

## Dates for your diary

In addition to the existing programme of events, a programme of brand new events, specially created for the year, will also take place.

### Edinburgh's Georgian Shadows (23 Feb–26 March)

Using lighting in inventive, creative ways, this event reveals the story of Edinburgh's New Town, one of the centrepieces of the UNESCO World Heritage designation.

### Scotland in Six (18 April), various venues

On World Heritage Day 2017, Scotland will celebrate our six iconic World Heritage Sites with six toe-tapping, mouth-watering, heart-pumping events from dawn to dusk.

### Tradfest (26 April–7 May)

Edinburgh's Tradfest kick-starts the summer season with a feast of folk arts – music, storytelling, dance, folk film and visual arts. To celebrate the year, an exciting new strand entitled 'The People's Heritage' will interpret the city through the lives of ordinary people.

### Paisley's International Festival of Weaving (1–2 July)

Over this festival weekend, the event will reconnect the town's weaving heritage with its historic textile connections all over the world.

### Purvai (Aug) – Ann Lanntair, Stornoway

Celebrating the rich history between India and Scotland and the vibrant South Asian culture which is an integrated and important part of Scotland today.

### Follow the Vikings Roadshow and Festival (Sept) Unst & Lerwick, Shetland

An opportunity to experience Viking Heritage in a scale never before seen in Shetland, held over two weekends, at two locations.

### Horsepower (9 Sept), The Helix, Falkirk

Equine history and archaeology brought to life with a wide range of activity set to appeal to a vast audience.

### The Mary Queen of Scots Festival (Sept) Kinross and Loch Leven

Celebrating the rich cultural, history and heritage of the Kinross area, most notably its famed connection to Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots.

### Shining Lives (Autumn), New Lanark

A spectacular sound and light projection event in New Lanark World Heritage Site providing a unique interpretation of this famous site.

Scotland hosts an exciting programme of annual events that showcases our history and heritage, bringing our traditions to life in a modern, vibrant way. From the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival to the Royal Highland Show, The Scottish Traditional Boat Festival to Scottish Archaeology Month, the annual programme is bursting with exciting experiences to bring the 2017 themes alive.

Scotland also celebrates a number of significant anniversaries throughout the historical year including the 70th anniversary of Edinburgh as a world-leading festival city, the 20th anniversary of Scottish Crannog Centre, 250th anniversary of Edinburgh New Town Plan, 30th anniversary of Beltane Fire Society and the 400th anniversary of the General Register of Sasines – the oldest public land register in the world.

Scotland has been preparing for 2017 for centuries – why not get involved and make your own history in 2017?

For more information and a full list of all events celebrating the year visit [www.visitscotland.com/hha2017](http://www.visitscotland.com/hha2017)

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# HARPS – the Historical Archaeology Research Project, Staffa



Staffa and the entrance to Fingal's Cave, taken from a drone © HARPS/GU

Lying off the West coast of Mull, the Isle of Staffa, and its internationally famous feature 'Fingal's Cave', is one of Scotland's most significant tourist sites. This small island (1x1/2km) is of a very striking appearance, consisting of a basement of volcanic tuff, beneath a layer of Tertiary basaltic lava which cooled slowly resulting in a highly unusual pattern of predominantly hexagonal columns. Although rare, this type of columnar basalt occurs in a number of places, famously at the 'Giant's Causeway' in Northern Ireland, but nowhere is it more spectacular than on Staffa.

The effect of the regular geometric shapes is both intriguing and disconcerting, so much so that as late as the 19th century scholarly discussions were still taking place as to whether the site was artificial or natural. Following a published description of it by Joseph Banks in 1772, Staffa and its caves quickly became established as an early tourist destination. It captured

the 18th- and 19th-century romantic imagination with its geological oddity, wealth of associated folklore and of course its association with the legend of Fhinn MacCool (Fingal). It should be noted that the designation of the cave as 'Fingal's' is controversial – a more likely name is *Uaimh Bhinn* or 'melodious cave'.

