

CIfA SCOTTISH GROUP IN-PERSON NETWORKING EVENT

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Meeting new people in the Early People gallery

The CIfA Scottish Group networking event took place at the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) in Edinburgh on 12 September 2025. Designed intentionally as a small event, limited to 30 attendees, the aim was to facilitate small group networking and discussions of archaeological practice to allow equality of opportunity to engage, alongside listening to some exciting and well-known speakers.

The venue

The day began with an introduction to the NMS by the new Keeper of Scottish History and Archaeology, Dr Rebecca Jones. The purpose-built Museum of Scotland building opened in 1998, after our own chair, David Connolly, had helped complete excavations before the first foundations were laid. The design drew on the work of the modernist architect Le Corbusier and was influenced by Scottish vernacular architecture, with spiral staircases, towers and narrow 'arrow loop' windows in the style of a medieval castle. Dr Jones explored the challenge of keeping the collections up to date in a purpose-built building with architecturally designed exhibition spaces and sculptural artwork, and this includes the Early People gallery, located in the basement of the building

with very little signage. The gallery uses an innovative thematic concept chosen by the original designers, rather than the more conventional chronological approach, which challenged people to look at the past differently. One change already proposed is a new lighting scheme for the Early People gallery in 2026. Further alterations are currently in discussion, and it is an exciting time for the re-imagining of the exhibition of Scotland's more distant past.

Breaking the ice

An unconventional ice-breaker saw individual objects within the Early People gallery chosen by attendees to present to the group if they wanted to. Attendees were encouraged to choose objects which they had a personal or professional attachment to, or indeed just an interest in talking about with the group. Objects ranged from the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish Cross Slab to a collection of daggers, to the tattered remains of a Roman tent. Professional stories were shared, along with personal connections to the objects. Discussions also arose around the possession and repatriation of objects within local communities in Scotland, the ability of objects to tell stories in the past and in the present and the tangible and intangible linguistic connotations of objects. All round, it was a lively few hours with a lot of chit-chat time with significant group involvement and conversation, exactly as hoped for. When people talk to each other in this way, barriers come down and networking truly works.

Conversations

Three talks, focused on archaeological practice, were presented during the afternoon:

- Steve Birch (West Coast Archaeological Services): High Pasture Cave – ten key moments from discovery to publication
- Jeff Sanders (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland): Meeting a myriad of archaeological audiences
- Liz Robson (University of Stirling): The practical application of social values in Scotland's heritage

The links between the three presentations resulted in a wide-ranging discussion on the potential for innovative archaeological projects to provide social value and public benefit for a range of different audiences, including those communities which do not naturally identify with archaeology and cultural heritage. It would be interesting to see these discussions transform into some 'talking point' documents that could help inspire innovation and thinking outside the box.

Attendees reported that the day had been enjoyable and productive. The Scottish Group welcomes all feedback from attendees and anyone else interested. It is hoped that the Scottish Group could hold similar events across Scotland in the future, basing networking days at regional museums including (but not limited to) the future new Inverness Museum, The Burrell Collection in Glasgow, Kilmartin Museum in Argyll and the V&A in Dundee (venue willing).

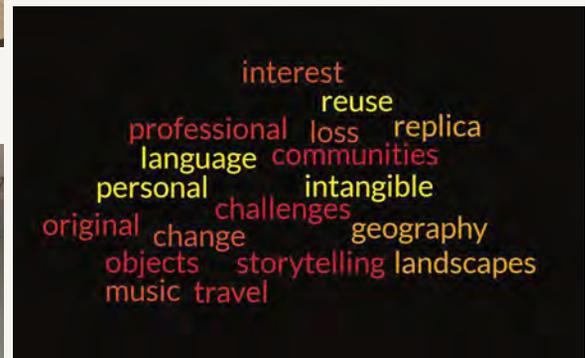
We would like to thank Matt Ritchie (Scottish Group CIfA), Dr Rebecca Jones (NMS), and Cara Burton (CIfA), and all those that made this event possible.



Attendees in the NMS, discussing objects within the Early People exhibit.
Credit: Lisa Bird



Attendees listen and participate in talks focused on archaeological practice.
Credit: Lisa Bird



Word cloud created from the discussion of objects from the NMS Early People exhibit.
Credit: Lisa Bird



Lisa Bird

Lisa is Secretary for the ClfA Scottish Group. She graduated the University of Edinburgh in 2015 with an MA (Hons) in Archaeology and subsequently graduated with an MSc (Distinction) in Archaeological Sciences from the University of Bradford in 2022. Lisa works within the consultancy team at AOC Archaeology Group.

