



## NEWSLETTER November 2013

### **Dates for your diary**

Tuesday 19 November, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

**MAD: Excavating a Neolithic settlement on Westray, Orkney**

- Graeme Wilson and Hazel Moore of EASE Archaeology

Friday 13 December, 6.45 pm at Coul House Hotel

**NOSAS Christmas Dinner**

Book with Anne Cockroft

Tuesday 21 January, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

**MAD: The archaeology of Fortriu - Excavations on the Tarbat Peninsula**

- Candy Hatherley

Tuesday 18 February, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

**MAD: Discussion on henges**

- Roland Spencer-Jones

Tuesday 18 March, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

**MAD: to be arranged**

## Winter walks

These are weather dependent, so make sure you contact the organiser in advance so that you will be informed if the walk has to be cancelled. Bring a packed lunch unless otherwise advised. Further details of each walk will be circulated nearer the time, and posted on the NOSAS website.

Sunday 1 December

**Three Duns above the Beaully Braes.** Meet 10.30 at Kilmorack Village Hall, NH 48360 44726, along the Cannich road from the Lovat Bridge.

- led by Roland Spencer-Jones

Saturday 14 December (day after NOSAS Christmas Dinner)

**Scatwell illicit stills.** Meet at 10 am at NH 409 555, 1 km east of Scatwell House, on the south side of the River Conon.

- led by Meryl Marshall

Thursday 9 January

**Rosehaugh Estate and Munloch Bay harbour and quarry, with lunch at the Station Hotel, Avoch.** Meet at 10am within Rosehaugh at NH 677557 - when approaching from the west on the A832 take a left turn about 2 km before Avoch, proceed on the estate road for c.1 km and park on the "terrace" from where there will be a 5 minute walk to the estate office. Book lunch with Beth Blackburn

- led by Meryl Marshall and Roland Spencer Jones

Saturday 8 February

**?Inver to Portmahomack**

- led by David Findlay

Tuesday 4 March

**Walk - to be decided**

Thursday 3 April

**Walk to Glenarigolach township near Gruinard and search for shielings**

Monday 14 April

**Surveying and recording the township of Keppoch near Dundonnell**

- led by Beth Blackburn, Meryl Marshall and Anne McInnes

Early May

**Sutherland - prehistoric stuff near Dornoch**

- led by Anne Coombs

## 2013 Chairperson's Report

As announced at the AGM I did not deliver a full review of the year, but instead concentrated on the resolution to become a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation). I am very pleased to announce for those who were unable to attend the meeting that there was a unanimous acceptance of the resolution and in due course NOSAS will become a SCIO. There will be further communications with regard to the changeover.

So to the review of 2013. We had three notable changes within the committee and general working of NOSAS. Cait McCullagh and Allan Mackenzie both stood down from the committee, and I would like to thank them both for their hard work over the years. They will both be much missed having given a lot of time and energy to NOSAS. Trina Wombell has also stood down from her 'jobs' of membership secretary and in charge of the library. We were able to confirm Roland Spencer-Jones as a member of the committee having co-opted him on last year. He has taken over as membership secretary from Trina and also looks after the web site. Susan Kruse has taken the library over from Trina. I wish them both luck with their new positions and thank Trina for the work she has done over the years, especially the moving of the library from her spare bedroom to Dingwall library so we can all access it. Susan has arranged that it will become much easier for people to get the books through their own library rather than coming to Dingwall. Meryl Marshall stood down as vice chairperson and proposed Alan Thompson who was voted in unanimously. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Meryl for all the help she has given me. I would also like to welcome James McComas to the new committee.

2012-13 was another busy year. The committee worked hard on the SCIO application and the new NOSAS constitution: especial thanks to the sub committee who took care of all the detail. However the society did so much else.

Firstly congratulations to Meryl who has been busy as usual. This year she and John Wombell led the Muchaich project, which involved a small dig on the kiln and the completion of the Adopt-a-Monument status of the site with a smart leaflet. In between times she also published the second edition of her Glen Feshie book. The new edition has lots of fresh information and is selling well; it is available from Meryl to members at a discounted price of £8.

