



SCOTTISH SALT SYMPOSIUM 2021

October 16th -17th BRORA, Highland

PROGRAMME

the archaeology and history of
the sea salt industry and artisan
sea salt making in Scotland today

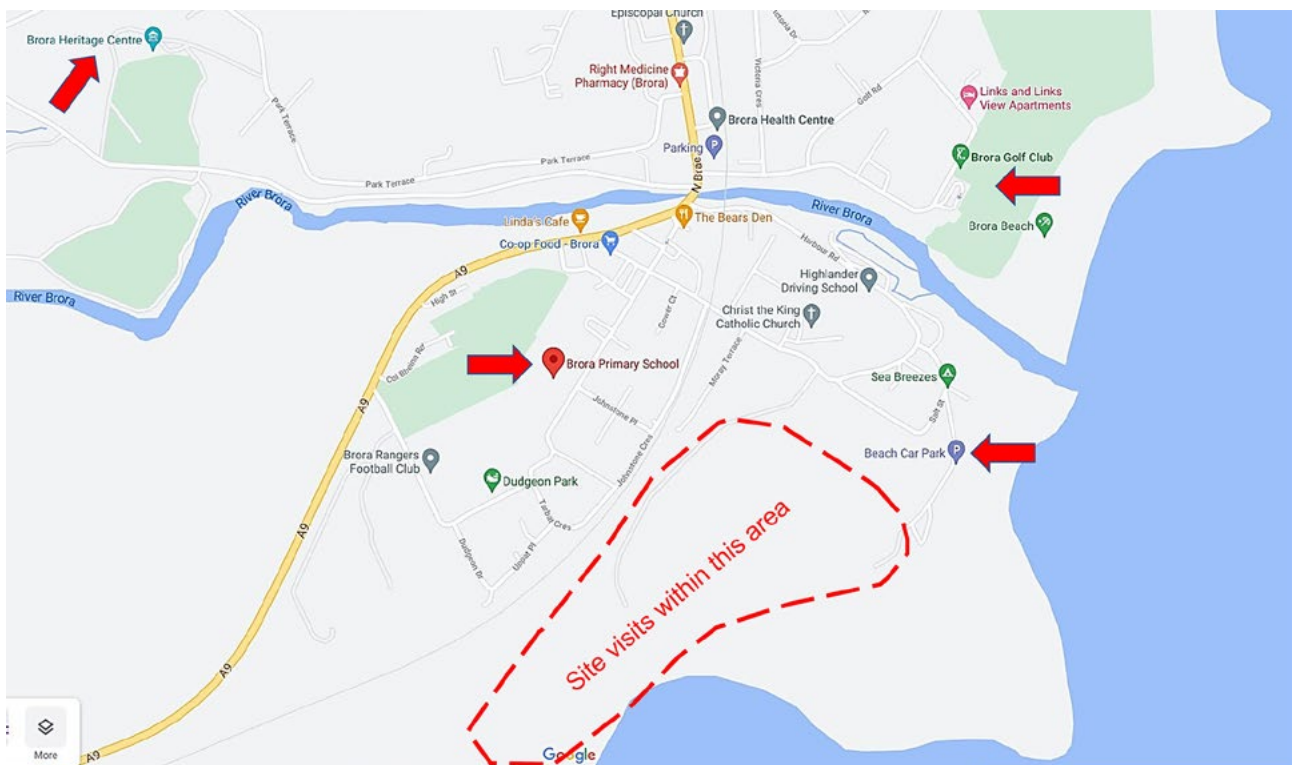
S C A P E



Symposium Timetable

	Venue	Saturday 16th	Sunday 17th
Salt Conference	Brora Primary School Hall and Community Centre	9:30am–5:30pm	
Symposium Dinner	Brora Golf Club	From 6:30pm	
Salt Making	Brora Heritage Centre		9:30am–4:00pm
Site Visits	Departing from Brora Heritage Centre or Beach car park		10:00am & 1:00pm

Orientation



CONFERENCE Saturday 16th

Brora Primary School Hall

9:30- 10:00 REGISTRATION and COFFEE

10:00 WELCOME

10:05- 10:50 **Chris Whatley** The Scottish Salt Industry revisited

10:50- 11:20 **Richard Oram** Scotland's medieval salt industry

11:20- 11:50 **Wes Forsythe** Pots and Panns: the archaeology of post-medieval salt making in Ireland

