

## Newsletter, Autumn 2022

### Chairman's Notes

As the summer draws gradually to an end with temperatures of 18C in late October, so does the fieldwork season. Although we have had no excavation ourselves this year, several NDAS members took part in Ace Archaeology's dig at Moistown and enjoyed the cordial atmosphere there. We've also had a number of field trips and most recently, we were invited to take part (along with RSPB and other archaeological society volunteers) in clearing scrub from one of the impressive Aylesbeare Bronze Age barrows. We then assisted with adding sand protection to the enigmatic ox-hide pebble platform nearby. An article by Ruth will be found below.

As we approach the winter talks season I would make a plea for engagement with Society activities. There seems to be a post-covid malaise which is affecting many other groups too. The concern is that speakers will not be keen to give repeat talks if few people turn up (I heard of one event recently where only 6 people turned up for a history talk). Our summer field trips used to attract 30 plus members; recently they've averaged 11.

We have opportunities for excavation in 2023 but objectives will very much be determined by numbers and we will email out asking, where possible, for people to sign up. First will be some small trial trenches at Clovelly Dykes (late March) and we've also been invited to take part in a community excavation at Torrington later in the summer. There is a possibility of a third dig in the offing (details when confirmed).

I do hope members will feel they want to take part in these activities; we have several new members and they can be assured a warm welcome and plenty of encouragement. Here's to 2023!

### Excavation for the Dulverton Weir Project 2022

Nigel Dymond

In March 2020 it was agreed with Phillip Hull and Peter Romain (two of the Dulverton Weir and Leat Conservation Trust trustees) that NDAS would carry out four trial trenches (later reduced to three) which had been proposed in the Project Design for a Community Archaeology Project (2020). The first two trenches were excavated in September 2021 when the pandemic



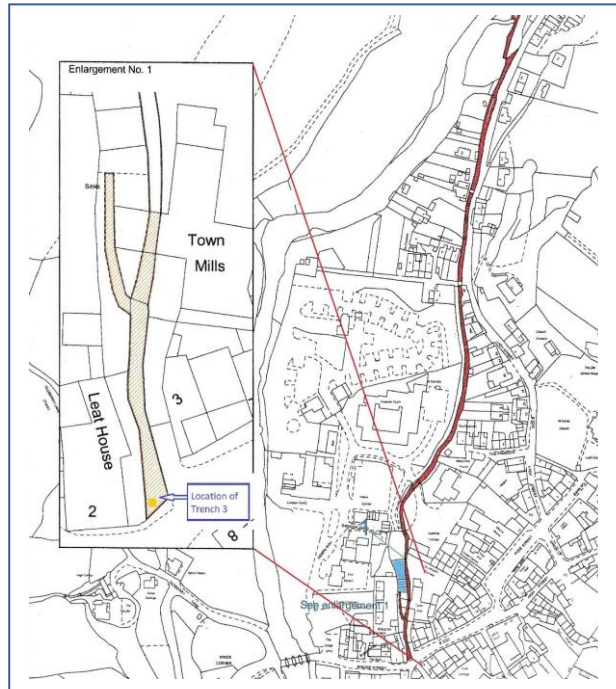
*Setting out Trench 3 on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022*

restrictions had lifted sufficiently for the work to be undertaken (Reported in the autumn 2021 newsletter). The third excavation, a small trench to be dug in the leat, to establish the construction of the base, was postponed until early 2022. On 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022, therefore, three members of North Devon Archaeological Society met with Philip Hull in Dulverton to complete the work.

## The Excavation

The third trench (Trench 3) was located approximately 1 meter upstream from the North face of the bridge, close to Leat House. The flow of the leat was reduced and Phillip Hull constructed a small cofferdam around the area to be excavated. Whilst the amount of water entering the area of Trench 3 was greatly reduced, it proved impossible to prevent the ingress of water into the trench.

The top layer (300) of the deposits over the leat floor comprised small pieces of natural gravel and small stones – brown, black and white. Beneath this was (301), a layer of more compact mid brown/grey silted clay, containing water borne pebbles 1cm to 5cm. Finds included coins (all decimal), broken glass (mainly broken bottles), a piece of 'Bridgewater' roofing tile, sherds of pottery, ceramic beads from a modern bracelet/necklace and part of a brick (manufactured). Beneath this was (302) a reddish-brown silt layer which still contained modern finds: decimal coins, broken bottle glass and ceramic beads. Beneath this was (303) the lime mortar base (with stone inclusions) of the leat. The base had been covered by approximately 30cm of silt.