The shell sorters of Tarradale deserve a mention - forget Molly Malone see Pam Draper, Rosemary Jones and Linda Lamb for the definitive description of cockles and mussels. We have field walked and geo-physed and carried home considerable amounts of Tarradale soil on our boots and look forward to the next phase of the Tarradale project. We joined with SCAPE and their new SCHARP project of re-visiting the coastal survey of over 10 years ago. We started with a training session run by Jo Hambly at Simon Gunn's house followed by a cold but useful walk along the shore to put into practice our new skills. Then three fun days were had walking along the coast around Golspie and Dornoch with appropriate stops for clafoutis on the dunes and tea and scones at the Trawler; several new sites were recorded. In March we joined with ARCH for a series of events with RCHAMS: a talk by Eve Boyle and two walks with her and Piers Dixon to Ormond Castle and to shieling sites in Strathconon. In May a great long weekend was had on the North coast around Tongue. We started with a good walk round visiting cup marked rocks on the Friday and then had an 'epic' day on Saturday. Jonie and Richard Guest ferried us

over to Eilean nan Roan in their RIB. The sun shone and, not satisfied with providing the transport, our 'hosts' produced a magical barbeque and ran boat trips round the island. Tired but happy we finished the day with a super meal at the Borgie Hotel organised by Beth Blackburn. Sunday was spent on the Kyle of Tongue with Jo Hambly of SCAPE recording all sorts of features. A slightly depleted group braved the cold on Monday and were rewarded by visits to more cup marked rocks, including an especially strange one near Lochan Hakel, a broch and more coastal sites. The following weekend John led another large group who met at the car park near Lossiemouth to visit the Sculptor's Cave. Being NOSAS we didn't stop at the main cave but also visited several more along the coast and found more rock art in every one. Roland introduced us to Urchany and its mystery structure, which has been well visited but still awaits classification in spite of the great and good expressing widely different opinions. Several members also assisted Scottish Canals in a survey of the Caledonian Canal confirming the CANMORE records. This project will end early in the New Year. Another group has been recording sites around Castle Leod and having great fun spotting mason's marks all round the castle. Simon has been beavering away with his Caves project and has spent the year surveying most of the caves along the shore near Rosemarkie and over the summer digging test pits in some of the caves. Recently several of us attended a photogrammetry workshop provided by Adopt a Monument. Who knows what kinds of exotic 3D pictures will be produced next year?

Then there were the digs beginning in February with Inchnadamph and continuing through the spring and summer with Loch Bhuie, Caen, Easter and Wester Rarichie, WeDigs and Comarty as well as our own Mulchaich kiln dig. I managed to visit many of them, often briefly - I usually managed to arrive in time for morning coffee and cakes and leave just after afternoon tea and cakes. There is a theme here! However I met so many members who were there day after day from the beginning of de-turfing to back filling in every kind of weather from sleet to sunshine. I hope you all enjoyed it as much as I did and also enjoyed the justified praise NOSAS got from so many professionals at the HAF conference. By the end of day one I expected to see us depicted as the 7th Cavalry riding over the hill on wheelbarrows with shovels and mattocks at the ready.

MAD nights go from strength to strength but new ideas are always welcome. We ranged from the information found in the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework and lots of other internet sites with Susan Kruse, an evening training about SCHARP with Jo from SCAPE and Anna Welti talked to us about her round house project WeDigs. The Christmas dinner was at Coul House again. A good time was had by everyone and the accommodation provided at a bargain price was excellent as usual. The festivities were completed with a post-celebratory walk on Saturday around the hills beside Strathpeffer and lunch at Nether Kinellan. The MAD nights have begun for 2013-14, the programme for the year is on the web site and a good programme of day events is also being advertised with Christmas dinner at Coul House once again this year on 13th December.

Finally I would like to remind members of the facilities NOSAS has available. We have the library which Susan has written about below. We are members of SCRAN which has a wide range images and maps; our password is on the web site so that all members can use it. We are also members of Archaeology Scotland and receive their publications which are put in the library when they arrive. For the majority who have access to the internet the web site and Facebook will keep you up to date with our activities. But they need to be fed and Roland needs you to send him information regularly to keep them fresh.

We have a large and comprehensive range of equipment for surveying and digging available for everyone to use. The list is kept on the web site and includes two well maintained First Aid boxes and a selection of small radios so that we can be practical about Health and Safety. We have insurance which covers our activities; again details of this are on the web site. As you will also know having seen it in our financial reports we have a 'Publications Account'. This was originally set up to facilitate the publication of the first Glen Feshie book but it is there as a resource for NOSAS and the production of project reports or books if we have such a proposal. We do have a printer for small scale in house project or survey reports. Although most of the equipment is kept in the Easter Ross area it is for the use of all members; please contact the committee if you need more information.

