

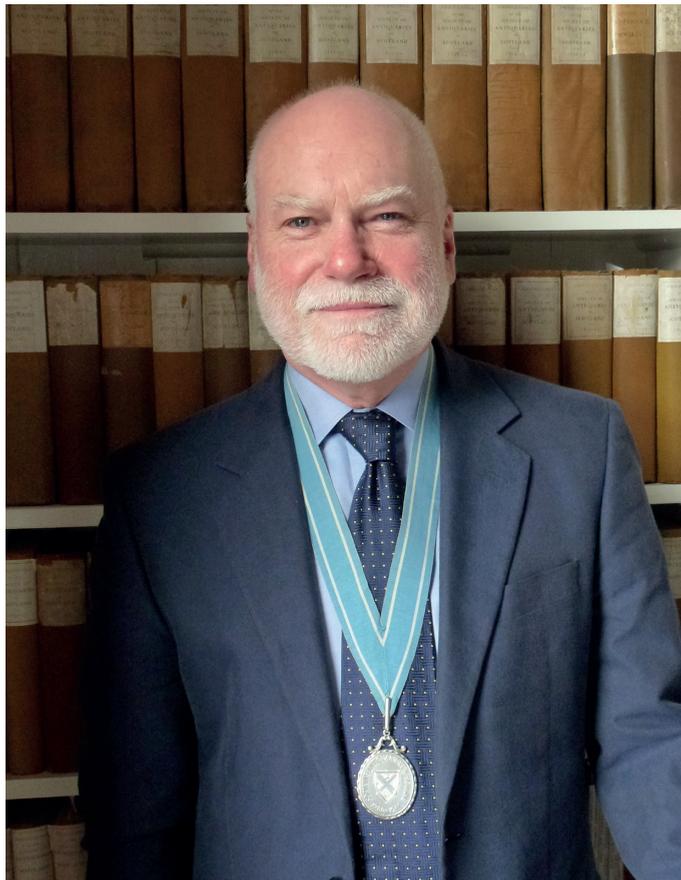
Obituary

Alan Saville

31 December 1946 – 19 June 2016

Alan Saville, the archaeologist and prehistorian and a former President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, died in his adopted city of Edinburgh at the age of 69, following a long illness. An internationally respected authority on lithic artefacts and the earliest prehistory of Scotland, he was, until his retirement in 2015, a Senior Curator in the Scottish History and Archaeology Department, National Museums Scotland.

Originally from Lewisham in south-east London, Alan graduated in Ancient History and Archaeology from Birmingham University in 1968. In 1972, after several years of post-graduate research on the early prehistory of the West Midlands and working on fieldwork projects, he was employed as a Research Assistant for what was then the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments within the Department of the Environment. Based in a soulless office



block in London, Alan single-handedly carried out the specialist analysis of the huge flint assemblage (weighing some six tonnes and comprising nearly half a million individual pieces) from two shafts forming part of the Neolithic flint mining complex at Grimes Graves in Norfolk, which had then recently been excavated by Roger Mercer.

Still working for the DoE, Alan subsequently directed excavations at the Neolithic chambered long barrow at Nympsfield, Gloucestershire, in advance of reconstruction work at the monument. This project marked the beginning of his long-term involvement in and passion for the archaeology of the region, and in 1974 he moved to Gloucestershire to become Curator and Field Archaeologist at Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum. This was a new post with a brief to establish archaeology at Cheltenham, which Alan went on to achieve by creating a Sites and Monuments Record for the Borough and its hinterland; publishing an implications survey; and creating and supervising a Manpower Services Scheme to catalogue the collections.