*Location of Trench 3*

## Conclusions



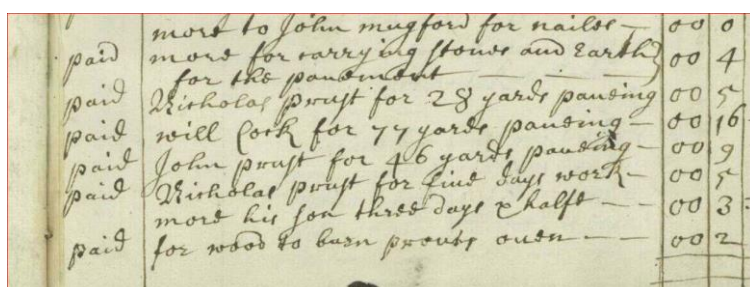
*The base of the leat with water rapidly flowing in. Scale: 30cm.*

The lime mortared base of the leat at this location was something of a surprise. Previous reports had suggested it was cobbled, although this may have been a description of the stone inclusions in the mortar. The lime mortar suggests a later resurfacing of the leat base and in general, its use in Devon suggests a post-medieval date. The finds (including decimal coinage) in all contexts above the mortared surface suggest that the leat had been cleaned out in the modern era. This in fact had been reported by local residents, who stated that the leat was regularly dredged/cleared by the local authorities and the last time this occurred was likely to have been in the 1960s/1970s. This would explain why the earliest coin that was recovered during the excavation was dated 1971.

## Making Sense of Cobbles (Part 2)

Chris Preece

In Part 1 (Spring Newsletter 2022) we looked at some examples where the date of the cobbles is shown by the use of different coloured cobbles highlighting the date within the set. Without this, other ways of dating have to be sought. If there is a layer sealing the cobbles and this can be dated then this can provide a *terminus ante quem* for the cobbles. Conversely, there may be a dateable layer below the cobbles which will provide a *terminus post quem*. An example of the former was the brewhouse at Buckland Abbey where a demolition layer (dated by pottery) of c. 1770 overlay cobbles. This is of limited help of course and in fact the excavator thought the cobbled surface to be pre-Reformation or earlier. At Buckfast Abbey, however, the cobbled trackway was underlain by a refuse dump which contained C13 pottery. Deposits overlying the cobbles contained later Medieval pottery, probably of post-1500 date, broadly dating the cobbles between these dates (Allen 2006, 255-7).



paid	more to John mugford for nails	00 0
	more for carrying big stones and earth	00 4
	for the pavement	
paid	Nicholas prout for 28 yards paving	00 5
paid	will cork for 74 yards paving	00 16
paid	John prout for 46 yards paving	00 9
paid	Nicholas prout for five days work	00 5
	more his for three days & half	00 3
paid	for wood to burn prouts oven	00 2

Fig.1: Early 18<sup>th</sup> century record of payment for paving in Fore Street, Hartland.

Courtesy, S.Hobbs

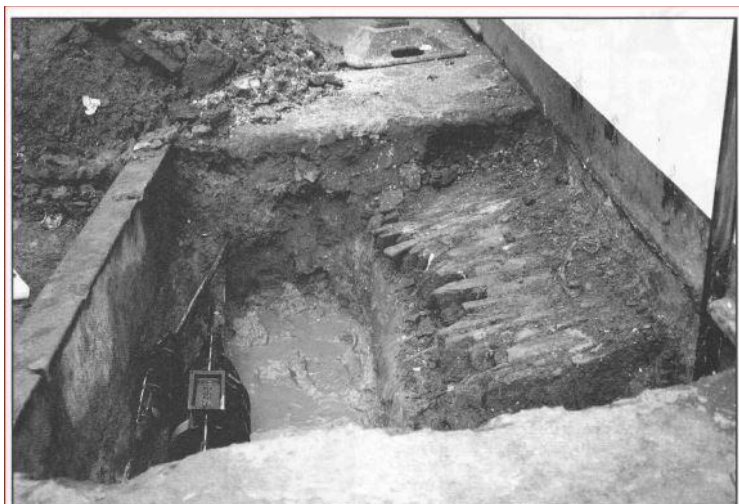


Fig.2: 20<sup>th</sup> century newspaper report on electrical repair work in Fore Street, Hartland, excavation revealing old cobbles beneath the tarmac.

Courtesy, S.Hobbs

**OLD PAVEMENT UNCOVERED** - During electrical repairs outside No. 30 Fore Street, the old stone pavement was uncovered some six inches or so below the present pavement level. Obviously, since the days of tarmacadam, the roadway and pavements have gradually grown higher and higher. From this picture it can be seen that the old roadway would have been at least a foot below the present level.

Another method of dating is through documentary evidence. In Hartland, Steve Hobbs found reference to payments for paving being laid in Fore Street in 1708 - at this time it would undoubtedly have been cobbles (Fig. 1). The mention of stones and earth (presumably clay) supports this, as does a clip from a newspaper showing cobbled paving below the modern pavement (Fig. 2). Although tarmac has covered the high streets in most Devon towns and villages, Hartland is one of several good places to see residual cobbles with its alleyways, gutters and pavement sections.



Other written evidence can be found in unexpected places, for instance guidebooks. In her book on Green Lanes published in 2008 (see references), Valerie Belsey describes a lane near Abbotsham as 'cobbled in places, reflecting its heavy use' (P. 160). Although by 2021 this had been concreted over, this observation has become a useful record.

Documentary evidence alone cannot be relied on as proof of dating of extant cobbles. The example of Clovelly cobbles being relaid on occasions is a cautionary tale. So too is the example of Winkleigh Church and surrounding buildings, many of which feature cobbled surfaces. As I admired the cobbles outside Church House back in 2006, the owner told me her husband had recently laid them! The type and pattern perfectly matched other examples in the vicinity.