Anne Coombs, Chair

## **NOSAS Library**

NOSAS has a small but growing collection of books which are kept in Dingwall Library. A list of current holdings can be found on the NOSAS website. Only NOSAS members are allowed to borrow them – and now we have arrangements in place for you to request books from your local branch of Highland Libraries.

In order to do this you must be a current member of the library. Please note that some of you may have lapsed memberships or may never have joined. If in any doubt, contact your local library and make sure your details are up to date.

If you want to borrow a NOSAS book, go into your library, and explain that you are a NOSAS member. The library staff will check your record which lists you as a member in the Analysis Field. They will then email Dingwall Library with your details and the book details, and the book will then be placed in the Highland van delivery system. This may take up to a couple of weeks, depending on how frequently your branch gets deliveries. You can return the books to any Highland Council library branch.

The NOSAS library is happy to take donations if you have some archaeology books you no longer want. Contact Susan on [cruachan.hts@googlemail.com](mailto:cruachan.hts@googlemail.com) if you want to discuss – or if you have problems with requesting books to other locations.

Susan Kruse

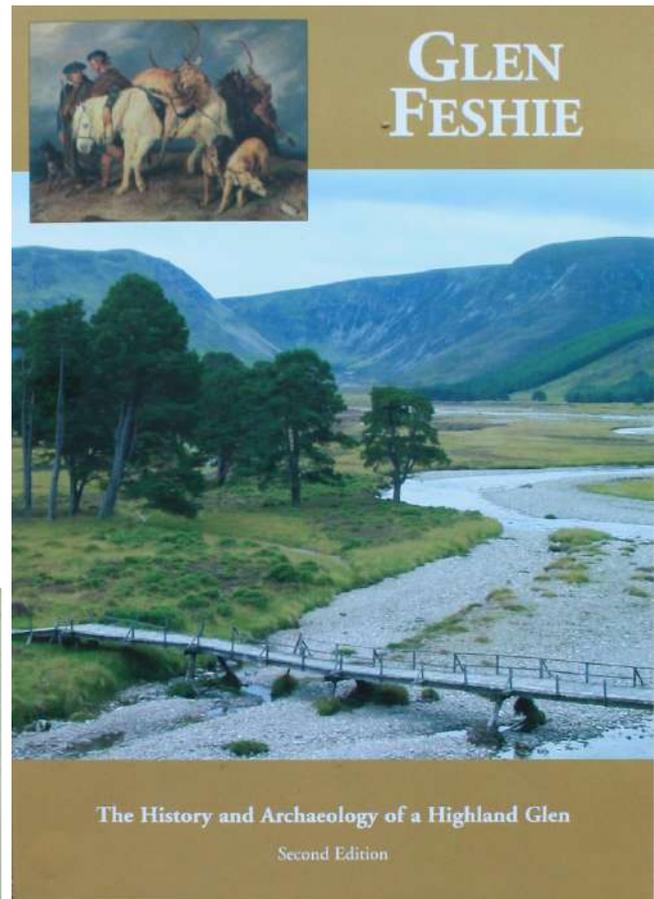
## The new Glen Feshie book

We, the North of Scotland Archaeological Society, are pleased to announce the publication of the second edition of "Glen Feshie - The History and Archaeology of a Highland Glen" by Meryl Marshall.

The first book, published in 2005, had a very successful reception and was quickly sold out. Since then more research has been carried out and new material and photographs have come to light; particularly fascinating are the 19th century photographs of the "Huts in Glenfeshie" by AM Urquhart.



*Duchess of Bedford's Huts in Glenfeshie*



This second edition includes many of these photographs and a new chapter on Kinrara, thought to be the inspiration for the settlement. The story of the glen is brought up to date with a new chapter on

the 20th Century and WW2 training. In 2007 the NOSAS Glen Feshie project was joint winner of the Council for British Archaeology's Marsh Community Award, a significant feather in our cap which we were very proud to receive.

Prof T. C. Smout, Historiographer Royal in Scotland, wrote of the first edition of the book:

"Glen Feshie is one of the most beautiful places in the Cairngorm National Park [... and] like everywhere in the Highlands, it is steeped in history: it is the interaction between nature and people that makes it so interesting. This excellent short book tells it all, from the old shieling systems and the deserted farmtouns high in the glen once growing grain (it seems incredible now), to the days of the nineteenth century deer stalkers. Particularly fascinating are the high jinks of the Duchess of Bedford, holding parties in her "huts" with her friend Sir Edwin Landseer and other guests, playing at turning their backs on civilisation. It is all a far cry from the usual idea of Victorians as prim and proper. There are lots of illustrations - maps, archaeological drawings, photographs, paintings, some contrasting what Landseer saw with the same scene today."

