



# Newsletter of the

Tayside and Fife Archaeological  
Committee

Issue Five - Nov 2008

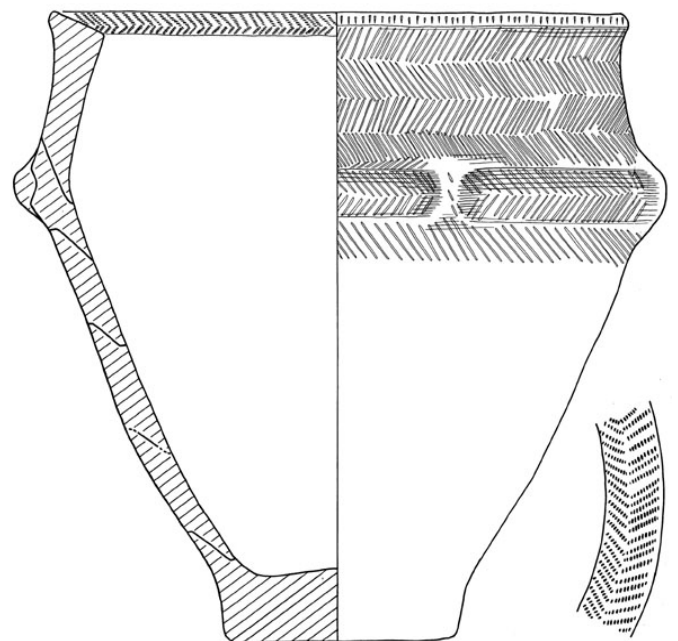
## MORE ON BRONZE AGE BURIAL FROM CALLUM'S HILL, CRIEFF

Readers may recall from issue two (October 2007) of this newsletter the news of the Callum's Hill Bronze Age urn and its associated cremated remains coming back into the light and being returned to Perth Museum and Art Gallery. Since then, with generous support from both the National Museums Scotland (and their *Dating Cremated Bones* project) and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, a sample from each of the individuals represented has been radiocarbon dated at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre laboratory in East Kilbride. In addition, all the bones from the urn have been examined by osteologist Dr Kath McSweeney of Edinburgh University.

Dr McSweeney's analysis showed there were not three people (as originally thought in the 1960s) but two: one age 6 years (Individual 1) and the other an adolescent aged between 12 and 20 years (Individual 2). The condition and colour of the cremated bones suggests that the bodies were burnt soon after death and that they were burnt at a very high temperature (above 645°C) in a well-controlled fire. The additional presence of small mammal bones was confirmed but they cannot be identified as goat, as they were in the 1960s. The two radiocarbon dates show that the human remains are around 4000 years old: there is a 95.4% probability that Individual 1 dates to

2116BC and 1881 BC, and that Individual 2 dates to between 2191 and 1947 BC. The difference in the dates is not statistically sufficient to show different burial dates and it seems likely that both individuals died, and were then cremated and buried, at or around the same time. The fact that the urn was found intact also suggests that the remains were probably placed inside it at the same time. Since the urn was found during building operations, we will never know whether there were any signs of disturbance to the grave (as would have occurred had people re-opened it to add the second person's remains to the urn). A single interment episode remains the most likely scenario.

The C-14 dates for the Callum's Hill urn represent an important addition to our dating of this particular type of cinerary urn – the Vase Urn, the earliest type of cinerary urn in use in Scotland. They are also useful in showing the broad contemporaneity of the two individuals buried inside it.



Late Bronze Age Cinerary Urn  
About 2500 Years Old  
Found on Callum's Hill, 1967

# A Late Bronze Age spearhead from the Firth of Forth

Trevor Cowie, Department of Archaeology, National Museums of Scotland

In the course of research on Scottish Bronze Age metalwork, I came across a brief reference to a spearhead found during dredging in the Firth of Forth around 1916. The spearhead in question is still in existence and is preserved in the collections of the Harris Museum in Preston, Lancashire, where Brendan O'Connor has examined it. It is a fine, almost complete example of a leaf-shaped bronze spearhead of Late Bronze Age date, c 1000-800 BC (see illustration right).

Perhaps because of the date of its discovery during the First World War or because no one realised its importance at the time, nothing is known about exactly where it was found or the circumstances of its discovery. I therefore contacted the Forth Estuary Forum to see if they could help. Susan Manson, their manager, then very helpfully published a short note in their newsletter, *Forth Sight*, in the hope that its readers might be able to shed light on the dredging regime in the early 20th century and thus narrow down the potential area of the discovery. Advice was also sought regarding the significance of the term 'Firth of Forth' since it would be helpful to know if that would have included the narrower stretches of the river west of the present Road and Rail Bridges?