At York Cathedral, an RCHM document states that the cobbles were laid in the C13. Yet when excavation took place to assess their stability, they were found to be bedded in concrete which meant they must have been relaid in the C19 when modern concrete was first used.

Thus, the ideal is when documentary evidence is combined with excavation. A good exemplar of this was South West Archaeology's excavation of the Three Crowns Hotel in Chagford. They were able to demonstrate (through a combination of documentary evidence allied to buildings survey and excavation) that the cobbled floor must have been laid either when it became the Black Swan Inn in the mid C17 or perhaps a little earlier when it was a town house.

There is considerable longevity in the use of cobbles in Devon, with examples from the earlier part of the Late Medieval period through at least to the end of the Victorian period. What of earlier periods? Although you could argue that Roman roads were often technically cobbled (or at least set), the only example I know of cobbles from the Roman era in Devon was found at Topsham Rugby Club where excavations revealed timber walls sealing a cobbled base (see online reference below). In terms of prehistory, the work being done on the Aylesbeare Pebble Beds may well reveal earlier dated examples. Thermoluminescence dating will also be a real asset in future dating of cobbles. Finally, if you are now inspired to go cobble hunting, good places to look (as well as more historic parts of settlements) are any religious or listed buildings. Older farmhouses also repay visits with yards, paths and barn floors often cobbled.



Fig.3: *Herringbone pattern in a Garden path.*



Fig.4: *Gutter in cobbles.*



Fig.5: *Roadside evidence of cobbles.*

Apart from the places mentioned in these two articles there are a number of other locations worth a visit.

Clovelly apart, Thorverton is the Mecca of preserved cobbles. As well as beautiful herringbone garden paths (Fig. 3) there are cobbled areas with gutters (Fig. 4), road drains and roads where despite the tarmac, the underlying cobbles are still evidenced (Fig. 5). This incidentally is a good way of adapting,

acknowledging and preserving cobbles without stripping them out entirely, although in many places (cf. Hartland above), modern surfaces have probably been laid directly on the cobbles as they would provide a firm footing.

Further examples:

Stepcote Hill Exeter (near the Tudor House that moved/Matthew the Miller clock etc). Also Cathedral Close area.

Totnes (Guildhall area)

Avonwick ('Cobbley Walk': a preserved ancient cobbled trackway which runs alongside the River Avon. Probably originally a drovers' track).

Budleigh Salterton, Aylesbeare and environs.

#### References

1. Allen, J. 2006 'The Excavation of the Brewhouse at Buckland Abbey in 2005'. (PDAS 64).
2. Belsey V. 2008 'Exploring Green Lanes and the Stories they tell; North & North-West Devon (Green Books Ltd.)
4. Tilley, C. 2017 'Landscape in the Longue Duree; a History and Theory of Pebbles in a Pebbled Heathland Landscape (UCL Press), available online at <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/>
3. Walls, S. and Morris, B. 2013 'The Three Crowns Hotel: evidence of a Medieval Burgage Tenement and early 18<sup>th</sup>-century Inn Clearance in High Street, Chagford'. (PDAS 71).

#### Online

Rural settlements in Roman Devon, talk for Thorverton History Society: Crediton Country Courier ([creditoncourier.co.uk](http://creditoncourier.co.uk)) (re: Topsham Rugby Club)

## Walking on an Ancient Riverbed - a Visit to Aylesbeare Common

Ruth Downie

Many NDAS members will remember the "Zoom" event during lockdown when Cressida Whitton of the Devon County Historic Environment Team told us about the curious archaeology of Aylesbeare Common. Three of us from NDAS recently enjoyed a day seeing some of that archaeology for ourselves and doing some practical conservation work in the company of Cressida and volunteers from other groups.



The Common lies very roughly halfway between Exeter and Sidmouth. It's described as "lowland heath" but commands fine views of the surrounding area, including the distant ridges either side of the Sidmouth Gap (in the distance, centre of photo). This, together with its unusual geology – it's made up of pebbles tumbled smooth by an ancient river – combine to give it some unique, if enigmatic, archaeology.



*Water-worn pebbles*

Cressida explained that the heathland is not natural – left to itself, it would revert to woodland. It may have been created in the Bronze Age, when the gorse and bracken would probably have been harvested. Gorse burns well in ovens (and indeed in braziers, as we discovered) and bracken would have been used as bedding, etc. With its pebble base, the land is not very fertile. The heathland has never been ploughed, and has instead been kept open by regular grazing and burning.

The reason for the likely Bronze Age dating of the heathland is that there are Bronze Age barrows on high points which, when the vegetation is kept down, form an impressive sight from the ridges above the Sidmouth Gap. By contrast, when the vegetation is allowed to grow, it is frankly difficult to see these low mounds even when standing a few feet away – as the “before” photo illustrates.



*Before conservation work*



*After conservation work*

Our first conservation task was to help clear the gorse from this almost-invisible bowl barrow so that the mound and surrounding ditch could clearly be seen. Hopefully this would also open the area up to be grazed by the ponies who now help with the conservation of the heath.

It's been estimated that these barrows must contain at least a million pebbles each, but as this one has never been excavated, whatever else the proud volunteers might have been standing on in this “after” photo is unknown\*.