His role changed in 1976, when he became Archaeological Field Officer for the Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset (CRAAGS), and subsequently for its successor the Western Archaeological Trust. In some ways, the glory days of rescue archaeology, those were also often cash-strapped times for committed individuals such as Alan. However, as well as a survey of all archaeological sites in the Gloucestershire and Avon Cotswolds, he undertook excavations at Norbury and Uley Bury Iron Age hillforts, Condicote Neolithic henge monument, and Saxon and later deposits at Winchcombe, all in Gloucestershire. During this period, Alan was based at Cheltenham Museum under a reciprocal arrangement whereby he also undertook certain curatorial duties. These culminated in a new permanent display of the archaeological collections, and the mounting of a temporary exhibition on *Archaeology in Gloucestershire*, which was complemented by an invaluable edited volume of essays under the same title.

However, Alan's major field project during his time at Cheltenham was to be the meticulous

total excavation, between 1979 and 1982, of the chambered long cairn of the Cotswold-Severn group at Hazleton North. During the late 1980s, his focus was the preparation of the excavation archive and the completion of the report for publication by English Heritage. It is widely acknowledged that the details of the cairn construction and the skeletal remains have made this a site – and report – of outstanding and continuing importance for the study of Neolithic chambered tombs. In 2010, Alan's Presidential Address to the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society offered an opportunity for his own personal reflections on the Hazleton excavation and its legacy.

On a lighter note, Alan was amused by an early scene in the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), where Indiana Jones is seen lecturing to a group of his archaeology students. Indicating a plan chalked on the blackboard Indy says 'Let's get back to Turkdean barrow near Hazleton; it contains a central passage and three chambers, or cists'. Some have taken this to be a brief reference to the site, but in a careful deconstruction of the scene in the film, Alan was able to draw attention to various discrepancies and details which suggest that the site referred to in the movie was more likely to be based on the chambered cairn at Notgrove, which was excavated in the 1930s (see *SALON* [Society of Antiquaries of London online newsletter], 191 (2008)).

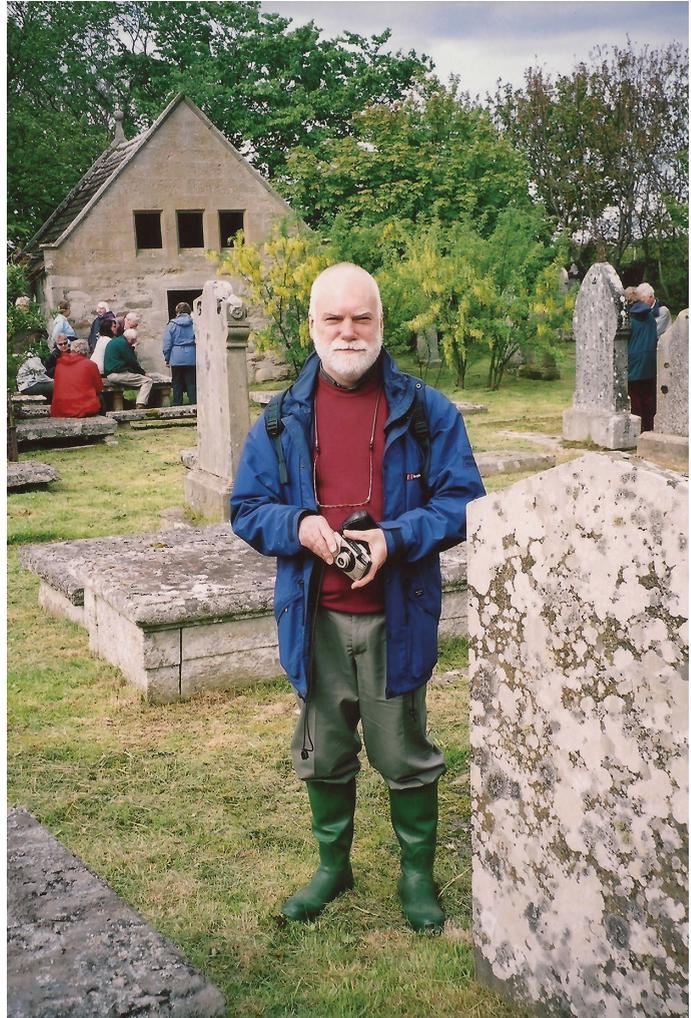
In 1989, Alan moved north to Edinburgh to join the staff of the Archaeology Department within the National Museums of Scotland, initially as Head of an innovative new venture, the Artefact Research Unit (ARU), which was then based in Coates Place. He oversaw its move to excellent new premises in York Buildings, opposite the museum's former home in Queen Street, in what has become wholly the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; however, the ARU did not survive the re-organisation and relocation of the department to its new offices as part of the Museum of Scotland development in Chambers Street. From 1995 until 2008, a principal part of Alan's museum role was to serve as Head of the Secretariat of the Treasure Trove Advisory Panel for Scotland; in this capacity he oversaw

