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Newsletter

Something new... introducing the Archaeology News North East podcast...

'Tales from the Trowel'

See Editor's Update for more details

What's inside...

1 Editor's Update…

Dear Readers,

A Happy New Year and welcome to our winter newsletter.

Yet again time has flown since our last edition in May 2024. Since then, some of our members have taken part in the two big digs at Gueswick and Plover Hall, Gilmonby with a further shorter excavation at Allendale Henge. These are likely to continue for another season of digging this year.

We've also had a number of interesting lectures and talks. In September at Mickleton Village Hall we had Alastair Robertson giving us his insights into features on Alston Moor, and a fascinating lecture from Prof. Ben Roberts on how British tin sources made Bronze Age Europe. In November at Whitley Chapel, we were treated to a double-bill of talks: Chris Jones of the Northumberland National Park updated us on the recent work at Yeavering Bell together with Martin Green and Tony Metcalfe giving us updates on the finds at the Gueswick dig.

Our final talks of the year came at the Christmas Party at St John's Chapel where Paul Frodsham delighted us with a captivating talk on Rock Art both here in the UK and in Spain. If you want to know more on this subject you can download *Abstractions Based on Circles* edited by Paul Frodsham and Kate Sharp for free at: https://www.archaeopress.com/Archaeopress/Products/9781803273167. This was followed by Martin Green describing the production process of a new book entitled *The North Pennines: From Prehistory to Present* (co-authored by Martin Green, Paul Frodsham and Greg Finch). Copies are available through the Archeopress website.

During July and August some of our members were educated in the labs at Durham University with a soil analysis workshop led by Perry Gardner and Marz

Ma. We also had two guided walks: the first in June at Shap where Patrick Neaves pointed out archaeological features in the landscape with the additional experience of seeing red squirrels in a nearby wood. In October, Dr. Emma Watson led the members around the Thornborough Henges in North Yorkshire and the Devil's Arrows Bronze Age Standing Stones near Ripon. A good day was had by all!

Finally, in December there was a meeting of the transcribers of the Durham Name Books at the Hub in Barnard Castle with talks by David Butler on 'Toll Roads' in Durham followed by Andy Curtis describing the purpose and process of geotagging (appending geographic coordinates to media such as geotagged photographs or websites). Rob Pearson, the Names Books co-ordinator, gave us an update on how far we are getting along in the process and also gave us details of some of the more interesting comments written down by the authorities. He also treated the transcribers to a lovely buffet lunch.

Now moving on, in this newsletter, we have articles by Lorraine Clay offering two fascinating glimpses into very different aspects of rock art, with her observations that historical recordings can provide useful comparators, and her experiences creating rock art using different stone tools. Alan Newham again gives us another episode of Church Corner regarding Medieval church lighting, and John Goldsborough gives a book review on the recent publication *The Rocks at the Edge of the Empire* by Ian Jackson. And to end, you can test your knowledge with the archaeology quiz, answers on p.17.

If that's not enough, and you would like to hear some more archaeology news, interviews and stories from the North East then please visit https://talesfromthetrowel.podbean.com/. This will keep you well entertained.

And finally, I would like to thank the members of the Committee for steering the organisation through another year. Thanks for all their hard work!

Happy reading

Sue Goldsborough

NB: if you would like to submit an article for the spring newsletter then send them directly to me at sgoldsborough2002@yahoo.co.uk

2 ROCK ART

Stronach Wood – sketches through time

Had I been up to the longer walk to Carn Ban during my brief trip to Arran, I might not have fit in Stronach Wood to view the rock art, but I was delighted I'd made the effort. Despite the site being mentioned in the Heritage Centre, there was no plan available, so with three hours to spare before the ferry, I went back up the hill with pad and paints. I aimed to do an overall sketch, as the panel was too big to take in with one photo. I couldn't get string in the local Co-op so I paced out the area and used fallen branches pressed into the ground every five paces.