11:50- 12:15 **Tom Dawson** "It's Very Salty" a short film documenting the return of salt making in Brora

12:15 - 13:00 LUNCH

13:00- 13:20 **Jacqueline Aitken** Rebuilding Brora's salt making heritage: reflections of a coastal community archaeology project

13:20- 13:40 **Joanna Hambly** The anatomy of a 17th century salt girnel

13:40-14:00 **Malcolm Bangor-Jones** Coal and salt in Brora in the 18th century

14:00- 14:20 **John Blair** Making salt in Portsoy, 1793 (or earlier) to c. 1810

14:20- 14:40 **John Pickin** Peat-fuelled salt works in the Rhinns of Galloway

14:40-15:00 **Nic Coombey** Rascarrel and other Scottish Solway salt works

15:00 15:20 **Gareth Jones** Observations and excavations from Cockenzie

15:20 - 15:50 TEA

15:50- 16:35 **Colin & Paula Martin
Robin Murdoch** St Phillip's Salt Works, St Monans

16:35-16:55 **Darren Peattie** East Neuk Salt Company: Preserving our Past to Sustain our future

16:55-17:15 **Gregorie Marshall** Blackthorn Salt: contemporary Scottish salt making using the graduation tower process

17:15-17:35 **Chris & Meena Watts** Isle of Skye Sea Salt Company: sustainable sea salt making in Scotland today

17:35 CLOSE

An extended programme which includes presentations not given at the in-person event will be available online following the Symposium.

Link will be at www.scapetrust.org

SALT MAKING AND SITE VISITS

Sunday 17th

Brora Heritage Centre

09:30 - 16:00 - Salt making at the Brora Heritage Centre

Drop in any time. Stay as long as you like.

Master Salters from the 1722 Waggonway Group and apprentice salters in Brora will fire up a scaled replica of an 18th century salt pan to make salt following the method described by Brownrigg in 1748.

The team will give an open-air talk at **11am** repeated at **2pm** about the salt making process learnt over hundreds of hours of experimentation with a wood and coal fired traditional salt pan that they operate in Cockenzie.

The Brora Heritage Centre will be open all day.

10:00 repeated at 13:00 - Fieldtrip to the archaeological sites of Brora's 16/17th century and 18th century salt works

Meeting points at the Brora Heritage Centre or the Beach carpark. The field trip lasts approximately 2 hours and involves a round walk of about a mile over sandy beach and sand dune terrain.

There is plenty of parking at the Brora Heritage Centre and a free minibus will take us to and from the Beach carpark.

We will visit the archaeological sites and associated industrial landscapes of two of Brora's salt works. With the help of historic maps, exposures revealed by coastal erosion and the knowledge gained from archaeological excavations, we will bring the salt houses and industrial landscape to life.

Please note, refreshments will not be provided on Sunday, but drinks and snacks are available to buy in the Brora Heritage Centre, and there are shops and cafés in Brora.

The Saturday and Sunday programmes may change slightly from what is outlined here

SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS



Chris Whatley

Historian and Emeritus Professor Christopher A Whatley OBE, FRSE, has been at the University of Dundee since 1980, other than a few years at St Andrews. Along with over 100 articles, chapters and books, he is the author of the first book length study of the salt industry in Scotland, *The Scottish Salt Industry, 1560-1850: An Economic and Social History* (1987).

The Scottish Salt Industry revisited

The paper will begin with an outline of the history of the sea salt manufacturing industry in Scotland. It is a story of a relatively high-status industry in the medieval period and, notwithstanding its rather cursory treatment by historians, was an important one too, until the later eighteenth century. Although it declined thereafter and eventually ceased production, it is now being revived. The paper incorporates work done by others since I first began publishing on salt in the early 1980s, but will also include new findings of my own, as on the salt workers and the hitherto largely neglected tax collectors - salt officers, who during the 18th century were stationed at each of the country's saltworks. Evidence relating to the officers reveals much about day-to-day salt making operations.



Richard Oram

Professor Richard Oram is a Scottish historian and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Stirling. His research focus is on medieval history and the environmental history of the North Atlantic region. The use of resources is amongst his wide-ranging interests, and related to this, he has carried out a comprehensive study of the archaeological and historic evidence for salt making in medieval Scotland.

