

1.1.1 Introduction

The *Tarbat Discovery Programme* was an archaeological research project aimed at revealing the history of the northern Picts, former inhabitants of the eastern Scottish mainland. The investigation consisted of 31 archaeological interventions in four Sectors inside and adjacent to St. Colman's Church at Portmahomack on Tarbat Ness in Easter Ross, north-east Scotland (1.1.2). Eighteen major structures and eight church buildings were defined and assigned to six Periods, Period 0 (prehistoric), Period 1 (late Iron Age/early Pictish), Period 2 (8th century/Late Pictish), Period 3 (9th to 11th century/Norse and Scottish), Period 4 (Medieval) and Period 5 (Post-Medieval) (1.1.3).

The programme of investigation ran over the twenty years between 1994 and 2014 and comprised a campaign of evaluation and design (1994-1996), excavation (1996-2007), survey on the peninsula (1996-2002), the restoration of the church and the construction of a museum inside it (1996-1999) and a period of analytical study (2008-2014). An interim account was published in 2008 (Carver 2008). This Online Archive supports the final publication (Carver et al 2014), to which users of this archive will need to refer. A full list of publications reporting the project will be found in 1.1.4.

The project was directed by Martin Carver, University of York and the fieldwork subcontracted to the company FAS-Heritage Ltd, whose field directors were Justin Garner-Lahire and Cecily Spall. Participants included professional site assistants, volunteers and students. The cost of the project, its sponsors, the history of the fieldwork and the people who participated in it will be found in 1.2. The 'Atlas' in Section 3 provides basic maps of the area explored and the Album (Section 4) pictures of the ambience and work in progress. The project design for fieldwork was published in 1995 (4.1), and for the analytical phase in 2007 and 2009 (4.2, 4.3). The design for the Museum display inside the church was written and implemented in 1999 (4.4).

Interim reports were issued annually during the fieldwork (1995-2007) (Section 5) and the sequence in each excavated sector is fully chronicled by Sector in Section 6, which is predominately the work of Cecily Spall. Thirty-six experts contributed specialist studies in the post-excavation phase. Their reports are presented as received in section 7.1 (artefacts), 7.2-7.5 (ecology) and 7.6 (radiocarbon dating).

Research on the peninsula undertaken as part of this programme (Section 8) included surveys at Nigg and Shandwick and a full evaluation at Hilton of Cadboll, including the

commissioning of a replica cross slab; a survey of the likely route of the portage implied by the placename ‘Tarbat’, a review of previous discoveries on the peninsula, especially of prehistoric burials, including those encountered at Balnabruach and an inventory of potential sites and placenames.

The promulgation design for the project is shown in Table 1. The inventories of records and objects deposited will be found in Section 9. The principal public outlet is the volume published by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. This contains a full but edited account of the discoveries, the studies and the interpretations, and includes a *Digest* that summarises the specialist studies found here, in abridged form.

Table 1:

<i>User</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Contact</i>
Members of the Public	Tarbat Discovery Centre	Museum display	THT
Students	Bookshops	Book: <i>Portmahomack Monastery of the Picts</i> by Martin Carver	Edinburgh University Press
General Researchers	Carver, Garner-Lahire & Spall 2014	Illustrated text	S of A Scotland
Specialist Researchers	ADS	Online Archive	ads.ahds.ac.uk
Specialist researchers of artefacts and materials	National Museums of Scotland	Objects in boxes	NMS
Specialist researchers of sites	RCAHMS	Records in boxes	RCAHMS

Contact

This Online Archive was compiled by Martin Carver in August 2013. For information relating to all archaeological data from the Tarbat Discovery programme, the contact is:

Cecily Spall
 FAS-Heritage Ltd
 Unit 8
 Fulford Business Centre
 35, Hospital Fields Road
 YORK Y10 4DZ
 Tel 01904 65200
 email: cecily.spall@fas-heritage.co.uk