

## **Transcription of Round Table Discussion from Elgin Museum Archaeology Conference “Forgotten, Hidden & Lost: unearthing Moray’s archaeology”**

**4<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

On Saturday 4th November 2017, Elgin Museum presented an archaeology conference, as part of the Scottish Government’s Year of History, Heritage & Archaeology, thanks to support from the HLF. Entitled "Forgotten, Hidden & Lost: unearthing Moray’s archaeology", the conference featured 10 presentations from commercial and academic archaeology, looking at aspects of archaeology in Moray which are little known to the general public, such as developer-funded archaeology; newly discovered sites lost in the archives, such as Cluny Hill; and old favourites we haven’t heard about in a while, like Birnie and Clarkly Hill.

To close the conference, all of the speakers return to the stage for an open questions & answer session with the audience, chaired by Dr Fraser Hunter, Principal Curator, Prehistoric & Roman Archaeology at National Museums Scotland. The Q&A session was filmed, and is presented here.

Speakers: Front Row (L-R) Prof. Leif Isaksen, Professor in Digital Humanities, University of Exeter; Martin Cook, Director & Head of Fieldwork, AOC Archaeology; Dr Tanja Romankiewicz, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in Archaeology at University of Edinburgh; Professor Ian Armit, Professor of Archaeology, University of Bradford; Dave Anderson, Anderson Archaeology / Highland Archaeological Services; Dr Melanie Johnson, Head of Post-Excavation, CFA Archaeology; Dr Lindsey Büster, Post-doctoral Research Assistant, University of Bradford; John Borland, Measured Survey Manager, Historic Environment Scotland. Back Row (L-R) Dr Gordon Noble, University of Aberdeen; Dr Gemma Cruickshanks, Post-Excavation Officer, National Museums Scotland; Matt Ritchie, Archaeologist; Forestry Commission Scotland. Behind the Camera: Claire Herbert, Archaeologist, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Angus & Aberdeen City Councils.

(FH) We’ve seen a wide variety to give a taster of the potential we have here in Moray. I’m sure there will be some questions coming out of all this, but before I let anyone else have a question I shall take Chair’s privilege and I’m curious actually to here from both Mel and Martin, as two folk who work in commercial archaeology across the country, what are your perceptions of how the archaeology of Moray is comparing to what you’re seeing in other areas within the commercial sector?

(MJ) That’s quite a hard question! The area around Inverness, particularly with Culduthel, that’s been a bit of a game changer to be honest, in many ways, and Birnie. I don’t know, how does it compare?

(FH) It does feel that there has been this real critical mass of material emerging here in the last few years, perhaps more so than we’ve seen in other areas. I’m biased by what I know, so I was wondering when you’re working more widely across Scotland how you feel about that?

(MC) Certainly in the Iron Age period I think the evidence we’ve got in Morayshire is probably better than a lot of places in Scotland, to be honest with you. We’ve had

huge developments in East Lothian, the Central Belt, and I don't think it had the same impact as in Aberdeenshire or Morayshire, so from the point of view of commercial archaeology and the Iron Age, it's been hugely important, and when a lot of that is published, there's things coming out in the next couple of months. I think Dawn McLaren and Rob Engl (AOC) are publishing Beechfield and a few other things will be published. Culduthel's coming along as well so I think once that's out we'll see that it's had a huge impact on the area. Yes, I think the large-scale developments just didn't take place in this area, has meant that we've got far more information. We've probably had that information in other areas already, but we aren't getting, some archaeology is still missing, some of the huge Roman archaeology probably doesn't exist up here, a lot of the Neolithic and Bronze age, although Mel touched on the Bronze Age, we probably get more of that in Perthshire and further South I think, but it has been huge, yes.

(FH) So beginning to sense almost of hotspots of particular periods.

(FH) Any more questions – any big topics you'd like to ask about, or small topics!

(Q) Ian during one of his slides about Spynie, and as a sort of throwaway remark, he mentioned Clarkly Hill, Covesea, Kinneddar were all on this headland, and you also mentioned Culbin as a centre, which I think someone has done some research on this sort of little islet of focus of Iron Age activity. I wonder if you Ian, or somebody, could develop on that theme? Are these particular, is it something to do with these liminal places that's leading to this?