Scotland's medieval salt industry

Salt-production was probably the first major industry to be developed in medieval Scotland, providing a staple essential necessary for the bulk preservation of meat, fish and dairy products. Record evidence for salt-production survives from the first quarter of the twelfth century, but the production sites identified seem to have been already long established by that date. Early sites were concentrated on the carselands of the Forth, Solway, feeder estuaries of the Firth of Clyde, Montrose Basin and Laich of Moray, probably all sleeching operations where salt was flushed from the silts and the brine boiled in pans over peat-fuelled fires, but direct boiling of seawater seems to have been established early where shallow coal seams could be accessed easily. This paper examines the development of the industry through the twelfth to mid-fourteenth centuries, exploring the little-researched Laich of Moray production sites in the context of the East Coast Scottish sleeching operations, and its relationship to the salmon fisheries on the Spey, Lossie and Findhorn. The second half of the paper considers the consequences of fuel shortages on the traditional sleeching saltworks and the transition to larger-scale coal-fired direct seawater boiling in the later Middle Ages, concluding with a discussion of the dominance of the outer Firth of Forth coal-and-salt producers in the fifteenth century and their business networks with herring and salmon processing and exporting operations around Scotland's coasts.

SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS



Wes Forsythe

Dr Wes Forsythe is a maritime archaeologist, and senior lecturer at Ulster University with interests in the activities and economies of coastal communities in the medieval and post-medieval eras. His long-running research on the archaeology of salt production in post-medieval Ireland has recently been published in *World Archaeology* and *Post-Medieval Archaeology*.

Pots and Panns: the archaeology of salt in post-medieval Ireland

This paper will review the origins and fortunes of the production of salt in Ireland exploring the material remains of salt works and their evolution. It will examine the central role salt making had in servicing the country's predominantly agricultural economy; and the opportunities provided by an expanding overseas trade network.



Tom Dawson

Tom manages the SCAPE Trust and is a principal research fellow at the University of St Andrews where he teaches courses in documentary filmmaking and archaeology. He has published widely on coastal archaeology and climate change and has made a great many films that tell the stories of peoples' relationship with their coastal heritage.

"It's very salty": the return of sea salt making in Brora after 200 years

The first screening of a short documentary film following the progress of Brora's journey to re-introduce traditional sea salt making in the village, from the construction of the pan at Macduff shipyard in 2020 to the first firing in August 2021.



Jacqueline Aitken

Jacque Aitken is Museum and Digital Heritage Curator at Timespan. She has a background in archaeology, museums and immersive technology and a lifelong interest in researching Highland history, landscapes and communities. Jacque initiated interest in the archaeological remains of Brora's salt industry over twenty years ago and now co-coordinates the Brora Salt Pans research group.

Rebuilding Brora's salt making heritage: reflections of a community project

In 1999, Jacque first noted eroding walls and middens on the Back Shore at Brora. This sparked a journey of community research and excavation, in collaboration with The SCAPE Trust, that has involved hundreds of volunteers, researchers and archaeologists. In 2010 the project won best community filedwork award from the Association of Industrial Archaeology. In the same year the team spoke at the Scottish Parliament. The Brora Saltpans research group was set up 2018 and in 2020, a milestone was reached with the construction of a replica 18th century salt pan by a team from the 1722 Waggonway Project, who returned to Brora this year to train local volunteers to make the first salt in Brora for nearly 200 years!

SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS



Joanna Hambly

Joanna Hambly is an archaeologist with the SCAPE Trust and University of St Andrews and managed the community excavations at the Brora salt pans from 2009. Her interest in the archaeology and history of salt was born during her 10 years with the Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire and has evolved into something of an obsession in her current role managing SCAPE's coastal public research projects.

The anatomy of a 17th century salt girnel

Buried in the dunes for nearly 400 years, the well-preserved remains of a salt girnel was excavated in community excavations of the Brora salt pans over 2010 and 2011. The girnel was part of the salt house of Jane Gordon Countess of Sutherland and her son John 12th Earl of Sutherland. The site is the earliest known for the manufacture of sea salt by the direct boiling method to be excavated in Scotland. This paper will explore the girnel building and its contents, which embodied the resources of the Sutherland Estate, the reach and connections of the family, and the craft, labour and domestic lives of those that worked and lived in it.