I later found a plan on Megalithic Portal (web.1), but the book referred to (Balfour, 1910) is not available via Google Scholar. Canmore (web.2) had two plans: from 1901 by Somerville (fig.2) and from 1917 by Buchanan (fig.3), and notes from 1981 and 1982. I was relieved to see that my efforts (figs.1 and 4) corresponded reasonably well.

Comparing the recordings

Motifs in the top left (fig.1) are not as clear today as they were in 1901 (fig.2) and 1917 (fig.3). The distinct motif in the central area does not appear in 1901 but is present in 1917; perhaps it was covered at that time? Somerville (1901) recorded four motifs in the bottom left of the panel; Buchanan (1917) saw five motifs and cups. I could see only three plus a single cup.

Today, there is a great deal of moss growth, like green fur stroked downward. This may be covering the unobserved motifs, and may also be protecting them from erosion - or they may have been lost over the ensuing 100 years since they were last recorded.

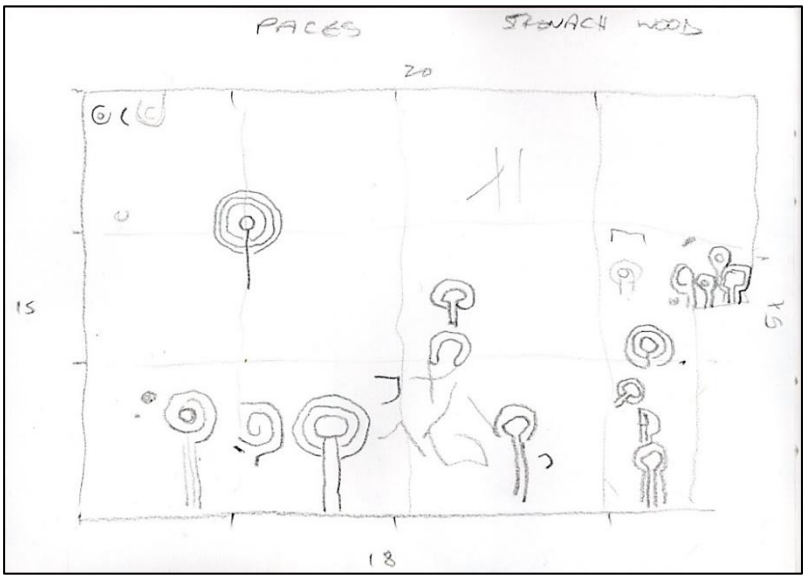


Fig.1: Sketch of Stronach Wood Rock Art by L. Clay (2024)

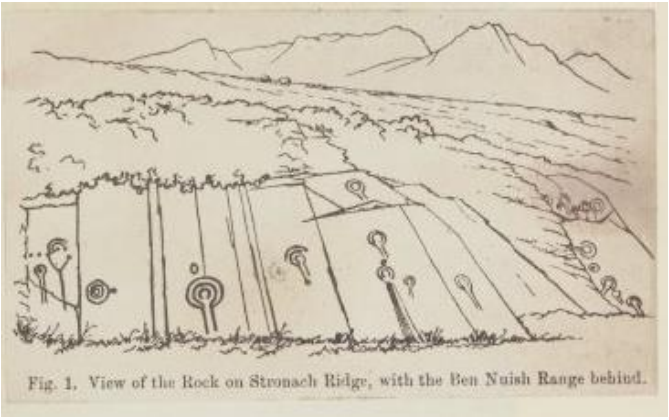


Fig.2: Sketch published in 1901 by Somerville. Note lack of surrounding forest.

Fig.3: Sketch by Buchanan, 1917 (Web.2)

Unusual motifs

It is notable that these are not cup and ring motifs as such. Somerville (1901) calls them loops, Beckensall (2005:10) refers to them as 'key-holes'. Somerville mentions similar designs at Ilkley and Kirkcudbright, but the Ilkley design has a double 'tail' and a cup, and the example at Gillroannie, Kirkcudbright, has a cup and arc and oval.

