presidency purely as a period of stability, but he improved the accessibility of the Society and presided over a series of successful conferences, including the conference of



Arbroath held in Arbroath (his home town), with the enthusiastic participation of the local citizens.

Graham had a rare ability to convey sound information to professionals and the wider public on a great variety of topics. He helped others unstintingly and shared his wisdom and knowledge freely.

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## **SUMMER EXPEDITIONS 2005**

M. McVicar

**20 April, Taynish National Nature Reserve** On a beautiful spring evening, John Halliday led members on a trip along the Barr Mor Trail at Taynish, with its profusion of wild flowers - dog violets, primroses, wood anemones, and bluebells. Along the way we were shown how the land is being managed by SNH; peat which was used for fuel; and a woodland which was so valuable that local people faced fines if they removed timber. We walked and climbed up a well defined path to an earth kiln where charcoal was once made and which was used in smelting iron ore at Bonawe (see article on p.2) About one-tenth of the trees (managed under coppice rotation) were felled on each occasion. Bark, rich in tannic acid, was also used in the process of tanning leather. This work reached a peak in the 1800s.

A few intrepid members carried on to the top of Barr Mor where they had clear views over to the Islands.

**21 May, Glasdrum Wood, Glen Creran** John Halliday led members of the Natural History & Antiquarian Society on an interesting climb through Glasdrum Wood, Loch Creran, in search of the Chequered Skipper Butterfly. This isolated population of butterflies was found at Loch Creran in the 1940s and is now to be found only in a 50 mile radius of Fort William. Glasdrum is Gaelic for the grey ridge and is thought to refer to the grey of the ash trees which thrive on the lime rich soil staying green much longer. Along with the southern aspect and an area kept clear of trees, these factors make for an ideal habitat for these butterflies. Of the 33 species in Scotland, 21 of these are to be found in Glasdrum Wood. We had several sightings of the Chequered Skipper as well as the Pearl Bordered Fritillary and other species. The woods are being managed and opened up to regenerate space for nectar plants such as the bugle, bluebells, marsh thistle - mainly blue and purple flowers. There are viewpoints with intriguing names such as - Hanging Gardens of Glasdrum; Getting a Glasdrum Tan; Gorge of the Cascades and Looking to Europe, the latter referring to the coral beneath the water of Loch Creran and which is protected as a Special Area of Conservation under European Union legislation.

## **THE WISE AND THE HOWES OF ORKNEY**

Rebecca Pine

This year's Summer Islands Expedition took twenty doughty members of NHASMA right off the top of the map of Mainland Scotland to the beautiful islands that make up the Orkney group; a fine decision destination-wise, company-wise and weather-wise!

On our first full day we mostly chose to visit the fine thirteenth / fourteenth Century sandstone Cathedral of St. Magnus in Kirkwall for the morning service. This is a meaty piece of architecture, shunning unnecessary ornament, but magnificent in its sturdiness; and unusually, is owned by the citizens of Kirkwall and not by the established Church. We then moved on to our first Howe - Mine Howe - a structure unique in design and scale, suggestive of a mine shaft, and of uncertain period between Neolithic and Iron Age. Our tour then carried us across the first of the Churchill Barriers and on to the little church of Lamb Holm, universally known as the Italian Chapel. This wartime conversion of two Nissen Huts by Italian Prisoners of War into a beautiful place of worship is both remarkable and inspirational to its many visitors, of any or no faith.

We continued over three more Churchill Barriers across Burray and South Ronaldsay to the southern end of mainland Orkney, at the nearest point to John O'Groats on mainland Scotland, which was clearly in our sights across the water. Some visited the Tomb of the Eagles and others were drawn down to the sands of Weddell Sound by the botany, the old wrecks, or just the distant call of youth!

On Monday we all went by passenger ferry to Hoy, where a bus had been chartered to transport us around the island. First stop was in the central valley to see the 'Dwarfie Stane', a very large boulder of hollowed out rock variously described as a Neolithic burial / sacrificial / symbolic stone, carved by man / ice / weather to form a cave which housed a dwarf/ a hermit / a religious recluse! Its situation was equally at odds with its location - a real teaser. We drove on to Rackwick Bay where the party split in two, one half continuing the bus tour to the south of the island and the Naval Museum at Lyness, and the rest hill-walking over Moor Fea to the cliff tops overlooking the Old Man of Hoy. On such a fine sunny day it almost seemed that you could lean over and touch it. Fortunately neither we nor the party of German tourists tried to bridge the thirty foot gap. After lunch this party split again, some continuing across the more demanding High Fea and the others retracing their steps to Rackwick in the company of an enthusiastic young Ranger from Bristol keen to point out the bird and plant life.

On Tuesday we headed for the sea stacks of Yesnaby and a pleasant stroll along the cliffs to the Brough of Bigging, set high above a rocky inlet. This was

but a prelude to the World Heritage Site of Skara Brae (see cover sketch) which of course is in a remarkable state of preservation. In idyllic surroundings in the Bay of Skail, as we saw the site it is difficult to imagine both the one-time distance of the shoreline, and the ferocity of the storms which so recently uncovered it. But it is easy to let your imagination run riot about the manner and means of living 5,000 years ago, so well is the settlement maintained. We would have liked to get inside the dwellings, but the constant pressure of coach parties obviously prohibits this, and there is an excellent reconstruction of a complete dwelling by the Visitor Centre at the entrance. Perhaps it was inevitable that the next site we visited, the Brough of Birsay, should lose a little in the comparison, dating only to Norse or Pictish times, though it did have the added interest of a tidal causeway, the tide perfectly judged in our favour. To give it due weight the ground plan of the settlement was well laid out and contained what may well have been a ninth Century (AD)sauna. We could have done with one of those at the Hostel!

