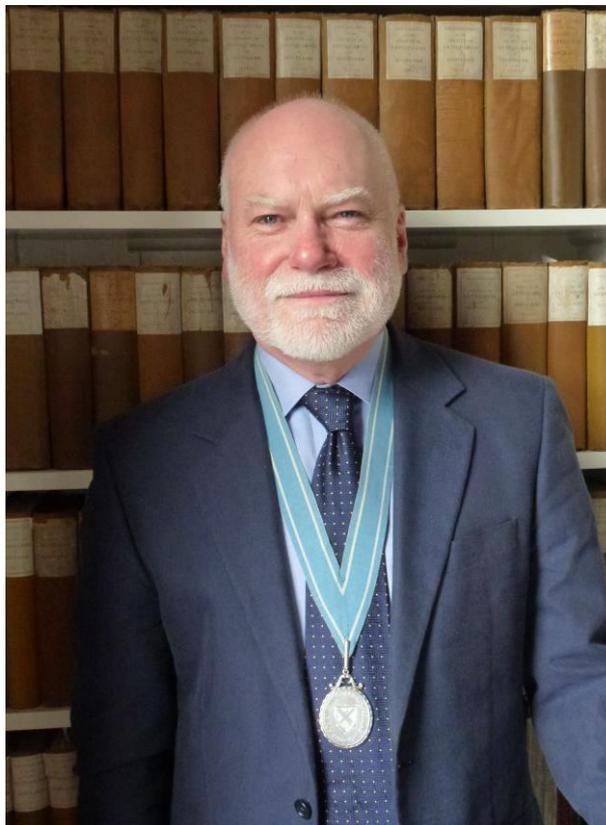

Alan Saville (31 December 1946 – 19 June 2016): One of Britain's finest lithics specialists

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Alan Saville, President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
(photo courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of Scotland).

Alan Saville had a long and distinguished career in British archaeology, and following his education and early archaeological background in England, he has latterly been associated mainly with Scottish archaeology, where he held the post of Senior Curator at the Department of Scottish Archaeology and History, National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh. Through his career, Saville had many roles and his achievements and posts include, *inter alia*, being co-founder of the Lithic Studies Society and its newsletter *Lithics*; the Editor of the *European*

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Journal of Archaeology (EAA); Chair of the Scottish Treasure Trove Unit; organiser and co-organiser of several important conferences, such as ‘Mesolithic Scotland and its Neighbours’ in 1999 (Saville 2004b) and ‘Flint and Stone in the Neolithic Period’ in 2005 (Saville 2011a); co-chair of the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework’s (SCARF) Upper Palaeolithic-Mesolithic panel; and, towards the end, President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

However, the purpose of this biography is to present Alan Saville’s achievements as one of Britain’s – and indeed Europe’s – finest, most enthusiastic, knowledgeable and productive lithics specialists. Just as the above overview of Saville’s long career is a brief summary, his production as a lithics specialist is so extensive that the following review of his contribution to the world of lithics is also in summary form.

At the most fundamental level, Saville was influential in defining lithic typology, not least the typology associated with microliths. Where most of the 20th century is characterized by analysts describing microliths in almost painful detail, referring to numerous microlith types and sub-types, he reduced them by asking which details might actually have any relevance to our interpretation of prehistoric sites and life, and suggested the use of only a few basic forms, such as – in the Scottish later Mesolithic – scalene triangles, crescents, edge-blunted pieces and indeterminate fragments (1980; 1981a; 1981b). He was also instrumental in the definition of a set of general rules for the illustration of lithic artefacts (Martingell & Saville 1988).