Slightly more similar are the motifs recorded by Naddair (1995) at Townhead. Although some do not have cups in the centre, they do have cups within the loop. One motif at Ormaig (see Beckansall 2005:95) has five 'legs' and also a cup.

This was never intended to be an accurate survey, but more of a tribute to the longevity of 'cup-an-ringie' as my host fondly called it. A photogrammetric model could be made, but there is too much tree cover for a drone, and sometimes more can be seen using low tech solutions.

Lorraine Clay

Fig.4: Detail of composite water-colour plan by the author showing 'key-hole' motif

Fig.5: Detail of 'key-hole' motif at Stronach Wood. Image: K. Sharpe

References

Balfour, J.A. (1910) *The Book of Arran*: The Arran Society of Glasgow

Beckensall, S. (2005) *The Prehistoric Rock Art of Kilmartin*: Kilmartin Museum Trust

Naddair, K. (1995) *Petrolyph Sites in the Townhead and Milton Area of Galloway*: Keltia

Somerville, J.E. (1901) Notice of cup-and-ring-marked rocks on the Stronach Ridge, near Brodick, in Arran. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 35: 315-24

Web.1: Megalithic Antiquarian (Stronach Wood) https://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=32226

Web.2: Canmore (Stronach Wood) https://canmore.org.uk/site/40156/arran-stronach-wood

3

CHURCH CORNER

Lighting the Medieval Church

The cresset stone

One of the earliest forms of illumination, taken up by medieval monastic buildings, was that of the so-called cresset; from the French 'craicet', originally a cup or bowel of earthenware or metal containing oil/tallow with a floating wick that was attached to a pole, making it portable. It is easy to see how this form was made static; hollow cups were carved out of the surface of a stone, hence the term: cresset stone. The stones varied in size, thus determining the number of cups carved into its surface. Although now relatively rare, examples of existing stones, some of which are now in local churches, may have originally come from monastic buildings.

One interesting stone is to be found in the church of Saint Mary in the village of Westow in East Yorkshire. It has twelve cups in one face, but on the reverse, is a carved crucifixion panel (fig.1). The stone is thought to have come from Kirkham Abbey. It now sits in a niche in the wall with the panel side facing outward.

