



Promoting awareness of the archaeology
and history of North Devon

Newsletter, Autumn 2023

Chairman's Notes

In contrast to last year (when we were excavation free), this year we have been spoiled for choice. In March we put two trenches in to investigate some promising geophysics in the field north-east of the scheduled monument of Clovelly Dykes. The weather was uncharitable and tested even the most seasoned digger. Results too were less exciting than before but still produced a lot of post medieval material as well as some flints for post-ex processing.

In May, the weather was the polar opposite and we were all sun-hatted and seeking the shade of a tree in breaks for the Gallantry Bower dig. This was run in conjunction with our friends from the North Devon Coast AONB who wanted to investigate the promising geophysics they'd commissioned. We found the ditch of the squarish enclosure but no man-made finds, so we await the Carbon 14 results with anticipation.

Again, in late July, several NDAS members took part in our partners' annual dig at Moistown (run by ACE Archaeology) and as usual enjoyed the relaxed and friendly 'vibe' there.

Finally, several of us took advantage of the invitation to 'Dig the Castle' in Torrington in September/October, organised by Emily Wapshott of South West Archaeology. This was an exemplary community excavation: well advertised, well equipped and well organised with lots of school children visiting and being involved in activities. Local involvement was key and most of the volunteers were from Torrington or surrounds. Let's hope the powers that be commission a sequel!

We had three field trips this year, all organised by members. The first was a tour of Weare Gifford courtesy of Keith Hughes in June, the second a walk through the Hartland landscape thanks to Steve Hobbs and lastly a visit to Holwell Castle, Parracombe thanks to Linda Blanchard. If you would like to organise a trip in 2024, do let me know. There will be plenty of help with the logistics.

The talks season got off to a disappointing start with a last minute cancellation but the remaining talks should provide some diverse and stimulating topics for winter consumption. We hope to see many of you there. All will be 'live' but hopefully with a zoom feed as well (technology allowing).

To finish on a sad note. This year we lost Steve Pitcher. It is not an exaggeration to say he was the prime mover behind the Clovelly Dykes project, liaising with the farmer and the AONB, with whom he put us in touch to commence things. I remember walking the ramparts with him and his undoubted enthusiasm for the site and his drive to help us understand it better. His modest, understated but knowledgeable demeanour will be much missed on the committee.

Gallantry Bower

Chris Preece

In 2021, North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Beauty (henceforth NDCAONB) commissioned Substrata to carry out a geophysical survey of the scheduled monument and surrounds at Gallantry Bower as part of the Monument Management Scheme (henceforth MMS) in conjunction with Historic England and Devon County Council. The monument (MDV72), which is interpreted as a bowl barrow (a form of round

barrow), and two other areas of adjoining potential archaeology were surveyed by magnetometer (see Fig. 1). One of these (MDV102340) suggested a squarish feature, possibly a somewhat unusual enclosure of uncertain date. These are relatively rare in North Devon and this one could be significant; if of prehistoric date it would probably require scheduling.

North Devon Archaeology Society (NDAS) were then approached by NDCAONB to see if it



Fig.2: Digging the trench in the heat of May.



Fig.1: Location of monument MDV102340 to the northwest of Clovelly in OS grid square SS30-26-.

was feasible to date the structure and whether it was possible to establish possible contemporaneity with the bowl barrow (Area A).

Given the potential importance of the site, it was proposed by NDAS that the investigation be minimal to preserve as much of the monument as possible. In line with this, just one trial trench was mooted, to be sited across the possible ditch.

On the 15th May, Mark Edwards of Substrata kindly delineated a 5m X 1m trench using GPS. As part of the MMS project, initial scrub clearance of both

barrow and enclosure was carried out on the 17th May, 2023 by the NDCAONB. On the 18th, MMS volunteers helped with further clearance and had some limited instruction and involvement in excavation techniques, once turves had been removed.



Fig.3: Ditch section showing the primary stony fill.

some way off the coast path. The drive to the site from the church tested Nigel's 4x4 skills, as much of it was along the narrow, rutted coast path. Thor manfully volunteered to walk the half hour or so to site each day from the church (so as not to exhaust the ageing director who insisted on accompanying the mobile site hut).

Once we had removed the tough coastal scrub, the upper fill of the ditch was made up of a mid-brown friable sandy clay, very stony, with a lot of root disturbance. Beneath this was a darker brown sandy clay, containing decayed roots and some stones. This was the primary fill of the ditch (Fig. 3). At the south side of the trench near the base of this fill were a number of stones, possibly redeposited from the spoil originally at the top of the ditch. In order to maximise retrieval of finds it was decided that the primary layers of the ditch would be sieved. Spoil was then carefully examined and in addition it was metal detected.