Saville applied his typo-technological insight to the discussion of prehistoric periods and phases, and was a key contributor in the definition of some English Mesolithic phases (e.g. the Honey Hill Phase; Saville 1980; 1981a; 1981b), but he was also able to define an approximate date for the transition between the Scottish Early and Late Mesolithic periods (with the key diagnostic types being isosceles and scalene triangular microliths) at a considerably earlier time than many may have anticipated, c. 8,500 cal BC (Saville 2008). Following the 1999 conference at National Museums Scotland, he produced an excellent overview of the Scottish Mesolithic period for the proceedings which followed (Saville 2004), and with colleagues on the ScARF panel he produced an updated and much more detailed overview in 2012 (Saville & Wickham-Jones 2012), which is available online.

Over the last decade, Saville worked with the author and other colleagues on the establishment of a Scottish late Upper Palaeolithic period, and on the definition of the involved lithic industries. They include: The Hamburgian (Ballin *et al.* 2010; forthcoming); the *Federmesser* Culture (Saville & Ballin 2009); and the Ahrensburgian (Ballin & Saville 2003). His publication of the excavation of An Corran on Skye shed light on the Scottish Early Mesolithic period and its lithic artefacts, as well as on the environment of the An Corran site (Saville *et al.* 2012). His paper on the site at Cramond, Edinburgh, dealt with issues relating to the Scottish Late Mesolithic, as well as general Mesolithic questions (Saville 2008).

He also produced several papers in which he defined British Early Neolithic industries (Saville 2002; 2006a), and he discussed Early Neolithic depositional practices such as those associated with two Scottish caches (Auchenhoan, Kintyre and Portpatrick, Dumfries & Galloway) of polished axeheads and flakes from Antrim in Northern Ireland (Saville 1999a; 1999b). His work on the Hazelton North long barrow in Gloucestershire informed us on Mesolithic as well as Early Neolithic lithic objects, but also on British long barrows and Early Neolithic burial practices. Among other things, he carried out a refitting analysis of that lithic assemblage to investigate distributional patterns within the Mesolithic and Neolithic elements of the assemblage. The analysis also provided information on flint reduction strategies (Saville 1990).

One of Saville’s main interests has been the prehistoric procurement of flint, where he has contributed greatly to the topic of Neolithic flint mining. As part of this work, he planned

and undertook the excavation in 1971-72 of one of the Grimes Graves mine shafts and its surrounding debris, and the publication of the results shed light on not just the Late Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age mining operations, but also on the associated industries, their artefact typologies and the applied operational schemas (Saville 1981).

In the early 1990s, Saville undertook excavations at two mining complexes at Den of Boddam and Skelmuir Hill in Aberdeenshire, and during his final years he spent a large proportion of his time in the preparation of these two sites and their recovered assemblages of flint debris for publication. Both mining areas date to the later Neolithic period, and his many papers on the two sites have discussed the mining operations themselves, later Neolithic typology and, first and foremost, the applied Levallois-like technique so characteristic of this period (Bridgland *et al.* 1997; Saville 1995; 2003a; 2003b; 2005a; 2006b; 2008b; 2011b).

Over the years, Saville analysed and published numerous lithic assemblages investigated as part of his work at National Museums Scotland, e.g. Skara Brae (forthcoming) and Kilellan Farm (2005). He also published numerous individual lithic objects discovered in the National Museum's stores or in connection with his work for the Treasure Trove Unit, e.g. Scottish earlier Palaeolithic objects (1997); a likely Scandinavian-style Neolithic tanged point from eastern Scotland (1998); possible Orcadian microliths (1996; 2000); and flint daggers from Northumberland (2012).

Those of us who have worked with Alan Saville will remember our deep, thorough and engaged discussions of lithics in all their shapes and sizes, and not least the help and advice we received if and when we needed it. If you asked Saville to comment on a manuscript, he would not simply skim the text and give you a few general comments – he would invest hours of his time, and the manuscript would be returned more red than black. However, following his intervention, the paper would always be a better one than it was originally.

After a protracted battle with cancer, Alan Saville sadly passed away Sunday 19 June 2016. I am personally grateful to Alan Saville for all the help and support I have received over the years, and he will be thoroughly missed. His death is a notable loss to Scottish and British lithic research.

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