

## HISTORIC RURAL SETTLEMENT DISCUSSION GROUP

### Report on the Annual Conference and Field Excursion

**Tait Hall, Kelso, Borders Region: Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

#### **Report by Richard Tipping**

A very successful day-conference of the Group was held on Saturday May 6<sup>th</sup> 2006. The meeting was held at the Tait Hall in Kelso, Borders Region, continuing our tradition of moving to different regions around the country and visiting old and new friends. This meeting focused on new work on historic rural settlement in the eastern Borders. The support of the Friends of Kelso Museum, and their secretary, Isabel Gordon, is warmly acknowledged.

The meeting attracted an audience of 55, making it the best attended conference of the Group to date and indicating the wide and burgeoning interest in the subject. This number included a large proportion of people not previously associated with the work of the Historic Rural Settlement Discussion Group, which was a very pleasing aspect of the meeting. Even more pleasing was the high proportion of attendees requesting to become members of the Group.

The convention of these meetings is that the morning is set aside for talks by a mix of speakers representing both professional and amateur interests. Talks this year covered a wide range of time periods and introduced a variety of different approaches and techniques. *Colm O'Brien* began the meeting by discussing the evidence from early historic sources for how we might reconstruct the size and integration of post-Roman, early historic administrative units, building on his work in the northern and eastern Cheviot Hills around Yeavinger. *Rory McDonald* also used archives, together with archaeological evidence, to describe the scale and intensity of the impacts of Henry VIII's "rough wooing", and the Earl of Hertford's raid of September 1545. *Althea Davies* described how she has tried to relate the documentary and archaeological records to her scientific analyses of changes in vegetation and land uses in the last several hundred years, to understand the stresses imposed on agriculture and settlement in the Borders. *John Harrison* represented the Peebles Archaeological Society in discussing the recording of historic archaeological remains in Eddleston Parish, and showed how combining archival data with old maps (cartographic data) and archaeological features expanded the depth of analysis of this landscape. *Paul Frodsham* spoke for the Upper Coquetdale Community Archaeology Project, a successful partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Northumberland National Park in which local groups are discovering some very significant and exciting archaeological sites. Finally, *Robin Turner* introduced the 'Scotland's Rural Past' Project, an ambitious partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, National Trust for Scotland and the Royal Commission on Ancient & Historical Monuments (Scotland), in which local communities throughout Scotland will be encouraged to record and conserve historic rural settlement remains within their areas.

After lunch and with the promise of a warm and sunny afternoon, we moved to the Borders Agricultural Society Showground by the River Tweed, for the short walk to

the related Medieval sites of Springwood and Roxburgh. Neither site has upstanding archaeological remains, but thanks to the presentations of Piers Dixon, Richard Oram and Colin Martin, the lives of people here in the Medieval period were brought to life using archaeological and documentary evidence. A full day was concluded at around 5.00 pm.