On the way to the second task we visited another nearby bowl barrow that was less overgrown. A four-legged digger had been in action here but sadly nothing of interest was spotted in the spoil heap outside its burrow.



The second task was to cover up, rather than reveal, more archaeology.

Beneath the weed-strewn patch of sand in the photo lies one of the enigmatic Pebble Platforms – shapes constructed entirely of pebbles carefully laid out on the ground in layers only one or two deep. There are, or have been, numerous examples of these across the heath. The shapes (some resemble ancient axe-heads) and tentative radio-carbon dating both suggest a Bronze Age date. However - it's also possible that they could have been created more recently by soldiers using the heath for military training. It's hoped that funding can be found for OSL (optically stimulated luminescence) dating, which should answer the question.

The difficulties caused by the platforms' fragile nature are compounded by the challenge of locating them. Several recorded in the 1930s can no longer be found under the heathland vegetation, while others have since come to light.

As our task was to deepen the sand cover protecting the platform, we never saw it! However there are some good photos and very much more detail about the archaeology of the heath in Professor Chris Tilley's book, "Landscape in the Longue Durée" which can be downloaded free of charge from <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10022736/9/Landscape-in-the-Longue-Dur%C3%A9e.pdf>



*Pebble platform before*



*Pebble platform after*

I'm not sure any of us could navigate our way back to the archaeology but for anyone wanting to try, the RSPB website provides good directions to the site entrance we used.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/aylesbeare-common/>

Ruth Downie

*\*with thanks to Cressida Whitton for the 'after conservation' photo*

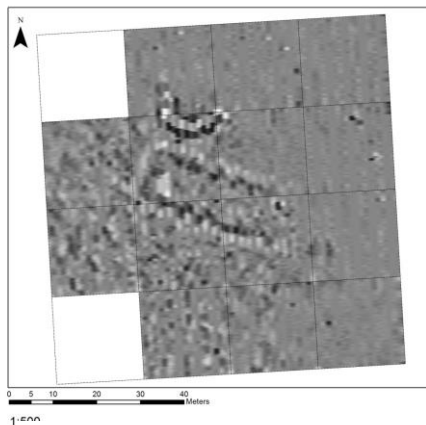
## **NDAS Parracombe update**

Linda Blanchard

Parracombe has been a place of interest and research for NDAS for over 20 years. In the early 2000s NDAS took the lead in the Parracombe Project which grew in scope over the years. Members surveyed hedgerows, buildings, test-pitted and made excavations. In 2014 NDAS members joined Exmoor National Park and Parracombe History and Archaeological Society (PHAS) in the Longstone Landscapes Project which explored features on Challacombe Common and along the boundary between the two villages. The findings of these projects are described in detail at <http://ndas.org.uk/> and there is a link to the Longstone Landscapes report at <https://parracombe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Longstone-Landscapes-Project-report.pdf>.

There has been some work in the village in recent years and it is timely to bring members up to date and to provide an overview of the wealth of visible remains in the area.

Parracombe is a hill farming village and has been mainly pastoral with little ploughing, meaning that many remains of human activity which may have been lost elsewhere are still clearly visible in the landscape. High up on Challacombe Common is a low rectangular raised area (roughly 30m by 15m), with indications of ditches and banks surrounding it. Geophysical survey and physical survey have led to the speculation that it could be Neolithic and perhaps related to mortuary practices. It is the westernmost monument of its kind and the only one known on Exmoor. Nearby is the Longstone itself, the largest standing stone on Exmoor, which otherwise is noted for its diminutive stone monuments. A short distance away a quincunx - a kite shaped arrangement of stones around a fifth central stone - here the stone size is more typical of Exmoor's monuments, so much so that on several visits I have failed to locate it. These are of possible Bronze Age date.



*Left: Geophysical plot of the possible Neolithic mortuary enclosure (Thanks to Doug Mitchum)*



*Right: Longston Landscape participants being addressed by Rob Wilson-North while standing on the bank of the enclosure*

By far the most common monuments on Challacombe Common and straddling the Parish boundary with Parracombe are a series of Bronze Age barrows which formed a focus for the Longstone Landscapes Project. Most of the group known as Chapman Barrows were surveyed by volunteers and one we affectionately christened "Chanter's Barrow" in homage to the Reverend Chanter who partially excavated it in 1905. This barrow was subject to exhaustive geophysical survey which confirmed Chanter's results (thus lending credence to his excavations elsewhere on Exmoor) and hinted at two phases of construction.



*Voley Castle, a probably Iron Age hillside enclosure.*

Moving downhill from the high moorland there are surviving earthworks of a settlement on South Common and several hillside enclosures (Voley Castle, Beacon Castle and Holworthy) around the Heddon Valley which could be of Iron Age or earlier date. Notably, Holworthy was partially excavated under the auspices of NDAS between 2002 and 2005 and post-holes suggesting a round house, a linear hearth, a possible wooden platter, a saddle quern and Bronze Age pottery fragments together with radio-carbon dating pushed back the date of this site to the Middle Bronze Age, and possibly that of similar sites nearby.



In common with much of North Devon not a single find of Roman date has been recorded in Parracombe but it is likely that Roman soldiers marched through the area as there is a Signal Station in the adjacent coastal parish of Martinhoe. This was excavated in the 1960s and remains of three buildings and a beacon fire site were revealed.

