



**Perthshire Society of Natural Science**  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SECTION  
(Registered Charity Number SC 012718 )

**Newsletter March 2019**

**Our AGM**

The Section AGM took place on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March at 7.30pm followed by a talk by Mark Hall - "The Tulloch Walker and some other new Treasure Trove acquisitions at Perth Museum & Art Gallery" Mark gave us an interesting update on his research on the Tulloch Walker, the unusual Pictish carving found during road excavations in Perth in 2017, as well as updates on recent Treasure Trove acquisitions including the Sherriffmuir Neolithic carved stone ball, the subject of our recent successful fundraising appeal.

*The Committee elected for 2019-20*

President – Margaret Borland-Stroyan

Vice - President – David Bowler

Secretary - vacant

Treasurer – Irene Green

Ordinary Members – John Andrews, David Perry, John Jessop, Colin McLeod, Philip Bryers, Percy Shelley

Archaeological Adviser - Mark Hall, Perth Museum and Art Gallery

John Bennett has agreed to become an administrator for the PSNS Facebook page on behalf of the Section.

**Section Summer 2019 Outings**

Wed 24th April - Dunkeld Community Archive

Sun 26th May - Scottish Crannog Centre

Sat 29th June - Montrose Air Station Heritage Centre

Wed 17th July - Strathearn Archaeology Trail

Full details are circulated with this newsletter.

**Sheriffmuir ball secured for Perth Museum**

On 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019 a fund-raising appeal for the Sheriffmuir carved stone ball reached its target of £1,625. With matching funding from the National Fund for Acquisitions, the 4,000-year old stone ball's assessed market value of £3,250 is being made available to Perth Museum, thus enabling it to add this beautiful and mysterious item to its collection of a dozen plain and decorated carved stone balls.

Mark Hall, Collections Officer at Perth Museum, who acts as Archaeological Adviser to the Archaeological & Historical Section, approached the Section Committee last summer to

propose a partnership arrangement with Perth Museum. His idea was that the Section should from time to time use an on-line fundraising platform to generate funds for the purchase of archaeological artefacts.

Under Scottish Treasure Trove law the reward valuation, based on the assessed market value of the find, is payable to the finder. (Landowners have no locus.) More and more artefacts are coming to light just as official funding for their purchase decreases. Although museums can apply to the National Fund for Acquisitions, they are expected to raise half the money needed.

It was agreed that, if the fundraising was successful, the Museum side would display the new item, fully acknowledging the contribution made by the PSNS. More generally, it would explore ways of enabling PSNS members to have special access to the workings of the Museum and its collections, for example through basic training in conservation. After due discussion and discussions with the PSNS Council, it was agreed that the Archaeological and Historical Section would undertake a pilot project. A Museum Acquisitions Focus Group was formed to take the matter forward.

The discussions coincided with the optimistic expectation that Perth Museum and Art Gallery would be invited to secure a beautifully carved sandstone ball, found on Sheriffmuir in the foothills of the Ochil Hills. In January 2019 Perth Museum received formal confirmation that the Sheriffmuir ball had been allocated to it. The notification allowed the Museum two months in which to raise the sum of £3,250, the ball's assessed market value.

The Museum Acquisitions Focus Group launched the appeal on the "JustGiving" fundraising platform on 23 January, receiving the first donation within a few minutes of going on-line. The receipt of the donation which reached and slightly exceeded the target was made at about midnight on the night of 8-9 March.

The Sheriffmuir ball is a particularly fine and highly decorated example of its kind. Of the 250 carved balls found in Scotland, fewer than 50 have been highly decorated. Carved balls like this are generally dated around 3200-2500 BC in Britain. In addition to the 520 balls found in Scotland, a very few have been found elsewhere – in the North of England, Ireland and Norway. The latest find is one of the most southerly of the Scottish balls.

No-one knows why the stones were carved and there are many theories about what they were, including toys, ornaments, offensive weapons and ceremonial weapons. All about 7 centimetres in diameter, they fit both comfortably and comfortably in the palm of an adult hand.

Dr Anderson-Whymark, Curator of Prehistory at National Museums Scotland says: "These artefacts have captured the imagination for more than 150 years and despite much debate we're still not certain how they were used."

In 2011, Louise Tait, a glass artist, made a glass interpretation of one of the carved balls on display in an Exhibition in Perth Museum. She comments on the Sheriffmuir ball: "These mysterious carved stone balls have confounded scholars around the world and their enigma continues to fascinate me and inspire my work. Every new discovery is of enormous value in itself and deserves our curiosity and attention."

In the light of experience gained during this fundraising campaign, the Section is likely to consider future requests to assist the Museum acquire further archaeological items. First of all, however, we are looking forward to seeing the Sheriffmuir ball and to learning more of Museum plans for closer engagement with our members.

Margaret Borland-Stroyan  
President

## Stone Circle Trail

A group of members plan, weather permitting, to begin clearing overgrown vegetation at Colen this weekend. One of the signs requires repair also.



*Colen Stone Circle 1996*

*Some of the original team –  
Dr Gregson,  
Eva & John Bennett,  
Tom Colquhoun and  
David Perry*



*Cup marks on one of the stones  
1996*

Two items that members may find of interest:

**Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal**

Volume 24 of the TAFAC journal was published online on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2018

(<http://www.tafac.org.uk/2018/10/volume-24/>) and contained the following papers relating to Perthshire:

Claire Ellis and Matthew Ritchie – ‘The Excavation of Na Clachan Aoraidh, a four poster stone circle in northern Perthshire’

Ray Cachart (Alder Archaeology) – ‘Treading the Boards. An archaeological evaluation and watching brief at Perth Theatre, Mill Street, Perth

Alison Sheridan, Derek Hall, Aida Romera, Nathan Welch, Oliver O’Grady and Rob Engl – ‘Kilmagadwood Early Bronze Age Cemetery: excavation and initial post-excavation research’

If you don’t have access to the internet but would still like to read any of these let me know and I will print off a copy for you.

**Edinburgh International Science Festival**

*Unlocking the Secrets of Our Past*

Saturday 13 April (3pm). National Museum of Scotland auditorium, Edinburgh.

Discuss and explore how science, technology and innovation in archaeology are used to unlock secrets of the past, with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland’s Fellows Dr Alison Sheridan and Dr Lisa Brown, chaired by theoretical physicist, science author and broadcaster Professor Jim Al-Khalili.

Presented and organised by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, as part of the 2019 Edinburgh International Science Festival. For information and to book a place visit [www.sciencefestival.co.uk/](http://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/) . Early booking recommended.

While the post of Secretary remains unfilled please continue to contact me as before with any queries or comments.

Regards,

Eva

01738 850489

psns1948@yahoo.co.uk

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(Registered Charity Number SC012718)

**[www.psns.org.uk](http://www.psns.org.uk)**