Malcolm Bangor-Jones

Malcolm Bangor-Jones is a retired civil servant who manages a woodland croft in Sutherland. He has maintained an interest in Highland history for many years. His most recent articles cover the resettlement of Strathnaver by the Congested Districts Board in 1901 and Sutherland emigration to Prince Edward Island. He is chair of the voluntary organisation ARCH (archaeology for communities in the Highlands).

Coal and salt in Brora in the 18th century

The paper tells the history of coal mining and salt production in Sutherland from the 1730s to the 1770s. The interest shown by successive Earls of Sutherland is explored in the light of their financial resources and the involvement of the Commissioners for the Annexed Estates. Particular focus is placed on the involvement of John Williams, the challenges faced by him and the precariousness of the enterprise.



John Blair

Professor John Blair is a historian and archaeologist of medieval England. His publications include *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005) and *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (2018). In retirement he is delighted to acquire a completely different historical interest, stimulated by the discovery that his ancestor made salt in eighteenth-century Portsoy.

Making salt in Portsoy, 1793 (or earlier) to c.1810

A small and transient salt-works at Portsoy was one of the series around the north-east coast that came into view after 1790. It was converted from a failed salmon-curing house and may initially have been intended to provide salt for the faltering Spey salmon industry. The salter, Alexander Blair, is mentioned as such in 1798 but was in Portsoy by 1784. Despite attempts from 1803 onwards to improve and market the works, it had been abandoned by c.1810. The site has recently been located on the north-west corner of the old harbour. The inlet channel, the bucket-pot, and foundations of the pan-house and an adjoining building are visible, and well-preserved archaeology may survive.

SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS



John Pickin

Formerly curator at Stranraer Museum, John Pickin has an interest in the archaeology of early industries, especially prehistoric and medieval extractive industries. He is an active member of the Early Mines Research Group.

Peat-fuelled salt works in the Rhinns of Galloway

There were a number of peat-fuelled saltworks operating in the Rhinns of Galloway during the 17th and 18th centuries. This talk will provide an account of the history of salt production in this isolated part of S W Scotland and will also look at the archaeology of the local salt industry.



Nic Coombey

As a Landscape Architect for 30 years, Nic has increasingly specialised in the management of heritage projects in Dumfries and Galloway. Currently delivering coastal projects for Solway Firth Partnership he is working on a series of projects promoting the rich heritage found along the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path

Rascarrel and other Scottish Solway salt works

Salt works recently came under the spotlight during the Solway Coastwise Project which used coastal place-names and the stories behind them to share an inspirational coastline. There is little physical evidence of salt manufacture on the Scottish Solway coast and place-name research provided the impetus to take a closer look. This talk presents the findings of a search by volunteers for evidence of salt works on the northern side of the Solway.



Gareth Jones

Gareth is a Conservation Architect and one of the founders of The Waggonway Project. He joined the practice of W A Cadell in Linlithgow and became fascinated by Scotland's salt industry while working on a project in Bo'ness and realising that the remains of the industry were to be found strung out all along the shoreline of his current home in Port Seton, East Lothian.

Observations and excavations from Cockenzie

Cockenzie and its near neighbour Port Seton were at the forefront of salt production and were a centre for innovation and improvements in the technologies used to extract salt from sea water using coal. There is however little evidence of the industry left now and the villages are known largely for their fishing heritage. Gareth will describe the fragmentary remains of salt manufacture on the shoreline of the villages and look in more detail at the recent excavations undertaken by The Waggonway Project. He will also describe how the group's curiosity led to their construction of an experimental salt pan based largely on the processes described by William Brownrigg in 1748.

SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS



Colin Martin

Dr Colin Martin is a retired Reader in Maritime Archaeology at St Andrews University. He has specialised in the excavation of historic shipwrecks, notably of the Spanish Armada, and has a parallel interest in the archaeology of maritime landscapes. This has included, in partnership with Paula, the investigation of the saltpan complex at St Monans, its associated coal-mining hinterland and the wagonway to Pittenweem harbour.



Paula Martin

After degrees in Classics and classical archaeology Dr Paula Martin came to St Andrews as Research Assistant at the Institute of Maritime Archaeology. After working with Colin Martin on several shipwreck excavations she moved on to local history, leading to a PhD. She has also worked with Colin on maritime landscape studies, including the St Monans salt pans.