Over time the island became an inspiration for works of music, art and literature by some of Europe's most important cultural figures, including Wordsworth, Mendelssohn, Turner, Verne and Hogg amongst many others. This tradition continues to this day, with Fingal's Cave especially **continuing to inspire** artists and musicians such as Pink Floyd.

However, despite Staffa's prominent position in the romantic mind, it has remained a largely unknown quantity archaeologically. This is a significant gap given both the likely prehistoric conception



of the island as a place of significance and also the unique potential for historical archaeology on the island addressing recent seasonal occupation and the archaeology of early tourism. Until recently the only archaeological work to have taken place on Staffa had been a walk-over survey for management purposes commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland in 1996. The survey noted numerous undated and hard to identify features, including a single ruinous, but upstanding 'bothy', which has traditionally been used as a shelter for tourists.

Following on from exploratory survey and test pitting in 2014 by the HARPS team, funding was kindly granted by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 2016 to allow further exploration of the archaeological potential of the island with a focus on historical archaeology. The proposed work included a small-scale excavation through

the upper floor layers of 'the bothy' with particular focus on evidence from the historic period and early tourism. Test pitting had recovered the first ever evidence of prehistoric activity (diagnostic worked flint) as well as pottery dated to the 15th century, both in close proximity to the bothy. Also undertaken was Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) of a subset of the 18th–20th-century tourist graffiti in Fingal's Cave, a systematic search for medieval or earlier rock carving/art, and a drone-based photogrammetric survey of the northern sections of the island (not captured by the 2014 survey).

Working on Staffa can be a difficult proposal, with all equipment and supplies, including drinking water, needing to be taken over by boat and carried by hand up the steep metal staircase up the cliff face from the landing jetty. Access to the island itself is heavily dependent on the state of

the sea and access to the graffitied sections of the cave itself requires calm seas and low tides for safe working. As a result of these constraints and the presence of nesting birds, HARPS fieldwork has been split into two phases: initial fieldwork completed in August and further work scheduled for March 2017. The August phase focused on graffiti recording and small scale excavation in the vicinity of the bothy as well as drone survey. Early 2017 will see excavation of sections of the 'bothy' itself. Despite being required to leave the island ahead of schedule due an impending summer storm (which ultimately made landing on the island impossible for several days), the 2016 work has resulted in some surprising results. Conditions in 2014 had not allowed for more than a cursory inspection of the graffiti, and it had been presumed that the vast majority of this would



excavation of the 'bothy' in 2016 © HARPS

be 19th-century tourist graffiti. Although analysis is ongoing, a major surprise has been the large amount of material dating from World War II, specifically ship names. The presence of numerous ship names, especially naval vessels, has opened up entirely new areas of potential research. Amongst those ships already identified are HMS Nimrod (mentioned more than once), HMS Alecto, HMS Quentin Roosevelt and the French Dunkerque class battleship 'Strasbourg' which visited in 1939. The wartime activities of these craft and why they stopped at Staffa is likely to be a fascinating story in itself, for example HMS Quentin Roosevelt is known to have been a supply ship for the (then) secret commando training base at Lochailort. The small scale excavations to the south of the 'bothy' again

provided surprising results in the form of prehistoric pottery at a relatively shallow depth (bearing in mind that due to the geology of Staffa, the soil is not deep). Sherds from multiple decorated pots, including some with a tentative date of late Neolithic, were recovered from a small trench to the south of the 'bothy' along with a fine example of a flint blade. It is hoped that the further excavation in March 2017 will allow a better understanding of activity in the historic period, including early tourist activity in addition to the hints of prehistoric occupation uncovered so far.

Stuart Jeffrey, HARPS

*The HARPS project is an interdisciplinary collaboration led by the Glasgow School of Art (School of Simulation and Visualisation) and the National Trust for Scotland with partners from the University of Stirling, the University of Glasgow and Spectrum Heritage.*



Team members, Mhairi Maxwell and Clara Molina Sanchez, RTI graffiti recording in Fingal's cave © HARPS



Prehistoric pottery sherd © HARPS/NTS