the establishment of a full-time team of two staff to deal with the growing demands being placed upon the Treasure Trove system in Scotland as a result of increasing numbers of reported finds of portable antiquities. Latterly, he masterminded the first publication of a *Code of Practice* for the operation of the Treasure Trove system in Scotland. His work in this area also resulted in several publications, including a succinct and elegant textbook chapter dealing with the divergent systems across the UK for dealing with portable antiquities.

Oversight of the operation of Treasure Trove was combined with curatorial work, particularly the development and publication of significant research on Scottish early prehistoric artefacts. Lithic studies continued to remain central to his research interests and he took opportunities to publish to his own exacting standards many of the discoveries made and reported through the Scottish Treasure Trove process – notably the impressive hoard of flint axeheads and blades found at Auchenhoan near Campbeltown, Argyll – while he was also the driving force behind the eventual publication of the report on the important Early Mesolithic assemblage from a rockshelter at An Corran, Skye, distinguished by the exploitation of a distinctive suite of local lithic raw materials. His more recent work includes two typically painstaking publications on specimens of carved stone balls, continuing a fascination with these peculiarly Scottish artefacts that goes back to the early days of antiquarian research. As well as Scottish material, he also contributed a number of specialist reports on nationally

important lithic assemblages from sites further afield, especially those from Carn Brea in Cornwall and Hambledon Hill in Dorset.

His long-standing research interest in the procurement and exploitation of raw materials, first fostered at Grimes Graves, also lay behind Alan's last major field project, an investigation of the series of later Neolithic flint extraction pits



cut into the Buchan Ridge gravels at the Den of Boddam and Skelmuir Hill in Aberdeenshire. Sadly, Alan was struck down by illness just as he was in the process of preparing the final report, but a series of published papers provides

key insights into the nature and operation of this nationally significant mining complex and its associated flint-working techniques.

In recent years, Alan played a major part in bringing into focus for the first time Upper Palaeolithic material from Scotland, notably from Howburn Farm in South Lanarkshire, while re-examination of older finds from other sites has allowed such material to be shown to be more widespread in Scotland than previously thought. Working in collaboration with Dr Torben Bjarke Ballin, Alan firmly established the existence of a Scottish late Upper Palaeolithic period and defined its associated lithic industries within their NW European context – ground-breaking research which has extended the story of the earliest human settlement of Scotland by some five thousand years.

In the present context, it will be his long service to the Society for which he will be remembered – serving as Honorary Treasurer (1992–9), Research Convener (1993–9), Publications Convener (1999–2004), Vice-President (2003–6) and finally President (2011–13), a cumulative period of service totalling over 20 years. While Research Convener, he inaugurated the Society’s period conferences, organising a highly successful international conference on *Mesolithic Scotland: the Early Holocene Prehistory of Scotland and its European Context*, held in 1999. While Publications Convener, he oversaw the publication of the proceedings of that conference – a book which set the standard for the volumes arising from subsequent conferences held under the Society’s auspices to explore Scotland’s place in a wider European setting. Alan also served as joint Convener of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic panel of the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework, and was joint editor of the resulting report.