At the east end of the trench was a thin layer of redeposited natural, presumably the result of weathering of the sides of the ditch and/or from excavated natural. Within this was a very small lens of grey/beige silting. The natural was the typical sandstone of the area, ranging from beige to orange in colour. No ceramics or lithics were found in any contexts but two possible slingstones (Fig. 4) along with possibly curated stone oddities were found. These were examined by Henrietta Quinnell and Roger Taylor who determined that, geologically, they were typically from the Crackington

From the 19th onwards, three NDAS members (Nigel Dymond, Thor Beverley and myself) then completed the excavation and restored the site by the 23rd May. The weather was hot and sunny and we were glad of shelter from a nearby tree for drinks and lunch break (Fig. 2). Due to the fact that the site was not accessible by road, we had to park at Clovelly church and load up Nigel's 4x4 with all the equipment, some of which we

could then leave discretely hidden on site as the trench was



Fig.4: Possible slingstones

formation with varying amounts of iron carbonate and that this material would have been collected from local beaches. Children's keepsakes, playthings or ritual objects? Who knows?

No evidence of a bank was found to the east of the ditch but the stones in the base of the primary fill suggest possible degradation of spoil, or a low bank. The possibility of a palisade (revetted?) should not be excluded, given the very limited excavation.

As no datable finds were made bulk samples for dating were taken from the primary layers of the ditch, in order to date the feature along with two good samples of charcoal from the primary fill. These have been deposited with South West Archaeology for processing and sending to labs for analysis. This takes a while but hopefully by the time of the next newsletter we will have more information regarding the date of this intriguing structure. A full report will then be given to NDCAONB and will be uploaded to the NDAS website for those interested. We are grateful to NDCAONB, particularly Dave Edgecombe, for involving us in this project and to John Rous of Clovelly Estates for his interest and permission to excavate. As well as Nigel and Thor, thanks also go to Sarah Mcrae of NDAS who dug on the 18th.

A 500 year old Royal Murder Mystery or a Cold Case at Coldridge?

Sarah McRae

It is, to say the least, unusual for the research and fieldwork of a local archaeological society to have national implications. You may remember from your history lessons at school the story and mystery of 'the princes in the tower'. NDAS member Sarah joined ACE in their investigations and reports below.

There's a mystery afoot at St Matthew's church, Coldridge.!



St Matthew's Church, Coldridge

Situated next to the tiny village square and surrounded by picturesque thatched cottages, well tended gardens and the rolling scenery of mid Devon, there's more to this little church in this remote location than meets the eye. And of late, it's attracted a growing number of curious visitors, from the UK and overseas.

This beautiful mostly 15th century church certainly holds some stunning treasures as it has largely escaped modern

restoration and retained many late medieval features – boasting one of the longest and finest rood screens in Devon, an ornate pulpit, a Norman font, a rare Flemish-made parclose screen, pre-Reformation carved bench ends and roof bosses plus a fine array of early modern floor tiles. Oh, and a most unusual remnant of early 16th century stained glass window – which is where our medieval murder mystery begins (or ends?)

In the window of the chapel is a stained glass portrait of the King Edward V – son of Edward IV and one of the “Princes In The Tower”, allegedly murdered by their uncle, Richard III in around 1483. There are only 2 other known windows dedicated to this young King who was never crowned, so why should one be in a Devon backwater? Is there some connection between Coldridge and Edward V? The puzzle deepens, for the original



The chapel window showing the image of Edward V and the “head” portrait below. This is all that remains of the window following the Reformation and later destruction.

window (there is only the image of Edward remaining, part of a crown, plus a strange head of another figure) was given or paid for by a gentleman called John Evans, who arrived in this rural village sometime in the 1484 as a young man. Already given the title Lord of the Manor and Deer Parker (ie a keeper/warden of the nearby deer park) John lived in Coldridge until his death at around the time his chantry chapel was completed. His tomb/monument (slightly broken) remains in the chapel he created in around 1511, his carved stone figure looking up to the window he had installed, although this tomb contains no remains but is empty. But why should a complete stranger to the village be given such important titles and responsibilities? Just who was John Evans?