The book is available through retailers in the area, from Waterstones in Inverness, and also from the Amazon website, price £9. But purchased from me the cost to NOSAS members is £8 - I will have them available at all the MAD evenings etc. Meryl Marshall

## Prehistoric Roundhouses of Wester Ross and parts of Skye

This illustrated booklet has been produced by Jeremy Fenton, Anna Welti and Martin Wildgoose as a follow-up to the posters which made up the Wee Digs Exhibition. The booklet covers much more than the posters could.

After answering the question 'What is a roundhouse?' it describes how to find them, how they can be surveyed and recorded, their design and construction, their choice of locations, the geology underlying their sites, etc.



*Diggers at Achnahaird*

The final section summarises where most of the roundhouses can be found in Wester Ross, Lochalsh and parts of Skye. Area maps and grid references are given, with brief directions on where to park and how to find the more accessible roundhouses.

To obtain a copy, email

[annawelti@btinternet.com](mailto:annawelti@btinternet.com)

or write to

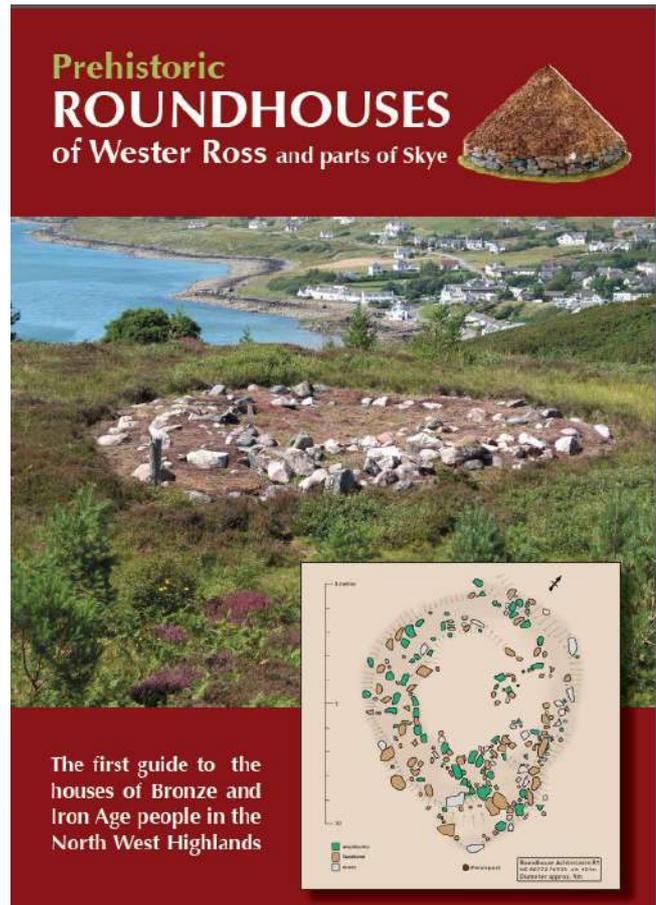
Anna Welti, Ard Coille, Braes,  
Ullapool

Ross-shire IV26 2SZ

enclosing a cheque for £4 plus £1.20 postage.

Copies are also for sale at Gairloch Museum, Ullapool Museum, Achiltibuie Post Office, Ceilidh Place Bookshop in Ullapool, and Ullapool Bookshop.

Anna Welti



The evolution of the Wee Digs project is described with photographs and plans of the six sites excavated, and initial interpretations. There is also a glossary of archaeological terms.



*Achnahaird laying out wall trench*

[www.wedigs.co.uk](http://www.wedigs.co.uk)

## Mulchaich Kiln report on progress summer 2013

Throughout the summer NOSAS members have been preparing the site at Mulchaich Farm on the Black Isle, Ross-shire for visits from the public under Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-a-Monument scheme. Oral tradition has it that the site is a distillery dating back to the period when Ferintosh whisky was at its height from the 1760s to the 1780s.