We know nothing of Post-Roman Parracombe but the mention in the Domesday Book shows that fields had been cleared and farming was taking place. Perhaps some of our local farms may have origins in this period. Work by NDAS has identified distinct differences in style and mass of existing field boundaries closest to some of the older farms but no dating evidence is available.



*St Petrock's Church, saved by the Rev. Leakey and John Ruskin from Victorian improvers.*

It could be that there was an early church pre-dating our old church, St Petrock's, but the oldest extant remains on the site date from Norman times with, clearly, alterations and rebuilding over the centuries. A new publication, edited by Karen Farrington - who also contributes two chapters - about the history of St Petrock's Church has just been released. This pulls together talks about the church with additional material by local researchers. The publication starts with a short history of the church and some of the mythology surrounding St Petrock himself. Of especial interest to NDAS members will be the contribution taken from lecture notes by

Stuart Blaylock. Stuart has re-appraised the phasing of the church and is particularly illuminating about the woodwork. He describes the rare survival of the 16/17<sup>th</sup>C pews, pulpits and some of the memorials.

Meriel O'Dowd describes the Rev Leakey's successful campaign to build a new church in the village (Christchurch) which protected St Petrock's interior from Victorian "improvements". He involved artist John Ruskin who in turn recruited famous artists of the day in raising the £2000 needed. Bob Godfrey (NDAS member) has studied the diary of William Watts, headmaster, stone-mason and Jack-of-all-trades in Parracombe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and provides a chapter on his works relating to the gravestones. Church Cottage residents Harry and Jo Harrison have compiled information about the



*Details of the St Petrocks stonework: Left to right, daisy-wheel graffito, quadrifoliate emblem on base of cross, fragment of medieval frieze re-used in the exterior east wall.*

former Church House from Stuart Blaylock and their architect as well as researching its history. The book concludes with a section on the gravestone inscriptions with additional information from documentary evidence. All in all, a good read for just £7.99 available in Parracombe or contact me. All the proceeds from the first edition will go to the owners of St Petrock's (The Churches Conservation Trust) to help towards its upkeep.

Local research continues at St Petrock's and PHAS are trying to locate all the original stones transcribed in the early twentieth century and add subsequent burials to the index. As a personal project I am undertaking a photographic survey which might help as a base-line for future Monuments at Risk Surveys. As part of this I have been rewarded by finding two carved stones re-used in the exterior east wall of the church which were probably once part of a medieval frieze and of course I enjoyed examining the beautiful medieval cross base in the tower. Once this survey is completed the next step will be to undertake a rigorous survey of graffiti.



*The remarkably well preserved motte and bailey Holwell Castle as seen from Christchurch.*

The other major medieval monument in the area is Holwell Castle, a motte and bailey castle, which, despite never having had a stone phase has remarkably well preserved earthworks. These include possible towers at the junctions of the bailey bank with the motte and outlines of two probable buildings within the bailey. The castle is on private land and is best viewed from the south side of Christchurch where you will find an information board and a reconstruction drawing of the castle. In certain light conditions you will see ridge and furrow in the landscape surrounding the castle and around the village. These features have been plotted on the Exmoor Historic Environment Register map layers.

The publication *Parracombe, an Unfinished History* describes the later medieval to modern history of the village.

The other piece of recent research, more accurately Lockdown entertainment, is "Parracombe in 100 Objects". Local residents were invited to post photographs of objects which they felt illustrated the history of the village on our community Facebook page. These are now on our website but we are only about half way to the goal of 100 objects, so work continues. As you would expect there were a few collections of objects found whilst gardening, clay pipe stems, a mole trap, post-medieval and Victorian pottery sherds and one or two medieval sherds. Other objects included an old ram pump, a snail inkwell, a section of the original Lynton to Barnstaple railway track and a piece of a crashed World War II aeroplane. Some of these objects, which can be seen on public property, are plotted on a figure of eight walk around the village. <https://parracombe.org.uk/category/history/100-objects/>.

For those who wish to enjoy viewing these monuments the best place to park is in the main village on Parracombe Hill, the main road (and bus route) through the village. This is the start and finish point for the self-guided walk. You will also find our new community shop and café where you can enjoy a snack and buy our two publications – the recently reprinted *Parracombe, an Unfinished History* (£7.99) and *St. Petrock's Church Parracombe* (£11.99).

(If you need help obtaining one of the publications please email me [blanchard.linda@live.co.uk](mailto:blanchard.linda@live.co.uk))

## NDAS Visit to Postbridge on Dartmoor May 10 2022

Helen Milton

A few intrepid explorers ventured down to Dartmoor to look at the Bronze Age artefacts, of which there are many in this area, and look at the relics displayed in the Visitor Centre too. Dartmoor has the highest percentage of Bronze Age structures in the country.

We began with the Visitor Centre which has some fascinating displays and video reconstruction of what life may have been like during the Bronze Age. There were some wonderful items of jewellery and utensils made from various materials.



*Stone row near Postbridge*

Sometimes one can only hazard a guess at what certain items were, or indeed what they may have been used for!

We then crossed the road to follow the History Hunters' Trail.