Over the course of his career, Alan gave his time to many other organisations and societies. Here we may single out the Council for Scottish Archaeology (now Archaeology Scotland) on which he served as Vice-President (1999–2000) and President (2000–3) and his membership of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland. Outside of Scotland he was the Honorary Editor (Archaeology & Production) of the Bristol and

Gloucestershire Archaeological Society from 1984–9, and later elected its President (2009–10). He had a particularly long association with the Lithic Studies Society, of which he was a founder member, serving as its Hon Treasurer (1979–83), Hon Editor of its journal *Lithics* (1981–4), and Chairman (1983–90).

Alan’s international interests are also reflected in his work for the European Association of Archaeologists. For six years he served as editor of the *European Journal of Archaeology*, in which capacity he sat on the Executive Board of the EAA; during his time as editor (2004–10) he did much to secure its status as one of the principal archaeological journals with a Europe-wide reach. While the eventual outcome will only become clear with time, we feel sure that Alan, as a committed European, would have been devastated by the result of the UK 2016 referendum and its immediate aftermath, and the failure of optimism that it represented.

Looking even further afield, an early enthusiasm for Japanese novels turned into a fascination with Japanese culture and eventually two visits to Japan, where Alan was warmly welcomed by archaeologists across the country. As a result of the connections established during those visits (and the exchange of business cards which would have accompanied them!), over the years a number of distinguished Japanese archaeologists visiting the UK beat a path to the door of his office in the museum. Indeed, a highlight of Alan’s time at National Museums Scotland was the chance to put his knowledge to use by developing and curating an exhibition on the theme *Prehistoric Japan: the collections of Neil Gordon Munro* (July 2001–May 2002). Munro was a Scottish physician and anthropologist who lived in Japan for almost fifty years until his death in 1938. Notable as one of the first Westerners to study the Ainu people, Munro presented his important collection of prehistoric Japanese material to what was then the Royal Scottish Museum in the early 20th century.

Alan’s life was also always full of music – of an exceptionally wide range. He was very knowledgeable about blues and soul in particular and while in Cheltenham he and Tim Darvill,

now a distinguished professor of archaeology at Bournemouth, used to run a disco for archaeological field units and museum parties! It was also during those Cheltenham years that Alan met and married Annette Carruthers, with whom he shared an interest in the Cotswold Arts and Crafts designers Gimson and the Barnsleys, and other aspects of art history. Frequently Alan and Annette were fortunate in being able to travel together, usually in mainland Europe, often combining holidays with conferences such as the International Flint Symposium and the annual meetings of the European Association of Archaeologists. In particular, a deep interest in French culture – exhibitions, films, food, wine and archaeology – was also important in Alan's life, and he and Annette enjoyed numerous holidays in France, often staying with Patrick and Fionna Ashmore in the Lot or following the Charles Rennie Mackintosh trail further south. It was such French connections that sparked what was to become Alan's final research project – an investigation of the life and work of Mary Boyle, the Scottish assistant of that doyen of the study of Palaeolithic cave art, the Abbé Breuil.

Among his many publications, it is Alan's monumental report on Hazleton that exemplifies his qualities as an archaeologist and prehistorian, including his perceptive nature and his meticulousness. It therefore seems appropriate to conclude by recalling a short article published in the *British Archaeology* magazine in 2003 as part of a series in which archaeologists were asked to reflect upon their favourite discovery. For his choice, Alan returned to the time when he was excavating at Hazleton North in Gloucestershire and to the unusual discovery of a male skeleton, accompanied by a very large flint core underneath his right elbow and a pebble hammerstone by his left hand; very fittingly then, for an excavator who was also a lithic specialist, the body was that of a flint-knapper, buried with the tools of his trade.

The best-dressed male archaeologist of his generation in Scotland, Alan Saville was a scholar, a gentleman and a friend to many. He did a great deal for our discipline in his quiet, understated but hugely effective way. He shall be greatly missed.

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