Robin Murdoch

Robin is a former electronics engineer (mainly aerospace) and first became involved in archaeology in 1972. He has specialised in the study of glass from archaeological sites since 1978 and is particularly interested in industrial sites. Elected FSA Scot in 1976, he is a trustee of the Scottish Ironwork Foundation.

St Phillips Saltworks, St Monans

In the late 18th century, Sir John Anstruther developed salt making on an industrial scale at the St Philips salt pans in St Monans, Fife. The excavated remains of his nine pan houses and ancillary features, including a wind-pump tower, are remarkable survivors in their own right, but are only part of a now lost and largely invisible industrial landscape stretching from St Monans to Pittenweem Harbour.

This paper will use archaeological evidence and documentary sources to reveal the technological, social and economic story of the St Philips salt pans and reconstruct the wider industrial landscape from a combination of documentary and cartographic evidence and air photography. Through this evidence we can trace the layout of a pre-enclosure landscape, the effect on it of early bell-pit mining, the development of 'room-and-space' deep mining in the 18th century with its consequent drainage requirements, and the construction of a waggonway which linked the main pits to a coal pier at Pittenweem Harbour, with a branch line to the saltworks. Few such landscapes have survived elsewhere because of later exploitation of the coal resource. An underground fire fossilised this one in its early 19th century configuration and so saved it for posterity.

SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS



Darren Peattie, East Neuk Salt Company

Darren Peattie aims to create Scotland's largest producer of hand harvested sea salt with his company the East Neuk Salt Co, based in St Monans in the East Neuk of Fife. Darren returned home to the village where he grew up after leaving 18 years prior to work in finance in London. Darren is now focused on creating the ENSC in his home village which has an incredibly rich history in Salt.

Preserving our Past to Sustain our future: The importance of Salt in a rural coastal community

The East Neuk Salt Company has recently harvested the first batch of sea salt to be made in the coastal village of St Monans for 200 years. In this presentation I will talk about our salt making journey and the motivation behind it, and our vision for the future of salt in St Monans.



Gregorie Marshall, Blackthorn Salt

Gregorie carries a legacy of family involvement with salt since 1874. He has dealt with an eclectic mix of salt companies, projects and connoisseurs in over 35 countries across 6 continents. Gregorie's knowledge spans salt in all its guises - from food to water softening, de-icing or cosmetic - as well as championing for innovation and sustainability within the industry.

Contemporary Scottish salt making using the graduation tower process

We have revived and perfected the Graduation Thorn Tower technique: we gather seawater, then trickle it gently down and through a large tower packed tightly with blackthorn bundles. This evaporates around 90% of the water, purely due to the wind and sun working their magic, and uses 85% less energy than the usual applied heating methods. When the concentration of the remaining liquid is salty enough, we gently warm it in the panhouse to draw off the crystals by hand: it is a patient process, genuinely all about making the best we can.



Chris and Meena Watts, Isle of Skye Sea Salt Company

Chris and Meena Watts founded the Isle of Skye Sea Salt Company in 2011, the first to produce sea salt on the island for 300 years. Chris used his extensive experience in sustainable design to develop a solar evaporation process that would rely only on the sun and wind to evaporate the sea water and produce the salt. The company was the first in the UK to develop and implement this process and has led the way in sustainable and environmentally friendly salt production.

Sustainable sea salt production in Scotland today

An explanation of how and why we make Isle of Skye Sea Salt the way we do, emphasising the innovations required to produce solar evaporated sea salt on the northwest coast of Scotland.

SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS



Gary Donaldson, Alan Braby, Ed Bethune: 1722 Waggonway Group

Open air talks on Sunday

The 1722 Waggonway Heritage Group was formed in 2017 as a means to celebrate the history of Scotland's earliest railway and its associated industries of salt production and coal mining. Over the past 4 years the group has conducted several archaeological digs, including the excavation of salt pan houses dating to the 1630s and the discovery of the earliest remains of the 1722 Tranent-Cockenzie Waggonway. They have also conducted extensive research, opened a small museum and revived traditional Scottish salt making in the 18th century methods through the construction of two salt pans, one in Cockenzie (2017) and one in Brora (2020). The traditional skills mastered by the groups salters are now being shared with the Brora group.

THANK YOU



The Salt Symposium is dedicated to the memory of dear friends:

Hilary Healey, archaeologist, artist, Lincolnshire historian and polymath,

and

George Macbeath, much loved and much missed.