This was aimed at children but we found the signs marking the route quite helpful in navigating our own walk around the area!

Our first stop was at an enclosure or hut circle where the boundary could be seen fairly easily. Field boundaries were often marked by a "reave" or low bank. Not far from this was a "cairn". This was a "ring cairn" which is a ring of stones marking a burial site. There are 210 of these on Dartmoor. People were buried in "cists" which was a stone chest and these were probably then covered by a mound or cairn. A

"round cairn" was just a simple ring of stones with no mound but also marked a burial site.

We came across a couple of "stone rows" as we walked further in to the moor. There was a spectacular one beside a burial stone, where weapons had been found, and one has to wonder how they moved such enormous stones! There are 75 stone rows on Dartmoor.

After a picnic lunch where we enjoyed a beautiful view, we walked a short distance down to the Clapper Bridge. This was probably first recorded in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and was built to enable pack horses to cross the river. The name "clapper" comes from the medieval Latin "claperius" which simply means "a pile of stones". There is also an Anglo-Saxon word "cleac" which means "stepping stone". It really is a very picturesque scene and very tranquil too. Many photos were taken here!



*The Postbridge clapper bridge*

After a short drive from Postbridge, the next stop was a stone monument known as Spinsters' Rock and this is one of the top 10 sites on Dartmoor as well as being one of the most ancient "portal dolmens". Dolmens are usually thought to be chambered tombs. This one dates from early Neolithic times 4,000 to 5,000 BC. It was big enough for us to walk inside it.





*The Spinsters' Rock portal dolmen*

A sign at the site says that “ the chambers probably contained many burials and would originally have been covered by a long earthen mound. The stones fell down in 1862 and were re-erected in the same year. Traditionally the monument was erected by three spinsters one morning before breakfast. “ They must have been incredibly strong!

A very interesting day was had by all and special thanks must go to Chris for sharing his knowledge with us and making everything so interesting.

(Photos Chris Preece)

## **Braunton Burrows World War II remains. Field Trip 14<sup>th</sup> July 2022.**

Chris Preece

Armed with packed lunches (although some favoured chocolate), ten of us assembled at Crow Point Car Park at 10a.m. to meet up with Dave Edgecombe of N. Devon AONB who had kindly agreed to take us on a tour of some of the main WW2 sites in the Burrows. We were down on numbers due to the inevitable Covid absentees. The weather though was kind to us and not as hot as initially forecast. Dave, with his usual meticulous preparation, briefed us initially using a US wartime map detailing 50+



*Fig.1: Approaching a dummy landing craft in the 'ramp down' configuration.*

sites, a sample of which we were going to see. He explained that the US military were allocated the area between Crow Point on the Taw/Torridge estuary and Mortehoe. This reflected the difference between the beaches the British and American troops would assault on D Day. The US were assigned beaches which were less tank friendly and which would rely on infantry to take the defences. Thus amongst the infantry units, were teams of rocket launchers, mortar firers and flame throwers whose main function was to keep the Germans battened down, to facilitate the

US infantry assault. Braunton Burrows was an ideal location for practice in these techniques. According to information

boards, some 14,000 young US soldiers were based here for training between September 1943 and March 1944.

First up were the 'dummy' landing craft (LCs). These structures are unique to North Devon and their importance has been recognised with recent protective listing by Historic England. They were used to practise embarkation and disembarkation. The 'ramp down' (which is visible in Figure 1), was for perfecting vehicle ingress/exit. The You Tube video (link below) shows units within the landing craft in action (wire cutters, demolition teams, machine gunners etc.). Inscribed into the concrete (before it set) on one LC example is the following: '146 ENG COC PLATOON', suggesting the US engineering unit who built it.



Fig.2: *At the rocket wall*



Fig.3: *Remains of dummy pillbox*

Next, we moved on to the Rocket Wall (Fig. 2). Bazooka shell remnants in the past suggested the ordnance used here and comparison of the front wall damage (and several repairs) with the unblemished rear wall, as well as a large open area to the front, confirmed where firing had taken place. This has also recently been Grade II listed by HE due to its intactness and uniqueness. A longer walk deep into the burrows took us to the remains of a pillbox. Many of these were lightly built, as the idea of practice was to lay down covering fire in approaching them rather than in destroying them outright. Many of the structures in the burrows were later blown up by British engineers and the demolition fragments are evident today. We then found another ruined pillbox which was new even to Dave, so we duly photographed it for his record. New structures in the burrows are still being found. The Friends of the Assault Training Centre have recently found two which were previously unknown.



Fig.4: *Enigmatic remains beside the estuary*

By now we were more than aware of the fact that Braunton Burrows is one of the largest sand dune systems in the UK and were ready for a lunch break. After refuelling, we headed back on much the same route we had come (it is easy to get lost within the dunes) and arrived back at the estuary where we noted the remains of more concrete structures whose purpose is less clear (Fig. 4). Wartime photos show them set back into the banks of the estuary.

By the time we returned to the car park the weather had warmed up and as we had walked 12k (according to Nigel's I Phone app), our thoughts turned to home and refreshing cups of tea. Many thanks to Dave and the AONB for an excellent and informative day out. Apart from the historic importance of the site, it is always a treat to be out in this UNESCO recognised biosphere reserve.