(FH) The work that Jonathan (Q) mentioned is something that Richard Bradley and colleagues have been doing, fieldwalking round about the Culbin Sands, and one of the things they've been able to show for early prehistory is that Culbin really is acting very much as an island, the area to the South of I suppose the modern dune system was effectively water or bog and cutting off the area from the South, so what is now the Culbin Sands was effectively an island. And they've commented for the earlier prehistoric period, looking especially at the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, the high amount of imported material, the large amount of unfinished material – there's a lot of unfinished arrowheads from the Culbin Sands – suggests there was a lot of production activity going on there. You've also got production of, it's argued that you've got production of things like faience beads in the Early Bronze Age there, an early form of glass bead, so certainly in the Early Bronze Age the argument is that that Culbin area is acting as something special. For the Early Medieval period, people have argued that it's almost a beach market. I've always been a little sceptical of that argument, I might pass this on to Gordon (*Noble*) in a minute to pass the blame, because these sand dunes are slightly odd sites in terms of their archaeological recovery process. You see a lot of antiquarian interest, a lot of fieldwalking interest, and it's relatively easy to find stuff because you've got essentially a clean sandy environment to pick things up in, so you have to be a little cautious in thinking that what you're getting is representative of what's happening more widely. Now in the Neolithic, Richard (*Bradley*) has made a convincing argument that Culbin is something special, the Early Medieval period I'm less convinced by, there's not much material coming out of the sands. For the Iron Age,

specifically for Culbin, I think it looks like another of these rich sites. It doesn't look disproportionately different from a Culduthel, or a Clarkly or a Birnie kind of site. The question of the new island that is forming from Burghead to Kinneddar, I think it's one that's never really been fully examined but you do wonder, with the stuff Ian (*Armit*) and Lindsey (*Büster*) are getting, these strange ways of treating the dead along that coastline, that it's not just the fact that you have all these interesting caves it is also that fact that it is an island. The implications for Clarkly Hill I must say I haven't really considered but I can easily pass the microphone back to Ian at this point or Lindsey?

(LB) Yes, it is interesting Clarkly is on that side of that loch and boggy area. If we start thinking about this peninsula, I suppose as being this slightly liminal place, I'd always thought of it as a liminal place where the journey across the lochs and across that boggy area to the caves, it was important in that kind of transition from maybe the land of the living where the farming and settlement happens to that sort of land of the dead where you've suddenly got this interface landscape between land and sea. So, it is really interesting to think of Clarkly positioned where it is, and I'm going to have to think about that a bit.

(FH) Sorry to hog the mike again! The other interesting thing that's come up in a number of talks I think is this idea of the longevity of the landscape and how the history, the ancient history of these landscapes is shaping what happens in later periods and you can see that I think in the dates that Ian and Lindsey were showing, from the long-term use of some of these sites. People I guess would have been aware that they had been used repeatedly in the same way as we see at Clarkly or at Birnie, they're coming back to older sites. The point that Tanja was making with the evolution of the use of these sites, how the use is changing over time. I wouldn't quite call them early archaeologists, but they're very aware of the landscape, of the ancient history of the landscape, and they see it in that sense as something important, something powerful in and of itself, something they can then use themselves.

(FH) More questions?

(Q) Apparently there's a current trend in farming to go back to light cultivation. Will this make a big difference or has too much damage been done in the past?

(FH) Where's Claire (*Herbert*)?

(CH) I'm not 100% sure to be honest! I mean it would stop any further damage from happening or it would reduce the amount of damage that is happening. A lot of damage has already been done, it tends to be with the change into the likes of potato farming that's a lot deeper. But at some sites it hasn't had an impact. So, the likes of just outside Craigellachie, where Dave (*Anderson*) has worked, the archaeology there was not impacted by the plough because it was probably about a metre down. So, it is variable. But there is a lot of cropmarks that have been ploughed out and a lot of sites that been ploughed out already. If there is a change and there is going to be a reduction in the depth of ploughing I would say it's a positive step in terms of the protection and management of archaeology.

(FH) Although we should also be perhaps using the fact this is a rich arable area to be doing more fieldwalking, a point that Gemma (*Cruickshanks*) raised, because it really is a resource, or technique, that has been used elsewhere but really hasn't been used much in Moray. It could revolutionise our understanding of early prehistory, as well as of "slag hills".

(TR) Really a question back to the farmer – as I understand it modern farming technology allows the combine harvesters to record yields over certain areas, because everything is now GPS controlled, and then adjust the fertiliser as well so for example with cropmarks where we have this differential growth which we rely on in order to pick them up because some corn is ripening slower than others and yielding less over the archaeological features, or vice versa, then these sophisticated techniques of fertilising over certain areas will blank out cropmarks and I wonder is this true? I've only heard that, I haven't much experience with this. And is this in that sense a danger not of destroying the archaeology but us not being able to see it anymore?

(Audience – off microphone) You will see it in the farmer's records because he will know where he's applied the extra fertiliser or the less fertiliser.

(FH) The point was that perhaps the farming records themselves will show the quantities of fertiliser going into different area.