The main thrust of the work at the site this summer was targeted at the kiln. The kiln had all the characteristics of a corn drying kiln and the purpose of our exercise was to clear the rubbish that was inside it so that its features could be displayed and we could interpret them for visitors. The work was carried out as if it was an excavation; nothing structural was removed, everything was recorded as we went along, photographs were taken at all stages and a report will be produced in due course. In retrospect we underestimated the amount of time it would take; we had bargained for one day, possibly two days, but in reality it took 8 days

The kiln bowl was just like many others seen in the corn drying kilns of Highland townships, but the flue was quite different. It was large by comparison, uncovered and there was substantial evidence of a hearth within the flue. In front of the flue entrance there was a pit, 600 mm deep. Several ideas and theories have been put forward as to the functioning of the kiln. The sheer size of it suggests that it was used for drying grain, most likely malt, on an industrial scale.

One theory is that the site of the fire was originally intended to be in the flue as this would give the greatest amount of heat to dry what must have been a significant amount of grain/malt. Another is that the fire within the flue was part of the final phase and the firepit had originally been positioned in the pit further back, but this had proved to be an ineffective heat source and the fire had been moved closer to the kiln bowl. The problem with this theory is that no evidence of burning was found in the pit.



*The bowl and flue post excavation, with the pit in the foreground*  
MM

It is well documented that corn drying kilns were used for malting when distilling was a cottage industry and before the development of malt kilns as we know them today (as at Dallas Dhu distillery, Forres). The kiln at Mulchaich seems to be somewhere in between - a transitional stage of malt kiln?

For the full story of the Mulchaich excavation, including the results and discussion, see <http://www.nosas.co.uk/index.asp?pageid=260462>

The excavation and consolidation of the kiln were completed in early October and the Mulchaich site was informally opened for visitors at the Highland Archaeology Festival Conference with the production and distribution of the Mulchaich distillery leaflet. The leaflet has a brief description of the site and invites people to find out more by visiting the site and scanning a QR code which is linked to our website page

<http://www.nosas.co.uk/index.asp?pageid=508439>

Investigation of the site however is not finished and will be ongoing for some time!

In the meantime, here are some pictures of the work in progress ...



*There was a good response from NOSAS members when the dig started*

MM



*Contemplating the tumbled boulder and how to fit it back in the wall of the kiln bowl*

MM



*Eyes down - everybody hard at work*

MM



*The hearth with the reddened and fire-cracked walls of the flue*

MM



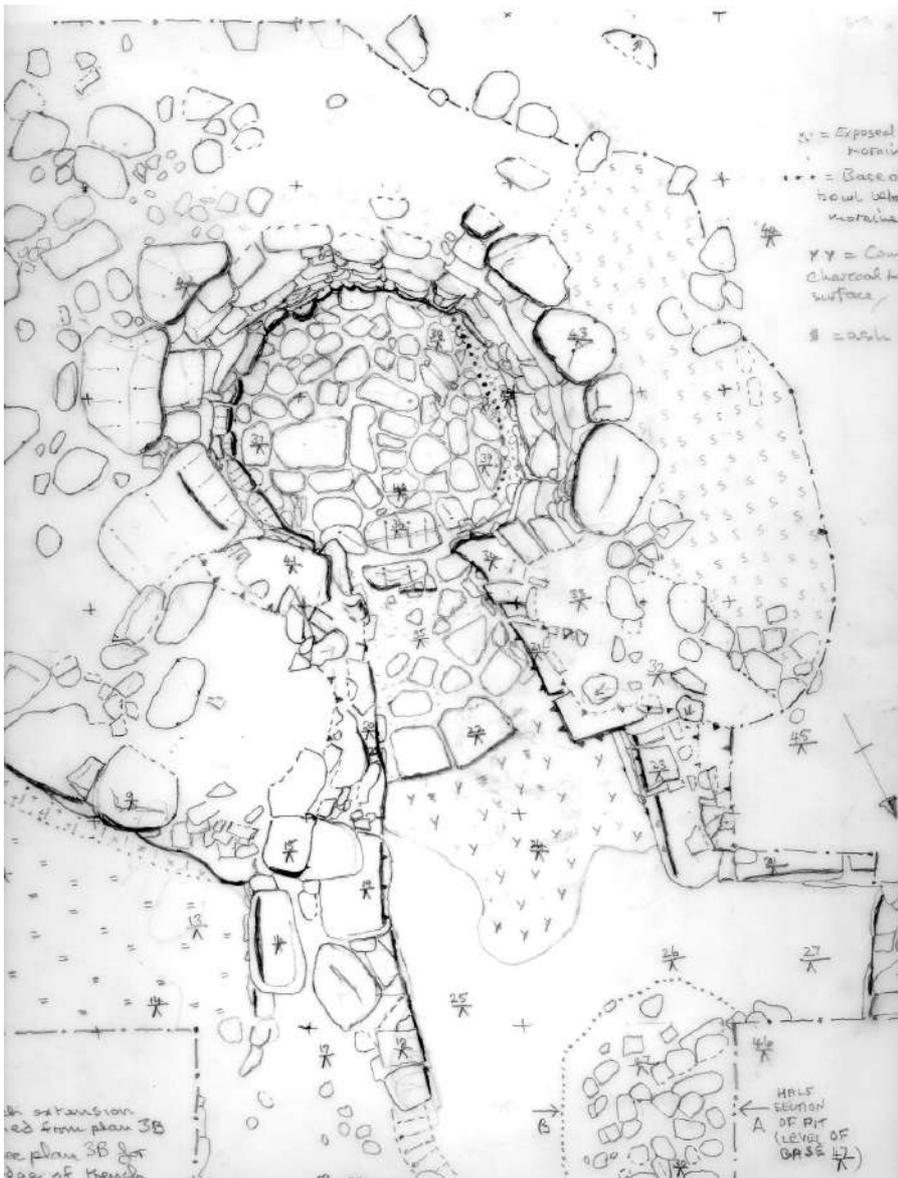
*The iron object from the base of the pit*