In the event, the article elicited two very helpful replies. Derek McGlashan of Forth Ports PLC noted that although no detailed records go back that far, dredging would have been carried out at various port entrances ranging from Grangemouth, Bo'ness and Alloa to Kirkcaldy, Methil and Inverkeithing. In addition, Rosyth Dockyard had also just opened at that time and dredging would have been required to maintain the depth. He felt it was unlikely

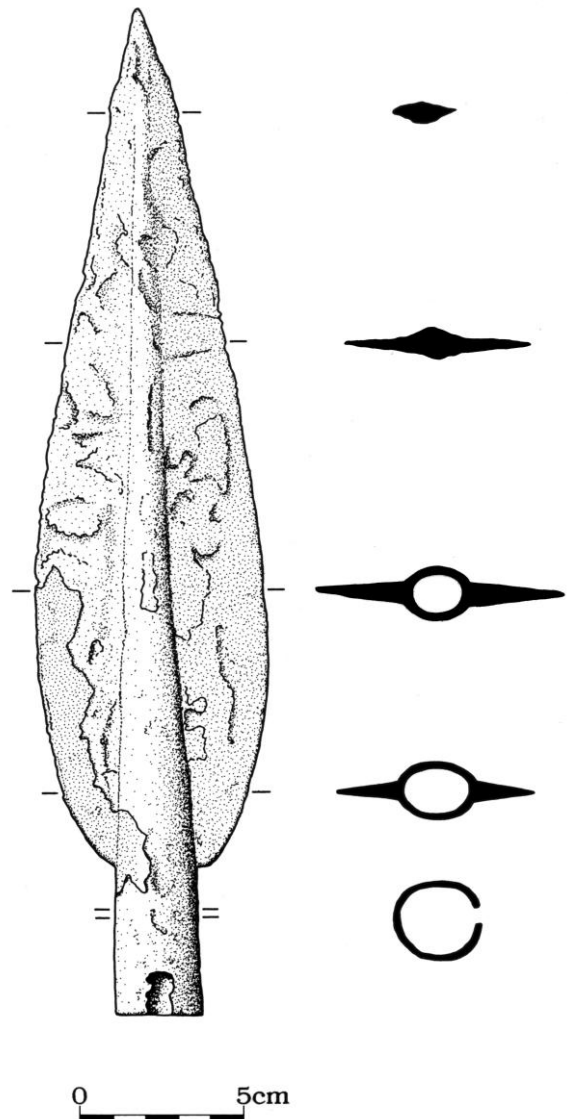


Illustration copyright NMS

that any dredging would have taken place in the main shipping channels of the Forth itself (except possibly upriver of Alloa). Another response came from Stephen Liscoe of Fife Council's Archaeological Unit. On balance, Stephen felt that the date of the find – 1916 – was potentially significant – and was also tempted to relate the discovery to the new naval dockyard facilities at Rosyth. He also made the observation that recovery of a relatively small object such as this might indicate a fairly minor dredging operation where there was an opportunity for the spoil to be scanned and accessed by those involved in the works – perhaps implying a small crane/bucket dredger dumping into a dumb barge rather than a large deep channel dredging operation on an industrial scale.

Regarding the possible significance of the term 'Firth of Forth', it seems this doesn't get us very far, as Stephen confirmed that the term really applies to all navigable parts of the river as well as the estuary – the relevant Admiralty Charts comprise an area from Fife Ness to Stirling!

To summarise, a provenance near the shore seems much more likely than any of the main channels and activity at Rosyth fits well with the date of the discovery. The absence of original documentation is frustrating, but it has been very useful to be able to narrow down the range of possibilities in this way and I am most grateful to Derek McGlashan, Stephen Liscoe and to Susan Manson for all their assistance with my landlubberly enquiries. Alan Braby kindly prepared the drawing.

A short paper on this intriguing find by Brendan O'Connor and myself will be submitted to the *Tayside & Fife Archaeological Journal*.

## New publications

A reminder to those who missed the annual conference at the beginning of November and did not have the opportunity to purchase copies of Monograph 6 (St Ethernan's Monastery, Isle of May, Fife, published in September, and volume 14 of the *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* (TAF AJ), published on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

Copies of both volumes can be obtained from JR Sherriff, 21 Burleigh Crescent, Inverkeithing, Fife, KY11 1DQ or from

SUAT, 55 South Methven Street, Perth, PH1 1NX.

The price of Monograph 6 is £15 + £4 p&p.

# EXPLORING PERTHSHIRE'S PAST!

Exploring Perthshire's Past (EPP) is a project run by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust focusing on archaeology and historic buildings in the region.

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund between 2006-8, EPP provides chances for everyone to discover more about the past and to get involved in a variety of activities.

The project developed from Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust's two existing outreach events, Doors Open Day and Perthshire Archaeology Month, with EPP delivering a year-round programme of events. One aspect of the EPP project was the creation of a programme of guided walks, providing opportunities for residents and visitors to get out and about in the area and discover more about its history.