(Q) Do you think that the stone that was found in the River Spey at Craigellachie and is now in the (*Elgin*) Museum, do you think that this was connected to the Macallan Elchies items you were talking about? (*NB. The stone in question was not found in the river but on farmland north of Craigellachie*)

(DA) In a word, No! We did excavate around the find spot of the Dandaleith Stone and we didn't find where exactly it had come from, so we can't say with any certainty whether it was sitting where it had been all along or whether it had been moved. So, we really can't find any definite link besides that we did find a structure with a Pictish date beside the find spot of the stone.

(FH) Which does reinforce the value of excavating around these find spots because some may produce nothing but every so often you will get something interesting.

More questions?

(Q) What is the panel's view on the random metal detectorist?

(FH) Oh, controversial! Any views on metal detecting?

I'm happy to answer from my point of view. I think responsible metal detecting works really effectively, it takes us to sites we wouldn't otherwise know about but the key word there is responsible. I think Moray, because of the work of Elgin Museum, good relationships have been built with many of the metal detectorists in Moray and a lot of stuff gets reported. Metal detecting is a tool in that sense like fieldwalking if it's used responsibly, you find interesting things and you can use that to investigate the past. The problem is when it is used irresponsibly, and that's something we need to make as unacceptable as collecting bird's eggs now is.

(Q) Is there any truth that the Roman's had a port at the mouth of the Spey?

(FH) No one else looks like they want to answer that question either!

The question of the direct Roman involvement in Moray, I suppose I was talking about the indirect Roman involvement, the trade contacts, the diplomacy and so on. The question of any direct Roman involvement in Moray has been a point of discussion for over 300 years now, and views on this differ. There is no doubt at all that the Roman army campaigned up through this area in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD. One of the great questions has been the presence of a camp around Bellie, around Romancampgate, and it does seem, and certainly I think the late Ian Keillar was convinced and I would believe him on this, that there was a camp in this area that was lost to the Spey floods, because the distribution of the camps heading up to this area would entirely support there having been a camp in that area. The positioning by the river mouth is likely to have involved it being garrisoned, or being supplied, by sea I would think, so we have to imagine the direct Roman involvement in the area both by land and by sea is sensible. If you look at the distribution of Roman finds in this area, they're coming in by sea, a lot of these things are being brought in by boat.

(Q) Hi, my name is Nick Brown, I'm an architect and town planner. My question to you is a general one – as archaeologists, do you feel that your work is properly appreciated and indeed rewarded? And I'm particularly thinking about politicians, developers and young people when I'm asking that question.

(FH) Who's going to brave that question? Gordon?

(GN) Yes, I think so, I don't think there's the same public interest in many other academic disciplines. Also, the professional contract archaeology has been fantastic in recent years in terms of engaging the public in archaeology, and the likes of Matt's (*Ritchie*) been producing great work in terms of creating school resources packs and getting this material more into schools which would be a great thing to see. But I think there's a huge appetite out there for archaeology and heritage more generally, and I'm sure Tanja (*Romankiewicz*) could talk more about the impacts that archaeology, architecture of the past is beginning to have an impact on things like town planning, the design of buildings and the like as well, loads of real world applications for what we do as well as discovering more about the past.

(TR) Yes, there's always two sides to the medal to this, and the participation today shows I would say how many people in Moray and beyond are interested in archaeology, want to hear more, learn more, and that this stretches through all periods and this is a way we can engage with the past, with individual events, with wider topics, and because archaeology is such a finite resource, it's very precious and therefore people are more and more realising this and being more careful, also it offers the chance to get involved yourself. It's not just coming and listening to what other people are doing, but there are a lot more community projects springing up and not just like Birnie where Fraser (*Hunter*) had his project and local volunteers joined in, but projects are being now developed within the community and are community led, and working in partnership with archaeologists. So, I think there is a lot that is happening already and a lot more that we can do in making our archaeological

findings more relevant. For example, I am working with architects, having an architectural background myself, and builders to try to translate more of these prehistoric and sustainable building practices into modern architecture. So not that we need to one by one build roundhouses everywhere, but use of turf, for example or use of more organic green oak, and demonstrating that this was well done in prehistory and we can translate it into modern periods so bringing archaeology in more and more. But the other side of the medal is presumably with Mel (*Johnson*) and with Martin (*Cook*) and what they are seeing at a time of economic pressure, economic downturns, developments are getting more and more difficult to do, more and more time pressure and money pressures of getting the archaeology conditions undertaken, and presumably Claire (*Herbert*) is seeing this as well, and I've worked in commercial archaeology as well, you're essentially trying to get every penny out. It's not just the work in the field, which is perhaps easier to understand for a developer that they need to pay people to excavate this, but once you come off then having to pay for the post excavation when it's completely removed from everybody's sight but its similarly important as all our work has shown today. This I think will become more and more difficult, and there will be more and more pressure on people like Claire (*Herbert*) and Bruce (*Mann*) who are putting planning conditions on and we may have to make difficult decisions, as much as in other sectors, about hospitals and schools, as archaeology as well, and we've seem quite bad trends in the south of England where conditions are not being put onto development sites and this information is just being lost. Yes, there are always two sides to the coin and we need to, especially in that commercial context, promote more the value of archaeology and what it can tell us and help people connect with their past locally and more widely as well, so there is probably still some more work to be done in that commercial context.