Our next 'organised' visit was to the area of Stenness and the many standing stones there. First on the list was the Ring of Bookan, lost on the trail of Barker! However the Ring of Brodgar (or Brogar) was just too enormous and magnificent to miss. This huge and perfect circle of over 100 metres diameter with a centre area yet to be properly excavated and assessed, would originally have had some sixty stones standing on its perimeter, of which less than two thirds remain. As is obvious from their differences, some of the stones are "local" others would have been dragged there from great distances at even greater human cost. Some stones were smooth and evenly weathered, others with pronounced strata offered shelter to scores of tiny striped caterpillars. The contrast with the much smaller circle at Callanish on Lewis (which we visited last year) could not be greater, though each is comparable in its fascination. A few hundred yards down the road are the twelve tall stones of Stenness which may have been the site of ancestor worship ceremonies; for us the cold wind was very much of the present day!

At the far end of this collection of monuments was our second Howe, Maes Howe. We were led into this large chambered tomb with a central square area over four metres wide and of the same height, through a low and narrow passageway. Our guide ('Alan', also from Bristol!) gave us a very lively insight into its history, its alignment with the winter solstice sun and to the translation of its well-preserved runic inscriptions. During our coffee break at the Stenness cafe we were asked (but unable) to identify a bird flying near the premises; we later saw its likeness among the stuffed birds of Stromness Natural History Museum, though not all were in agreement!

On others of our 'separate' days, in addition to sketching in Stromness and shopping there and in Kirkwall, members of the party made visitations to some

of the other Islands of Orkney by the good ferry services, though the aircraft connection between the Westrays which we had hoped to sample was fully booked. Some returned for further exploration of Hoy and others made additional trips around the Orkney mainland. Jean and I were in the last category and had the great pleasure of visiting another of the spectacular monuments, the 2,000 year old Broch of Gurness. Standing on a promontory on the northern coastline with the island of Rousay in the near background, its setting is glorious and its layout fascinating. Without the volume of tourists that Skara Brae receives it was possible to get right inside the central Broch and the complicated set of domestic buildings surrounding it, and to get a real 'feel' of its history and life style - and to appreciate the great variations of use to which the thin flagstones of Orkney were put so long ago. Another sketch was called for!

Our last night followed a now familiar pattern. The Royal Hotel, which had treated us royally over our stay, arranged an extended table for the full twenty of us to wine and dine and enjoy a fine exchange of animated conversation as a fitting climax to our holiday. After laying down a marker for Shetland in 2006, I offered the party the following summary of Orkney 2005 :-

### **The bugs and the Anoraks**

The Bugs and the Anoraks went to sea  
In a beautiful sky-blue boat.  
They took John D. and Douglas and me  
And everyone else of note.  
They sailed away for a week and a day  
To the land of the Scapa Flow,  
Where the skies are big, but there isn't a pig  
And nor does the Bong tree grow, tree grow,  
And nor does the Bong Tree grow!

They ventured next day to South Ronaldsay  
By Chapel, Cathedral and Howe,  
With time on their hands to run down on the sands  
Like the children they were (but not now!)  
But you never would guess, that day in Stromness,  
What would happen, and how, and to whom -  
Dear Fred, are you willing to bet me a shilling  
You've locked yourself out of your room, your room  
You've locked yourself out of your room?"

They all booked up for the boat to Hoy  
To look at the Dwarfie Stane  
And there by the wood a Ranger-wig stood  
To tell us about the terrain.  
Some went on a trip to southernmost tip  
While some climbed round to the stack  
Yet everyone thought they'd had the best time  
When everyone else got back, got back,  
When everyone else got back.

By Yesnaby, Borwick and Skara Brae,  
By sites of a thousand myths -  
The ways that they found to live underground,  
They were clever those Neoliths!  
At the cusp of the day to the Brough of Birsay  
The anoraks went in force,  
Yet someone remarked (and we mustn't say who!)  
"Oh this lot is only Norse, just Norse,  
Oh this lot is only Norse!"

They went by car to the ring of Brodgar-  
And the phantom ring of Barker! -  
And the chambered room in the Maes Howe tomb  
Where the Solstice Sun grows darker.  
As the clouds unfurled and the North Wind birled  
And the eyes grew moist and narrow,  
The bird, I swear, that we all saw there  
Was a part-albino sparrow, a sparrow,  
Was a part-albino sparrow!

On in-between days they went their own ways  
To Shapinsay, Rousay and Hoy;  
Or stayed in Stromness (they were painting I guess)  
And every last day was a joy.  
They dined on fish, and many a dish,  
Which they ate with a sensible spoon!  
And they sailed away the following day -  
But everyone said "Too soon! Too soon!"  
But everyone said "Too soon!"

### Office bearers

President     Dave Batty.

Correspondence to Mr. Batty at Kirnan Farm,  
Kilmichael Glassary PA31 8QL  
(Kist contributions to the editor)

Vice - President     John Halliday

Membership/  
Publications     Mrs. Marina Cowham, 10 Dunadd View,  
Secretary     Kilmichael Glassary, Lochgilphead PA31 8QA

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Committee     Douglas Barker, Maureen Meachan, Cat  
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Copies of Kist can be obtained from the Membership and Publications Secretary, price £1.50, postage and packing extra.

Editor: Ed Tyler, Daisy Cottage, Big Brae, Tarbert PA29 6UQ. Tel. 01880 820656. Email: tyleredward@hotmail.com.

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