Below. EPP volunteers at Pitcarmick. © PKHT



## Other opportunities

The project also provides opportunities for hands-on activities which make up the EPP 'key events', including archaeological excavation, fieldwalking, geophysical survey, site clearance and conservation, and standing building recording. So far this year participants have taken part in a number of different projects, including:

### ***Balado Bridge site clearance and conservation***

Balado Bridge is an 18<sup>th</sup> century B-listed bridge which used to be part of the main route west from Kinross to Crook of Devon and on to Stirling. The bridge is no longer in use, having been superseded by the modern A977, and had become so overgrown with vegetation that it is one of the few bridges currently on the Buildings at Risk register. Volunteers helped to clear the substantial amount of vegetation and soil from the bridge, enabling the full structure to be examined. A strategy for further conservation work is currently being devised which will see this picturesque bridge fully conserved.

### ***Geophysical survey***

Volunteers have been given the opportunity to take part in geophysical survey with local geophysicist Dr Peter Morris and PKHT. Surveys so far have taken place at Tullibole graveyard, and Ardgilzean Farm, at the site of a possible round barrow identified on aerial photographs. Further projects are planned for sites in the Carse of Gowrie and Blairgowrie area in winter 2008. Volunteers also had opportunities to take part in other projects taking place in the area which the Trust coordinates or supports. These included:

The Black Spout homestead. Volunteers through the EPP project took part in the Trust's 4<sup>th</sup> season of excavations at the Black Spout homestead, Pitlochry.

Excavation of the site of the ancient abbey at Scone Palace, as part of the Moothill and Abbey Survey Scone (MASS);

Excavation of a henge monument near Forteviot and a Dun Knock hillfort near Dunning as part of the University of Glasgow's Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot project (SERF);

Geophysical survey at Bertha fort and excavation at Strageath fort as part of the University of Liverpool's Roman Gask Project (RGP);

More hands-on activities are planned through winter 2008 and into 2009, including further geophysical survey, fieldwalking, site clearance and conservation, and historic building recording. If you are interested in finding out more about the Exploring Perthshire's Past project, please visit the PKHT website.

### **Contact**

If you would like to add your name to the volunteer list, to be kept informed of upcoming opportunities for hands-on activities in the area, please email Steven Timoney – [stimoney@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:stimoney@pkc.gov.uk)

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SUAT, 55 South Methven Street, Perth, PH1 1NX.

The price of Monograph 6 is £15 + £4 p&p.

The price of TAFAJ 14 is £12 + £3 p&p.

If both volumes are purchased together then the price is £20 + £5 p&p.

Cheques to be made payable to 'TAFAC'



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## **EXCITING DISCOVERY ABOUT KINCLAVEN SPEARHEAD**

In 1991 a spearhead was found in the river Tay beside Kinclaven Castle and subsequently acquired by Perth Museum & Art Gallery. It was an exciting find in two key ways: it's findspot close to Kinclaven Castle evoked the skirmishes that took place there during the Wars of Independence between the Scots and the English and the rare survival within the iron socket of a piece of the wooden shaft. At the time it was thought to date to circa 1250-1400 but a recent fresh examination by Mark Hall at Perth Museum suggests it is much earlier in date.

Prompted to re-examine it by a PhD student's request to see it as part of her research, Mark was soon convinced that the style of the spearhead had more in common with early medieval variants than post 1200 AD types. Consultation with colleagues, including Ewan Campbell (Glasgow University) and, in particular, Andy Halpin (National Museum

of Ireland) confirmed this hunch. We are now suggesting that favourable comparison with both Anglo-Saxon and Continental (especially Norwegian) examples suggests a date in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. There are very few such spearheads from early medieval Scotland so it is very exciting. It is hoped that in the very near future the wooden shaft can be sampled for radiocarbon analysis and a scientific date obtained. Watch this space!



The Kinclaven iron, socketed spearhead, with wooden shaft fragment. The spearhead is 296mm long. Image copyright Perth Museum & Art Gallery

This “rediscovery” of an early medieval weapon in the Perth collections follows hard on the heels of the similar “rediscovery” of a Hiberno-Norse arrowhead (which lay long unrecognised in a group of objects from St Serf's Priory, Loch Leven), again in the Perth collections. Both eloquently demonstrate the need for active research of museum collections.

## **CONFERENCE 2008**

This year's annual conference in Dundee went off without a hitch. Just over 100 people paid to attend (slightly up from two years ago) and they heard speakers talk about a broad range of subjects.



EPP volunteers at Balado Bridge with vegetation cleared. Photo copyright P&KHT.

## CONFERENCES

Readers will be pleased to learn that this year's annual conference in Dundee went off without a hitch. Just over 100 people paid to attend (slightly up from two years ago) and the audience seemed to appreciate the speakers talking about a broad range of subjects.

Next year's conference will be in Perth and work has already started on thinking who should be invited to talk. If any corresponding members have any ideas about either the content or organisation of this or next year's conference, please contact the editor of this newsletter, who will swap hats and consider all suggestions in his role as conference organiser.

Back with my editing hat on, we have reached Newsletter 5 and I have still had no contact from any corresponding member. Somebody must have something to say – even if it is only to point out typing errors.

As usual, the editor can be contacted at:

[johnsherriff@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:johnsherriff@hotmail.co.uk)