(FH) I would just add that I absolutely agree. I think that selling the results of the commercial work is really important. That's why a conference like today is really important in showing the value of the new data, new information coming out, making this available to the wider public is critical and winning the hearts and minds of the wider public, and this would mean that you'd get more support, you'd a popular groundswell will still stop people doing things like selling off the collection of the Falconer Museum, for example.

(MR) I would add to that, I'm afraid that archaeology is quite a fragmented discipline and that we as a sector very rarely talk amongst ourselves or collaborate as much as we should. In terms of archaeology on the National Forest Estate, it's about for every £10 spent on the environment £1 is spent on archaeology and the historic environment. We still run archaeology in this country on an absolute shoestring and we often end up talking in echo chambers to interested people like yourselves rather than very much successful outreach, I think more pressure on politicians and on government agencies to step up the investment in archaeology and historic environment would be a very good thing.

(JT in audience) On that same question, the Treasure Trove system is brilliant, okay, but you've now got 1 person essentially running Treasure Trove for the whole of Scotland and this is just ridiculous, it can't be sustained. Even if the two people who

are normally in post were working at the moment, its still not working, the backlog. We're getting tremendous support from metal detectorists who are coming in with their stuff and the delays are just making them lose heart and this is not helping the system to work.

(FH) Absolutely, and my answer would be: complain. Complain to your MP, complain to your MSP, complain to the Crown Office, because if we don't complain there's no voice. If something's wrong, we need to talk to them.

Final word to Edna (*Cameron*), then we'll wrap it up.

(EC) Its 2 years since the Archaeology for All project finished, and still every week there are several hits on the website just pointing to the enthusiasm of the volunteers and of community archaeology. So, I've got this virtual sack of cash here, and I'd just like to ask you individuals what would you like to spend it on? Because there is money, let's be positive - there is money out there, it just needs to be applied for. So, what do you think the most useful thing to do in our local area would be?

(FH) Rapid dating round – 10 second answers each!

(JB) Give some more financial support to your local museum.

(LB) As we spoke about earlier, provide money for these great syntheses, especially with the commercial archaeology, all the data coming out, get it out to the public.

(MJ) Yes, I would agree with that. Some wide ranging synthetic work to pull all of the amazing projects that have been happening, pulling that together to provide a bigger story.

(DA) Getting stuff published! There's a lot of information out there and not enough gets published.

(IA) I think these two things go together, getting published and getting it synthesised so that people can see the actual impact it makes on how we understand the past and the value of everything that we're doing, that's where the money should be targeted.

(TR) I would say, dig more roundhouses! And maybe also apply modern technologies at a macro and micro level and bringing in other specialists. If we don't add to the data, we'll be using the same sites again and again.

(MC) On a different note, I think all commercial units should publish, just get through their backlog, and leave the money aside for more community projects and get people involved. There's loads of great projects happening all across Scotland, every weekend some's doing something, so get involved and spend it on some great projects.

(LI) In addition to supporting the museums, the local libraries and archive as well are an absolutely incredible resource for understanding the past. So, supporting them and making their material more widely available online.

(GN) Reinvigorating the Pictish Trail. I think the Pictish archaeology is really outstanding and I think that it's such an icon for Scotland and we should really be doing more to promote that and making all these wonderful carved stones and sites accessible to the public. And I think there are moves afoot to do that lets make it happen.

(GC) I agree with everything everyone's said so far, but I would also say start a fieldwalking group, something regular that local people can run for themselves.

(MR) I would argue that historic Assynt and Clachtoll Broch should be used as a model for the sort of conservation, research and excavation that communities can start, and to their credit it was HLF and HES that funded that. It's a tremendous project on a really important site that could be replicated at significant places across Scotland leading to more research, leading to more community engagement and leading to better protection of our monuments. Which is what we're famous for, upstanding monuments in the landscape.

(FH) And to follow on from that, having a regular "big dig" is important. It's one of these things that acts as a focus for attention, really builds up people's enthusiasm into an area. That was a great question Edna, thank you.

We should at this point stop our blethers and its over to Grenville (Johnston, President of The Moray Society) to offer a vote of thanks and close the day.