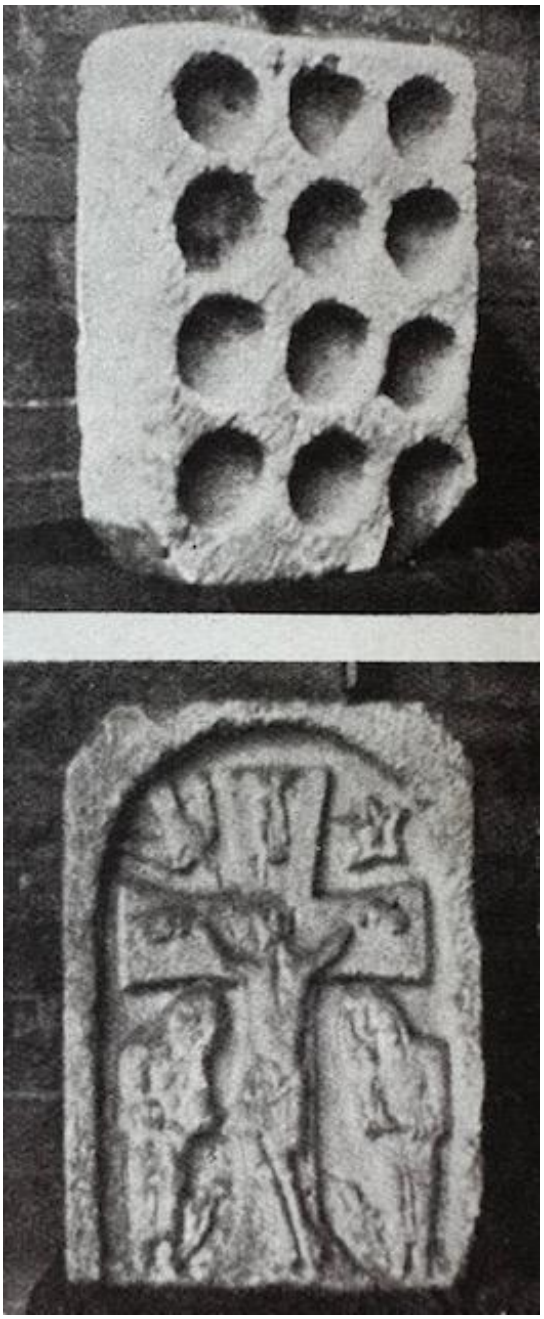


Fig.1: Cresset and panel, Westow

Cresset, Lowenick, Cornwall

Cresset, Brecon Cathedral

Here's a cresset I made earlier with 250 million year-old Magnesian Limestone.

Tiered Suspended Candelabra c15 onwards

A small number of later medieval tiered candelabra survive, one of which is of a supposed c15 Flemish design that hung in the Temple church in Bristol and survived the destruction by the bombing of the church in 1940. It is now in Bristol Cathedral. The popular two-tier design continued, of which there are examples below.

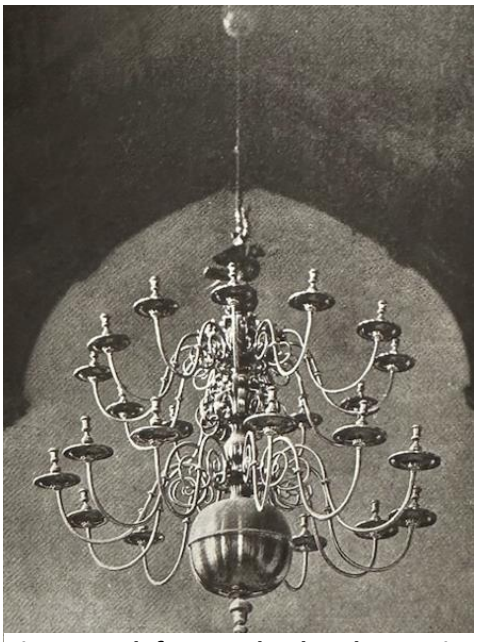


Fig.2: Top left: Temple Church, now in Bristol Cathedral, 15thC; Top-right: Wedmore Church, Somerset, 1779. Botttom-left: Wymondham Abbey, Norfolk, 1712; Bottom-right: Saint Hilda's Church, South Shields, 1802

Iron-Work

A first-class example is to be found in the church of Saint Peter, Rowlestone (fig.3), containing two wall-bracketed candelabra dating to the medieval period. They have cock and fleur-de-lys heads and prickets for candles. They are hinged, so to move against the wall when not in use.

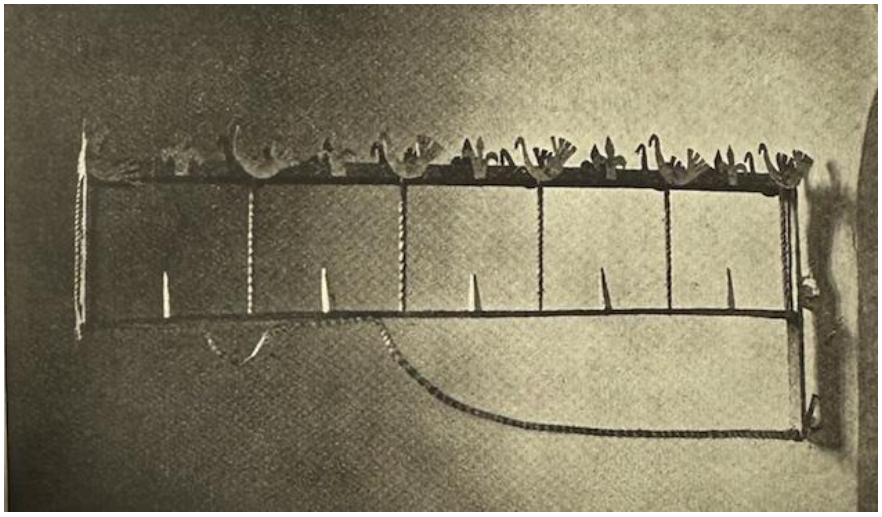


Fig.3: Saint Peter Church, Rowlestone, Herefordshire, 15thC.

