

Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists

Chairperson's Annual Report 2020

In what has been to date a very different year, necessitating the cancellation of most of our survey trips and the postponement until next year of our Arran field trip, ACFA has still managed to be remarkably busy, although the wider membership has not had the opportunities they would normally expect.

Surveys:

Work was suspended on the Thorntonhall Lime Kilns survey last autumn but funding provided by the local community council helped purchase a handheld electronic distance measuring device which has been used effectively recently surveying selected features around Eaglesham village. Ken Mallard, Janie Munro and Christine MacDiarmid continue to work in the village (in pairs) under Susan Hunter's direction and the Thorntonhall survey will recommence when possible.

In February, before lock-down, a small group of ACFA members and the Luing History Group began recording some remaining features on the island including more of the footings of farm buildings from the 1847 estate plan. Also drawn were more of the slate industry buildings and a survey of the coast was undertaken to describe previously unrecorded caves, rock shelters and rock overhangs. In one cave on the east coast, a side passage opened into a large chamber which remains to be explored properly. Borrowing animals at a rock shelter on the west coast have thrown up limpets shells, and a piece of animal skull was also recovered. Margaret Gardiner found what may be a quartzite hand tool in a rock shelter that had been poached by cattle. A circular enclosure on Leccamore ridge not far from the fort, found by Helen Maxwell on a previous occasion, was drawn up. Several more features found by the Luing History Group which they hope to record over the winter in association with a Lidar survey which they self-funded.

Once lock-down was relaxed, the Mearns Parish project under Susan Hunter's direction recommenced, recording the remains of the Broom Estate including Broom House (now Belmont School), bridge, carriageway, stables, lodge house, Broomcroft and Broom cottage.

May-September - More work was carried out in the Kilsyth Hills where shieling remains and a large fold with attached two-compartment house were recorded. Also noted were some rock shelters and small pens. This survey was carried out by Anne and Dugie MacInnes, Libby King and Margaret Gardiner when easing of Covid-19 restrictions allowed people from three households to meet out-of-doors.

August - Anne and Dugie MacInnes and Jean Hirst field walked more areas in the Halter Valley as a prelude to future visits by ACFA and Border Archaeology Society members. Several small previously unrecorded features were drawn up including a possible ring-ditch barrow/cairn. Wendy and Peter Raine joined in this work for a day. The upstanding remains of a building known as Halfway House were recorded with the fair copies of it being drawn up by Scott Wood.

September - Anne and Dugie MacInnes visited Port Appin, on a family history trip and recorded the remains of buildings not shown on the First Edition OS map and two possible unrecorded cists and a rock shelter.

In late September Dugie and Anne were joined by Ian Marshall to spend a day revisiting rock art sites in Glen Lochay at Lower Duncroisk and Corrycharmaig recorded during our 2019 trip, adjusting descriptions, completing photography and photogrammetry, and creating records and sketch plans. Work still remains to be done in the glen both revisiting sites, eg Upper Glencroisk, and recording those still to be investigated.

October - ACFA was able to send two socially distanced teams to Tiree in October 2020, under the advisement of Dr John Holliday. Ed and Ailsa Smith spent a week on Hynish continuing to map boundary walls and this included work with a drone. Their departure was followed by the arrival of Dugie and Anne MacInnes, Margaret Gardiner and Libby King who 'tidied up' various features already drawn on Hynish, recorded several more and embarked on a more rigorous recording of kelp kilns and rock shelters along the coast. A few remaining small features were also recorded, including several cists, a boat 'noost', possibly used by smugglers, a flint-knapping site, found by John, and a set of possibly defensive walls near to one of the duns. Nearly thirty features were drawn and a further fifty to sixty recorded taking the total features to date on Hynish to around six hundred and twenty. We were also extremely fortunate to be joined by soil scientist Diana Zilioli who spent two days with Elaine Black sampling soil in the vicinity of various boundary walls. Much to our surprise, given the limitations we have all been under this year, her work has contributed to a major breakthrough in our understanding of the site. The project in its entirety, therefore, proceeded as planned and indeed, exceeded expectations.

Publications:

We are delighted that Dr David Caldwell has agreed to be the reviewer of the archaeology content of our occasional papers. A worthy successor to the late Lionel Masters, David is out-going President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and was Keeper of the *Scotland and Europe*, and *Archaeology* collections at the National Museum of Scotland. We are also happy to note that he has joined us as a member.

His first task saw the publication in October of ACFA Occasional paper 145, *Halterburnhead*, the first paper arising from our ongoing survey in the Halter Valley.

Prior to David's appointment, ACFA Occasional Paper 144, *Southern area of Mearns Parish* was published, the latest in Susan Hunter's survey of surviving features. The paper covering the Broom Estate is in preparation.

A field survey of a house, byre and barn above Glen Duror Bothy, West Highland, has been proofread by and publication will proceed shortly once it has been approved by David. *Glen Duror, In Search of James of the Glen* is a collaboration between ACFA and Neill Malcolm (Friends of Keil Church). It also includes a re-consideration of various documents pertaining to Jacobite prisoners of the '45 by Angus Stewart QC. Unfortunately, accessing digital copies from the National Records Office at Kew was a long drawn out process due to the pandemic but this has finally been resolved and was certainly worth the wait. Glen Duror is associated with James Stewart whose execution in 1752 for his alleged part in the Appin Murder inspired Robert Louis Stevenson's masterpiece *Kidnapped*.

Dugie MacInnes, Margaret Gardiner and Libby King continue work on the Glen Lochay magnum opus and further Tiree papers are expected.

Ailsa and Edward Smith produced two technical papers detailing the methodology and techniques used to collect data, map and analyse the field systems of Ben Hynish, Tiree. These have been published on ACFA's website.

Eric Cregeen Archive:

The ACFA project to collate and evaluate the residual archive of Eric Cregeen (1921-1983), the renowned folklorist, historian and archaeologist, has made some progress, albeit more slowly than anticipated. Eleanor MacKay, Librarian at LiveArgyll's library at Sandbank, Dunoon, generously arranged for the 20 boxes of material in her keeping to be moved to Glasgow in November 2019. This facilitated access to it by the team of nine members assembled to create a spreadsheet of it and do an initial trawl for hitherto unpublished material and papers that might be relevant to the continuing Tiree project, a significant part of Eric's work having been done on the island. However, after getting underway properly in January, the project was brought to a sudden halt soon after by the Coronavirus pandemic, which ruled out members of the team coming together to work on the material. Fortunately, the Librarian authorised permission for individual members to work on boxes in their own homes, and that is continuing. About a third of the boxes have now been completed. The material examined so far is extremely varied in nature and significance, but some of it will certainly be worth closer evaluation. The project has been extended to include examination of the content of the nine volumes of Eric's field notebooks of 1939-1982, published in facsimile. Those from the 1950s onwards contain many references to Tiree, principally oral history taken from octogenarian inhabitants in the 1960s, whose family recollections extended into the early nineteenth century. Thanks to the accommodation of the Librarian, the project will continue best it can within the current and future restrictions on movement and contact.

Miscellaneous:

Ongoing training in the use of our EDM was interrupted but it is hoped to recommence when conditions permit.

Thanks go to Ian Marshall and Janet MacDonald for their excellent work in producing our newsletter.

William Dougan has taken up the baton from Sue Bryson as administrator of the Photography Competition. He devised an inventive use of our website to run an online competition.

Our website has now been updated on its new platform and we await the imminent online publication of our collection of Raasay surveys as a beginning to the project of making all our occasional papers freely available to download from our website.

Who knows what the next year will bring but ACFA will continue to take advantage of opportunities to carry out activities.