#### **Links (courtesy of Dave Edgecombe)**

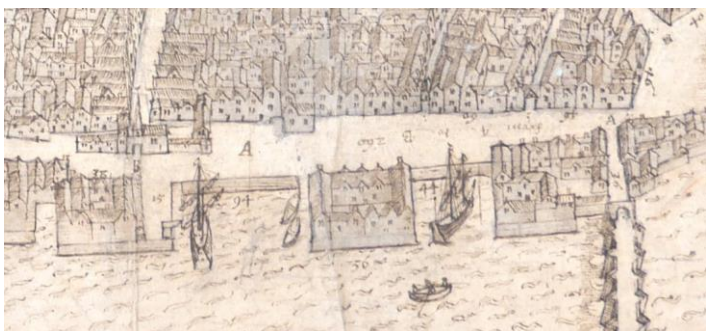
[https://archive.org/details/BeachObstacles \(Westward Ho! And Braunton\)](https://archive.org/details/BeachObstacles%20(Westward%20Ho!%20And%20Braunton))  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwqSNTVfyR0> (lasts about 25 minutes)  
<https://youtu.be/C3kFzFQCh8E> (shorter version)



## The Newcourt Map

Terry Green

At the time of writing a new temporary exhibition is due to open at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon. Recently concluded is an exhibition highlighting the life and works of the Partridge Family of North Devon; Ethel and Fred Partridge were prominent practitioners in the Arts and Crafts Movement around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The new exhibition, opening on 12<sup>th</sup> November, is centred upon a recently discovered map of Barnstaple dating from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The map was produced by the cartographer Richard Newcourt who was born at Tiverton – date unknown – and died in 1679. He produced a detailed map of London before the Great Fire of 1666 and drew up proposals for the rebuilding of the city on a grid pattern, but which were never implemented. We are quite privileged therefore, that he applied his skills to Barnstaple, though very likely there were other places similarly favoured.



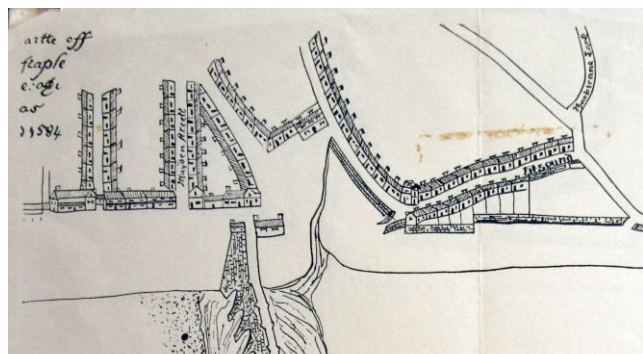
*Section of the Newcourt map showing the Strand, St Nicholas' Chapel and the Great and Little Quays.*

The Barnstaple map lay unregarded in a folder in the Bodleian Library in Oxford until Dr Todd Gray, indefatigable Devon historian, happened upon it and adopted it as his latest historical research project. The result is to be the aforesaid new exhibition in which the map will be the centrepiece attended by artefacts,

paintings and information placing it in the context of the 17<sup>th</sup> century which was the high point of Barnstaple's

and Bideford's commercial prosperity. The exhibition is accompanied by a book containing a compilation of essays by a range of historians filling out the story of Barnstaple's evolution.

Early maps are normally few and far between. The earliest that we have of Barnstaple dates from 1584, but only exists as a partial copy showing the Long Bridge, the eastern end of the Strand and Litchdon Street. There are historical references to a more complete map, but repeated searches have failed to find it. There are two 18<sup>th</sup> century maps belonging to the Bridge Trust and the



*Section of the 1584 (partial) map showing the east end of the Strand, the north end of the bridge and Litchdon Street. (North Devon Athenaeum)*

Penrose Charities respectively, then we come to the 1820s with a town plan by Joseph Gribble. All of these illustrate the very well preserved ancient street plan of the town, but are sparing with detail. In the 1840s the town was treated to an exact survey the result of which is the Wood map of 1843. The map is full of detailed information on properties and their occupants, and compensates for the more or less empty tithe map of the same period which recorded solely those properties subject to tithe. Then in the 1880s and 1890s the Ordnance Survey produced the first modern maps, including a 1:500 scale mapping of the town, which again is rich in detail, but not easy to access. In this context the Newcourt map is a remarkable find and well worth study. I recommend a visit to the exhibition which runs until 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023.



*In light of the interest aroused by the newly discovered 17<sup>th</sup> century map, it is appropriate to conclude this newsletter with the following contribution by John Bradbeer.*

## **The North Atlantic in the Trade of Barnstaple and Bideford**

It is very hard nowadays to imagine either Barnstaple or Bideford as ports with a flourishing trade with North America. I have previously written about the Newfoundland fishery, the staple activity of the two ports from c1620 to c 1750. However, there were other trades across the Atlantic, both in the seventeenth, and the eighteenth centuries, at the same time as the Newfoundland fishery, and again in the nineteenth century when trans-Atlantic links were re-established in the years following 1815 after the major hiatus of the American Revolutionary War and the Napoleonic War.

