

# IN SEARCH OF ROCKS AND STONES

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**Name:** George Geddes

## What do you do?

I'm an Archaeological Investigator with RCAHMS

## How did you get here?

I started with a BSc at Edinburgh followed by a few years on the Scottish digging circuit. An MA at York in 2003-4 focussing on the archaeology of buildings in the Western Isles led to five years at Headland Archaeology as their building surveyor. In 2007, I took up the post as St Kilda Archaeologist for the National Trust for Scotland, which led to an interest in conservation management planning. In 2008, I moved to RCAHMS to work on a range of archaeological survey projects.



## What are you working on today?

Today I am splitting my work over a series of projects: as aerial survey forms part of my work, I am interpreting and cataloguing photographs of cropmarks taken in the Lunan valley last year, an area where a whole archaeological landscape of multiple periods survives under modern land use.

Later in the day I will continue researching the work of Gordon Childe with RCAHMS from 1942 to 1946 and digitising the photographs, notes and sketch plans he made on about 700 sites during the war, so that they can be viewed on [Canmore](#).



*Gordon Childe, a Commissioner at RCAHMS for 4 years, in Edinburgh.*

We are also producing a new book on St Kilda's archaeology, surveyed by RCAHMS in 1983-6 and 2007-9, and I am researching and writing the chapters for the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, exploring new approaches to the sites and their wider context.

My most recent fieldwork has been a re-survey of the fort at Finavon, and the discovery of a whole new and significant phase, and a trip to the Flannan Isles, where a medieval chapel and seabird hunters bothies survive – for both, I will begin the drafting of our detailed descriptions.

### **Favourite part of your job?**

In comparison to project manager, the job title 'investigator' seems so old-fashioned but the Ordnance Survey and RCAHMS used it for many years as it describes so well the process of critically engaging with the archaeological landscapes and collections in Scotland. Whether it is getting to grips with complex earthworks at Finavon, or teasing together the evidence of how we have got where we are today in interpretation, the focus at work is so often on that *process of investigation*. When this process is coupled with a good old sense of 'public service', it can be very productive and rewarding.

### **What did university not teach you?**

While University was fantastic at providing a broad overview, and the opportunity to share and develop ideas, it did not provide an adequate grasp of either fieldwork skills (excluding excavation) nor of the character of Scotland's field archaeology. While this can to some extent be learnt simply by tramping round sites on one's own, as so many of us have done, the advantages of doing this more intensively (i.e. looking at *everything* within a study area), and with experienced colleagues, makes a huge difference. When one considers that RCAHMS has had staff in a similar post to myself since 1908 (initially in fact, the only staff), there has been a huge amount of accumulated organisational experience, passed on from generation to generation (this can include bad habits too!).



*The chapel and lighthouse on the Flannan Isles*

### **Surprising part of your job?**

The colleagues! No seriously, I'm surprised that there is still so much investigative work to do in Scotland. Though we are really far ahead of most countries in the world in having more than a century of relatively coherent and structured fieldwork (by many individuals and bodies) behind us, resulting in a fantastic collection not to mention an ever-improving sense of the past, great swathes of the country still require thorough field survey, to support research, planning and to enable the public to engage with the past. This national project, when combined with an excellent and robust system of planning-led archaeology, and community archaeology, must surely be the envy of many countries.



*George thinks his colleagues are surprising...*

**Top tips for aspiring archaeologists?** Earn a fortune in something else and then self-fund excavations and surveys in the land of your dreams (i.e North Rona).



*Colleagues on North Rona*