Churches are full of objects, large or small, sometimes hiding in a corner, seemingly neglected. Close observation of fixtures and fittings can be a pleasant pastime, so keep a look out next time you find a convenient church when fleeing the rain.

Alan Newham

4 Experimenting with Rock Art Tools

Experimental Rock Art with Wallridge Stone and Foreign Stone

At the end of the excavation at Wallridge (Belief in the North East) in 2023 I asked to take some stones from the site to work at a later date, just like I did for The Ness of Brodgar in 2022 (https://www.nessofbrodgar.co.uk/recollections-of-working-stone/).

Our geologist stated that the Wallridge stone was a particular hard intrusive sandstone (fig.1), and proved hard to work on whilst on site. Red sandstone used as a hammerstone disintegrated, and yellow sandstone flaked when struck on the bedrock. Most successful was a small nodule of ironstone, but even that was making slow progress.

Fig.1: Working stone on site

I was interested to further these experiments and was given permission to collect stones from the vicinity. I selected two portable samples of bedrock and a selection of small stones from the spoil heap, not finding any more ironstone.

I chose one stone (Sample A) to work with local stone (fig.2) and another (Sample B) to work with foreign/imported stone from my collection (fig.3).

Fig.2: Working stone A with local stone

Fig.3: Foreign stone- unsuccessful percussors

Local stone tools used on Sample A

The local stones I had selected on site were mostly small. When percussing on Sample A, stones that appeared sturdy split; some were even soft enough to use as "chalk" (fig.2), as had happened in the field. The stone that proved the best was a pointed triangular grey siltstone with some weight to it. It was quarter circle in profile and an even thickness and comfortable to hold.

Foreign Stone

Several foreign stones were tried on Sample B (fig.3). Quartz pebbles were too small to get proper purchase and were unsuccessful; Orkney Sandstone 'courgettes' made some impact initially but were too fat to deepen the ring. A Lewisian Gneiss finger also didn't have an adequate point. Skaill Bay siltstone fingers were too slender to hold in such a way as to create impact. The full thickness of the Skaill Bay siltstone pebble, used to make rock art in 2022, was too broad to make a ring. The half thickness pebble worked best, as it had on the on the Orkney horned spiral and cup and ring (fig.4). Also successful were Northumberland beach flint, Dryburn Quartz, basalt and granite 'eggs'.

To avoid cramping, I changed stones during processing, switching my grip or my hand. Debris was photographed. Notably two flint flakes splintered off when working the tail: one siltstone, and one a piece of the bedrock. Quartz, basalt and granite left no debris to the naked eye.

Fig.4: Rock art on Ness of Brodgar stone (2022) in situ one year on (NB stone from Kirkhaugh in foreground)

Discussion

The ability to use a stone in percussion involved characteristics that were not just related to the type of stone but also to the size and shape. Impact could be made with rounded stones initially, but a point was indispensable in creating a deeper line or ring. Local stone at Wallridge was not hard enough to make much impact on local bedrock (fig.5) and artists may have needed to import flint, ironstone, or quartz to decorate the site (fig.6). Given that the quartz and basalt did not fracture, we would not expect to see debris at sites where these stones are accessible. This might also suggest that fractured quartz found in conjunction with rock art in Kilmartin Valley, Argyll and Bute, was deliberately placed.