It must be admitted that this association with North America was tainted by slavery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. True, North Devon was not engaged in the slave trade itself, but it was deeply involved with the supply of goods to slave owners, and the transport of tobacco and sugar produced by slave labour. The association commences both unsuccessfully and unhappily in the 1580s. Sir Richard Grenville and his cousins, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh, were keen that England should emulate Spain and have colonies on the other side of the Atlantic. In 1585 Raleigh sent colonists to Roanoak, in what is now North Carolina, but these first colonists chose to return to England with Sir Francis Drake when he called there in 1586. Sir Richard Grenville arrived a few days after the colonists had departed, bringing supplies and leaving a small garrison to guard the settlement. He also brought back a native American, who was to be christened Raleigh in Bideford. The unfortunate Raleigh died in the winter of 1589, almost certainly of influenza. Raleigh sent another expedition in 1587 with more colonists. The intended relief and re-supply expedition of 1588 never sailed because of the Armada and it was not until 1590 that an English fleet returned, only to find all the colonists had vanished and no traces were ever found of them. American historians have been fascinated by the story of the Lost Colony but many English histories start with the foundation of the Jamestown colony in Virginia in 1607. Recent palaeo-environmental work in the area around the Roanoak colony has established that the years 1587-1589 were the driest years in a 600-year climatic sequence established by examining tree ring cores, so the colony probably suffered both crop failure and difficulty in securing fresh water.

Virginia was promoted by the Virginia Company and the Barnstaple merchant, John Delbridge, became a member around 1610, and thus able to send settlers and to trade with the colony. He is known to have sent a party of colonists in the *Swan* in 1620. Delbridge ceased to be active in the Virginia trade later that decade and it is significant that the cargo carried from Virginia by the ships *Content*, *Eagle*, and *Mercury* in 1627 included beaver and otter skins, as well as some tobacco. It was not until the middle of the seventeenth century that tobacco became almost the only export from Virginia and Maryland. Tobacco, grown by slaves, allowed the planters to enjoy a relatively leisured and luxurious lifestyle and they became dependent on the supply of these as well as more mundane necessities from England. In 1680, the *Thomas and Nicholas* sailed from Bideford to Maryland with a cargo that included: axes, brandy, bricks, cordage, canvas, earthenware, haberdashery, hoes, linen, malt, nails, shoes, stockings, sugar, Spanish wine, window glass, Irish frieze, Barnstaple bays and German woollen cloth. In the absence of a reliable system of bills of exchange, these goods were paid for in tobacco. Earthenware from North Devon has become a reliable dating diagnostic for early colonial archaeology in North America and there must be many hundreds of tons of North Devon pottery along the American eastern seaboard. John Watkins in his *Essay towards a History of Bideford*, published in 1792 proudly boasts of Bideford's tobacco imports and how in the period to about 1750, they were only surpassed by those of London. Almost all of tobacco landed in North Devon was forwarded to Bristol, Ireland, and Amsterdam. This was to be one reason for the collapse

of the tobacco import trade, for government duties became ever more exacting during the century and North Devon's merchants simply lacked the capital to be able to carry the burden of duty paid on discharge many weeks before recouping this from sales elsewhere. This was much less of a problem for the better capitalised merchants of Bristol, London, and Liverpool, to which could increasingly be added, Glasgow. One effect of the Act of Union of 1707 was to allow Scottish ports to trade with English colonies and the tobacco trade seems to have been a primary target. Although in the early days of the tobacco trade North Devon ships, being smaller, were able to go further up the creeks and estuaries of Chesapeake Bay than the larger ships of Bristol and London, the steady increase in the value of tobacco meant that initial shipment by barge to deeper water ports for transshipment became economic and the major players were able gradually to drive North Devon shipping from this valuable trade. Also, of the 47 locally owned ships whose tonnages were recorded in the 1672 Port Book, only three were over 100 tons and the *Virginia Merchant*, engaged in the trans-Atlantic trade, was only 55 tons



*An early eighteenth -century advert for tobacco (original in the State Archive of Virginia)*

Sugar replaced tobacco as the plantation crop grown in the West Indies, but North Devon was only really a small part player in the sugar trade, and references to imported sugar in the North Devon Port Book become sparse after the Restoration in 1660. It seems shocking now, but seventeenth and eighteenth-century economics were such that a cargo of slaves was worth considerably more than one of sugar and no doubt slave ship owners and traders would endeavour to fill their ships with sugar in the West Indies for the return voyage and deny opportunities to North Devon ships to do the same.

North Devon did trade on a small scale with New England, supplying the colonies with necessities and a few luxuries but New England lacked the valuable return cargoes of Maryland and Virginia. Also, as the New England colonies grew, they developed their own shipping and became active in trade between Newfoundland and the West Indies as well as coming to Britain for cargoes to take home.

John Bradbeer has strong Irish connections and offers the following for your interest

### ***The Irish Mesolithic***

*The Irish Mesolithic is fascinating, as the hunter-gatherers in Ireland had a reduced suite of animals to hunt and plants to forage than their contemporaries in Britain. A very useful guide to the Irish Mesolithic has just been published by the Irish Heritage Council and a copy can be downloaded from: [www.heritagecouncil.ie/publications](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/publications) It is at the top of the list on that web-page.*

**TG.**