MM

... until finally the work is completed:



The kiln consolidated, returned and ready for visitors MM



A section of the plan drawing

MM

Meryl Marshall

## Easter and Wester Rarichie

In April and again in July of this year a number of NOSAS members helped a team from Aberdeen University to excavate two sites at Easter and Wester Rarichie on the Tarbat Peninsula.

The Department of Archaeology within the University are undertaking a four year project about the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Fortriu. The project is investigating the secular and religious power centres of Northern Pictland. Recent research has placed 'Northern Pictland' in the area delineated by Moray in the east, to Ross in the north and the surrounding coastal areas in between. A programme of evaluative archaeological research on a number of key sites is taking place. Easter and Wester Rarichie are the first such sites to be investigated.

Research and excavation over the last twenty years has established that a major early medieval ecclesiastical centre was located on the north coast of the peninsula at Portmahomack. It is likely the Tarbat peninsula was a key component in the early medieval kingdom of Fortriu. Fortriu was potentially the most powerful Pictish Kingdom and is the most cited in historical sources.

So much for the background! The sites themselves are located on two rocky knolls approximately 180 metres apart at the base of the north-eastern slopes of the Hill of Nigg on the east coast of the Tarbat Peninsula. Easter Rarichie is a multivallate hill fort crowned by a roundhouse on its summit. Wester Rarichie has a turf walled roundhouse and a series of ditches and banks located on its summit. Both sites command clear views across the Peninsula and the Dornoch and Moray Firths.

Four trenches were excavated on Easter Rarichie, targeting the roundhouse, the rampart walls encircling it and a flat terrace on the lower slopes. These excavations revealed a well preserved stone built roundhouse with internal postholes, occupation surfaces and a paved hearth. The terrace trench identified a series of paved areas, postholes and a metallated surface.



*Inner wall face and postholes Easter Rarichie, looking towards Wester Rarichie*  
*Allan MacKenzie*

A fragment of shale bracelet was recovered from a posthole within the interior of the roundhouse.

The trench across the earthen bank and its interior on the summit of Wester Rarichie identified a turf walled roundhouse with a series of postholes and one end of a possible rectangular structure with a well worn entrance way. A fragment of cannel coal bracelet was recovered from one of the postholes.

The abiding memory of working on the site was of wind, wind and more wind interspersed with sun. It could have been worse, much worse! The soil was generally of a sandy nature and was a (relative) pleasure to work in, although the inevitable bracken and gorse roots could make life wearisome at times.



*Bracelet fragments*

Candy Hatherley from Aberdeen University will be talking about her work this summer on the Peninsula at a MAD evening on 21st January 2014 when more information and photos will be shown.

Allan MacKenzie

### Urinals, Ferintosh Free Church



*The outside*

*Marion Ruscoe*



*The inside*

*Marion Ruscoe*

A most surprising survival behind Ferintosh Free Church on the Black Isle are the urinals, manufactured by the Saracen Foundry in Glasgow. Though a little rusty, they're in remarkably good condition with a number of interesting details, including the reminder "Before leaving please adjust your dress."

There's some useful historical background for this foundry at

[http://www.glasgowsculpture.com/pg\\_biography.php?sub=macfarlane\\_w-co#](http://www.glasgowsculpture.com/pg_biography.php?sub=macfarlane_w-co#)

Marion Ruscoe