Lorraine Clay

Fig.5: Sample A with local stone as tools

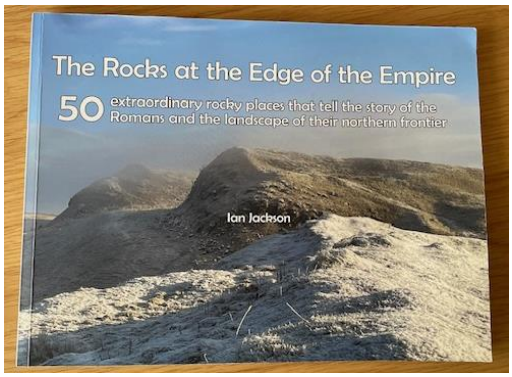
Fig 6: Sample B with successful percussors

5

Book Review

‘The Rocks at the Edge of the Empire’

This book is by the geologist, Ian Jackson, and is an introduction to the way geology shaped the occupation of the most northerly part of Hadrian’s empire. The author claims this is not a specialist or academic publication and is written for people curious about the landscape and it’s past. The book has 110 pages and retails at only £12 with proceeds going to the Newcastle Society of Antiquarians.



The book covers 50 different sites along Hadrian’s Wall and its hinterland. For each site there is a page of narrative, plus a picture of the site and an ordnance survey map with a grid reference of the exact location. I have to say that the photographs are stunning but there is a hip-hopping in the sequence of sites from east of the wall to west and back again that can leave you disorientated especially if you are not familiar with the site locations.

The topics vary from burns, loughs, peat bogs and lime kilns to the more familiar names such as Housesteads, Vindolanda and Chesters. Information on the locations also varies from site to site. I found some places to be really interesting and thought provoking such as the lime kilns at Knag Burn, the iron ore at Brackies Burn, the salterns at Crosscanonby and especially the tufa at Newbrough, but this could be down to my personal interests.

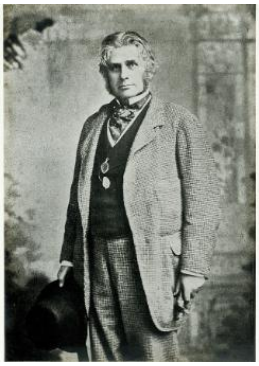
I would have liked some more detail than we are given. However, the book does work as a travel guide to ‘whet the appetite’ and stimulate people to visit the sites. It also provokes the reader to think about the thought processes of the Romans in choosing where to build. I enjoyed the book but just wish it contained more narrative. There is scope here for a more in-depth book just waiting to be written.

John Goldsborough

[ISBN: 9781739486143, published 2024]

6 QUIZ

Can you match the description of some well-known archaeologists/ antiquarians against the pictures? (answers p.8)



a. A. Pitt-Rivers

b. William Camden

c. Howard Carter

d. Mary Leakey

e. Mortimer Wheeler

f. Kathleen Kenyon

g. Arthur Evans

h. Flinders Petrie

1.	During the late 1930s and early '40s this British archaeologist excavated numerous large and complex sites, including the Iron Age hillfort at Maiden Castle in Dorset.
2.	This person excavated Jericho to its Stone Age foundation and showed it to be the oldest known continuously occupied human settlement
3.	An English antiquary, a pioneer of historical method, and author of *Britannia,* the first comprehensive topographical survey of England
4.	A British archaeologist and Egyptologist who made valuable contributions to the techniques and methods of field excavation and invented a sequence dating method
5.	A British archaeologist and pioneer in the study of Aegean civilization in the Bronze Age. Carried out the first excavations at the Minoan palace of Knossos, on Crete
6.	A British paleoanthropologist who developed a system for classifying the stone tools found at Olduvai, and made several fossil finds of great importance in the understanding of human evolution
7.	This person was noted for innovations in archaeological methodology, and in the museum display of archaeological and ethnological collections
8.	A British archaeologist and Egyptologist who discovered the intact tomb of the 18th Dynasty Pharaoh Tutankhamun in November 1922

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QUIZ ANSWERS

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Many thanks to the following AA members for their contributions to the newsletter:

- Alan Newham
- Lorraine Clay
- John Goldsborough