



Society of Antiquaries
of Scotland

THE RHIND LECTURES 2020

Neolithic Scotland: the Big Picture and Detailed Narratives in 2020

Dr ALISON SHERIDAN FSA FRSE FSAScot MDAI FBA ACIfA



Free and open to all online with a live Zoom webinar
Question and Answer session on Friday 18th December
– registration required

Please visit
www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2020
to see details and register

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Neolithic Scotland: the Big Picture and Detailed Narratives in 2020

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The Scottish Neolithic clearly fascinated Alexander Henry Rhind and he made important, and very early, contributions to its understanding. In the 170 years since Rhind's prehistoric exploits, our understanding and perception of this fascinating period in Scotland's past have been utterly transformed.

This series of six lectures will offer an in-depth assessment of the current state of our knowledge about the period c.4000-2500 BC, when new ways of living and of making sense of the world appeared and developed in Scotland. This involved the active production of food, as opposed to its procurement from wild resources, which had characterised subsistence strategies over the preceding millennia. Globally, the advent of food production with the possibilities it brought for accumulating surpluses has conventionally been hailed as a revolution, with major long-term consequences for the ways societies operated.

These lectures will look at the fundamental changes that resulted from the appearance of farming in Scotland, and will trace developments up to the point when life for many changed once again with the appearance of new people, new ideas, new technology, and new practices from the Continent around 2500 BC.

Dr Alison Sheridan FSA FRSE FSAScot MDAI FBA ACIfA

Dr Sheridan recently retired as Principal Archaeological Research Curator in National Museums Scotland, having worked there since 1987 after obtaining her doctorate from the University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on the Scottish Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age in their wider European context, specialising in pottery, stone axeheads, and jewellery of jet, faience and gold. Past President of the Prehistoric Society and Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, she became a Fellow of the British Academy in 2019.

This year, lectures will be released online every day at 6pm starting on Sunday 13th December. Registration for the lectures is not required. However, if you would like to participate in the live Question and Answer session on Friday 18th December, you must register.

For more information, visit www.socantscot.org/events

Tickets are free and popular, so early registration for the Question and Answer session is advisable.

Sunday 13th December

6.00pm Neolithic Scotland: changing perceptions, new approaches, a plethora of data, and contested narratives

This lecture reviews our understanding, and our characterisation, of Scotland's Neolithic period and explores what is meant by the term 'Neolithic'. It also highlights the exponential growth in information that has resulted from the application of new scientific techniques, survey methods, and research strategies in the study of people, animals, artefacts, ecofacts, structures, and the environment. Our narrative of the past has been, and continues to be, the subject of intense debate, not least in regard to when, how and why the novel way of life appeared and became established in Scotland, and what happened to Scotland's hunter-fisher-forager communities.

Monday 14th December

6.00pm The Big Picture and regional narratives

Understanding what happened across the Scottish landscape between c.4000-2500 BC requires us to adopt multiple scales of enquiry, from the international to the local. This lecture explores the main developments, and highlights the diversity in the regional trajectories of social and economic change by focusing on two contrasting and often overlooked regions: western and south-west Scotland and Shetland.

Tuesday 15th December

6.00pm An everyday story of country folk?

What was the nature of the farming way of life, and how did it vary over time and space? How well do we understand the range of resources that were being used and the changing environment in which people lived their lives? How did society operate, and where did people live? What can we say about the people – their life expectancy, their state of health, the way they interacted with each other, their power relationships, their identities? This lecture assesses our current state of knowledge about these not-so-ordinary country folk.

Wednesday 16th December

6.00pm Making sense of funerary monuments and funerary practices

Megalithic chamber tombs – of widely varying shape and size – loom large in the visible traces of Scotland's Neolithic, but they formed just one element in a diverse range of practices concerned with dealing with, relating to, and commemorating the dead. This lecture explores this diversity and draws out the regional and chronological trends that can now be discerned, thanks to our growing body of radiocarbon dates. It also attempts to understand the meaning and significance of funerary monuments, and to identify the 'drivers' for the specific trajectories of change that we see.

Thursday 17th December

6.00pm Not just a load of old balls: Late Neolithic developments and the creation of a new world order in Orkney

The remarkable complex of large structures at Ness of Brodgar in Orkney has justly attracted worldwide attention, and has led to some contentious claims on popular TV programmes. This lecture investigates the emergence of the competitive, adventurous, innovative elite in Orkney who were responsible for building Ness of Brodgar and other iconic structures including Maeshowe-type passage tombs and the Stones of Stenness. It explains how Orkney took over from the Boyne Valley in Ireland as a major ceremonial centre, and how Orcadian innovations including Grooved Ware pottery were rapidly adopted elsewhere, as far away as south-west Ireland and the far south of England.

Friday 18th December

6.00pm All change around 2500/2400 BC? The end of the 'Scottish Neolithic', and the future of Scottish Neolithic studies

The 'boom' period in Late Neolithic Orkney seems to have come to a fairly dramatic end, although the timing and tempo of this collapse continue to be debated. From the 25th century BC, signs of new people, new objects and new practices appeared in parts of Scotland from the Continent, and thanks to isotopic and DNA analysis we can say quite a lot about these so-called 'Beaker people'. But was their appearance linked to the collapse in the Late Neolithic Orcadian social order? And what was happening elsewhere in Scotland? This lecture will explore the complexities of developments between c. 3000-2400 BC. It will also highlight the many questions that remain to be answered about this period, and about the rest of the Neolithic, and will suggest where future research needs to be concentrated.

Followed by a live Question and Answer session and a short celebration of the Society's foundation 240 years ago. Registration for this session is essential. Please visit www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2020 for more information and to register.

The RHIND LECTURES, a series of six lectures delivered annually on a subject pertaining to history or archaeology, by eminent authorities on the subject, have been given since 1876. They commemorate Alexander Henry Rhind of Sibster (1833-63) who left a bequest to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland to endow the lectures which perpetuate his name.

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