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ARCH reflections from Susan Kruse

As I start the huge task of sifting through the ARCH archives from the past 13 years, I'm struck again and again on how much we have. ARCH started in 2008, when I approached Cait McCullagh and Lynne Fraser, suggesting there was scope for an archaeological learning organisation. I had been offering Highland archaeology courses for the WEA, but was rapidly using up their liberal arts budget. A new charity was needed. We set up a charity in 2008 with a supportive Board, created funding applications, and our first project was rolled out in 2010 – Black Isle Heritage Memories. This formed the basis for our oral history offerings, now one of the signature ARCH modules.



Our next project was hugely ambitious, the three-year Stop Look and Listen project which had six main modules: Community Timelines (oral history and research), Delve into the Past (excavation), Pathways into the Past (research and survey), Display the Past (exhibitions), Heritage along the Kyle Line (research), and Living in the Past (for young people). Janet Hooper replaced Lynne, and we were joined by Caroline Vawdrey for publicity. People still come to me saying much they enjoyed their sessions.



Looking back, I'm struck by the energy and ambition we had! We have rolled out dozens of projects and workshops, some one day, some lasting months, on a variety of topics from prehistory to 20th century wartime remains. Cait and Janet left to pursue other paths, with most of the work of ARCH now undertaken by myself, but others also facilitated sessions over the years, including Lachlan and Lynne McKeggie, Cathy Dagg, Alison Boyle and Monika Maleszka-Ritchie.

Our focus has always been broad, taking Scotland's Archaeology Strategy definition of archaeology as study of the human past through

its material remains. Many of the projects were place-based, including at Strathpeffer, Dingwall, Ardross, Evanton, Tain, Dornoch, Ardersier, Auldearn, Knockbain, Hilton, Kirkhill, Tomatin, Boat of Garten, Invergarry, Broadford and Gairloch. We've rolled out wartime projects at Invergordon, Evanton, Dalmore and the Black Isle (for Groam House Museum).

We focussed on the material remains of Thomas Telford, as his work affects the entire Highlands. Although we never managed to get funding for a full Highland project, there were sessions in Kyle of Sutherland, Sleat and Badenoch and Strathspey.



The choice of projects was influenced by a number of factors. Sometimes groups came to us with specific ideas and we helped to develop sessions for them. Good examples include Kiltarn Kirk for Evanton Community Trust, Boblainy Wood for Kiltarlity Community Council, Strathpeffer Station for Highland Museum of Childhood. In other cases we collaborated with other groups from the start. We have always been sensitive to the work of other groups, and have tried not to step on any toes.

Sometimes a chance meeting or discussion could spark a new project. This was the case for Feats of Clay, where Trevor Cowie of the National Museum of Scotland had identified Bronze Age clay moulds in material from excavations in advance of the new housing at Bellfield, North Kessock. There was no money to provide further specialist analysis, so Trevor suggested forming a community project. North Kessock and District Local History Society got on board, and a diverse project developed involving guest talks, searching for clay sources, thin section analysis, experimental Bronze Age casting and other crafts, and research for a corpus of



Bronze Age metalwork from the area, culminating in a book.

The experimental archaeology aspect of Feats of Clay was so interesting and informative, that we then developed a year long project to explore various crafts, hands-on when possible. This is also a good example of the ARCH approach. Rather than just stopping there, we asked each craftsperson to donate one object. Expecting enough for one loan box, they were so generous we have four boxes. But then knowing from experience that teachers are often without guidance on how to use loans boxes, we had a teacher work with



archaeologists to create learning materials, a very fruitful collaboration. These learning materials are now available online on the [ARCH website](#), and also from the [Heritage Resources Portal](#).

Covid of course presented challenges for community heritage. I wrote a number of Online newsflashes, organised talks and we were able to roll out an online course with Professor Keith Lilley of Queens University, Belfast exploring remains of the first Ordnance Surveyors. While this showed the positive side of online provision, I was very conscious of the large number people who don't use the internet and were not able to participate.

Our work gained national recognition over the years, and it is certainly true that we have punched above our weight. I was invited to be the first community heritage representative on the newly formed Scotland's Archaeology Strategy, where I advocated for community participation as a major focus. ARCH has been organising the Highland Archaeology Festival for the Highland Council Historic Environment Team for seven years, drawing on the contacts developed over the years.

ARCH also spearheaded the Highland Regional ScARF, which pulled together contributions to create an overview of Highland Heritage, identifying what is different from the national picture, and what are the major research questions. It was certainly unusual to have a community group lead this work, and we brought a number of new approaches to the task. [HighARF](#) launched in 2021, providing for the first time an up-to



-date summary of Highland heritage from Palaeolithic to Modern times. It also led to a complementary project on Highland Finds, as I have long found it difficult to find information about finds. Like so much of ARCH's work, we have contributed the finds information to the [Highland Historic Environment Record](#), and from there it will go to Canmore.

I'm sometimes asked what is my favourite project. It is too difficult to choose just one! For me the highlights have always been working with people and going with them on the voyage of discovery of local heritage. I have immense pride in what people have achieved. I have also learned as much as the participants of the courses!

I have particularly enjoyed the multi-period projects. I think the Community Timeline project has such potential, bringing people together in communities, including those who might not at first have thought they were interested in heritage. It produces amazing results at relatively small cost, with the outputs contributing to important information for the historic environment, reinforcing a sense of community and place. Every community has such a project crying out to be done, and with trained facilitators could be rolled out widely with important beneficial results

I'd like to finish by acknowledging the support of the ARCH Board throughout the years, and of all the people who have participated on our projects. I look forward to seeing where ARCH goes once a successor has been appointed.

ARCH Development Officer Post

ARCH is currently recruiting for a Development Officer, to take ARCH forward following the retirement of Susan Kruse at the end of 2022. The successful candidate will carry on ARCH's work, fundraising for new projects and providing delivery in some cases. The post is for 2 days a week for a year, with the potential to increase the workload as new projects come on stream. Further details can be found on the ARCH website in the ARCH Jobs folder in the [Library](#). Closing date 15th March 2023.



Feedback for Historic Environment Team

The Highland Council Historic Environment Team provides a range of archaeological services including inputting to planning applications, maintaining the [Historic Environment Record](#) (the HER, Highland's database of all known heritage) and of course organising the yearly Highland Archaeology Festival (HAF), the largest festival of its kind in Scotland. In these cash-strapped times, the Council is looking for savings, and it is important that the team can demonstrate just what HAF means to you. They would very much welcome your thoughts. Should HAF continue to organise and promote a full range of events as well as the conference? How useful do you find the HER? Please email comments to archaeology@highland.gov.uk or write to Historic Environment Team, Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX.

Heritage Events

The [ARCH website](#) posts any events we know about. If you are member of a local heritage society, or know of something interesting, forward the details to ARCH, and we'll post them on the website and include them in our periodic newsflashes.

Friends of ARCH

If you enjoy what ARCH provides, please consider becoming a 'Friend of ARCH'. The Friends are a group of supporters who help ARCH in many diverse ways. ARCH relies on Friends' and lecture donations to help pay for office space, insurance, postage on newsletters, HAF walks, and the other mundane but important matters which allow us to continue. We value your help and support! Friends of ARCH are requested to give an annual donation of £10 (or more if you wish). There is an annual Friends' invitational event. To become a Friend — or to renew — contact ARCH or fill in the form below. If you prefer, you can pay by [Paypal from our website](#).

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THANK YOU!

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The Goods Shed, The Old Station,
Strathpeffer IV14 9DH
077888 35466
info@archhighland.org.uk
www.archhighland.org.uk