A fine example of 16th/17th C floor tiles, two of which appear to show the white rose emblem of the House of York

This two pronged puzzle has now attracted a new theory about the fate of the “Princes in the Tower” and is being studied as part of “The Missing Princes Project”. (TMPP). Established in 2015 and led by Philippa Langley who helped find Richard III’s body in Leicester almost a decade ago, TMPP is investigating a number of possibilities around Edward V and his younger brother Richard who vanished from public view just months after their father’s death in 1483. Their ultimate fate has never been confirmed and historians have spent centuries trying to prove whether they did indeed die or somehow survived. Although the skeletons of two children of approximately the same age as the two princes (13 and 11) were discovered during the reign of Charles II during renovations to the Tower

of London in 1674 , the bones have not been subject to modern scientific examination (eg DNA analysis, etc) and they remain sealed in an urn in Westminster Abbey and cannot be exhumed without Royal and ecclesiastical permissions being given, which at this point in time is very unlikely.

TMPP conjectures that Edward at least, escaped the Tower and lived out a rural, isolated life in Coldridge under the name of John Evans, and with the collusion of Richard III and possibly later Henry VII. There are tantalising clues in the church, including on John Evans' tomb, on the floor tiles and on the roof bosses and in some tiny fragments of stained glass which appear to depict "motifs" of the House of York.

There is also a family connection to the church, with Edward's half-brother Thomas Grey (son of Edward's mother Elizabeth Woodville's first marriage) owning land in Devon, including Coldridge.

The tomb of John Evans also contains a possible mistake which has led to further investigations. The name is engraved as 'Evas', with the 'n' most definitely missing.

Coldridge PCC member John Dike who has been helping with research for TMPP, argues this could symbolise 'EV', as in Edward V, with the 'as' possibly standing for 'asa', the Latin term for 'in sanctuary'. John continued "To have all these symbolic details in such a remote and inaccessible church, which in 1500 would have only been accessed by cart track, and is right in the centre of rural Devon, suggests the presence of a person of importance. An ideal location for Thomas Grey, with the probable agreement of Richard III or later Henry VII, to place his half brother out of the political arena."



John Evans' (empty) tomb in his chapel

And so we leap forward 500 years and to our ACE investigation, brought about with the help of ACE member and resident of Coldridge, Emma Inglis who told us the tale of the Coldridge mystery, whilst helping on the Moistown dig. This led to an ACE visit to St Matthews in May 2023 with a guided tour and talk plus (by all accounts) a rather delicious tea afterwards! Could ACE help the TMPP and local researchers in their endeavours by undertaking a small dig outside the church? Might we be able to solve the Coldridge Cold Case?

Our aim then, was to open some test pits around the church and to see if we could locate any items dating to the period when John Evans was living in Coldridge and which might help fill out some facts about his life. In particular we were looking for shards of stained glass, hopefully from the Edward V window, which might help "fill in" many of the missing pieces and so enhance what is known about the window and whether it could answer any of the questions surrounding John Evans.

So it was that the ACE roadshow rolled up on Friday 8th September, headed by Andy Crabb, (Archaeologist for Dartmoor NP and English Heritage) as our dig director and with a splendid array of equipment and a team of willing and eager volunteers, all of us intrigued by the Coldridge mystery.



Digging in pits 5 and 9

Suffice it to say it was a broiling hot two day dig! Sun hats, shorts and sun cream were the order of the day for those working outside. Inside the cool of the church, the finds team set up tables and trays and waited for the first items to arrive from the test pits. Throughout the sweaty Friday and Saturday of digging, the thermometer hanging in the shade, hovered in the top 20's and we all welcomed the use of the shady gazebos which were erected over the pits to help keep our cool as we trowelled down and down.

In total, 9 test pits of 1m x 1m were dug over the two days, around the north and east walls of the church and quite close to the building. After taking off the grass layer, we trowelled down in 10cm spits, with finds collected from each layer transferred to the finds group. Each bucketload of earth removed was then sieved to ensure we hadn't missed any small find. Once indoors, objects and items were identified (if possible) and individually placed in bags with a dig label to identify the pit number and spit level.

Typically found throughout were a good collection of post medieval pottery sherds including the ubiquitous green glazed N Devon ware, a nice clay pipe (possibly dropped by some long-ago grave digger on his tea break...!), and an assortment of metalwork, mostly nails plus some thin lead wire used to hold glass in place on stained windows. Interesting items included a Spanish coin (possibly 18th C), portions of black glazed roof tiles, and a number of chunky broken floor tiles with a glaze and raised patterning which looked very similar to the existing ones in the church. In several pits small bones were found, some animal, some human and these were held aside as they will be re buried by the church.



Digging and sieving beneath the gazebos

We unearthed quite a lot of glass window shards, some very small. Most were clear glass but there were a few "darker" almost brown sherds of possibly late medieval glass which will be examined in detail by experts and which (hopefully) may form parts of the original stained glass chapel window and help resolve some of the questions lingering over the figures shown.

By the late afternoon on Saturday, we concluded our work, backfilling the pits and replacing the grass turves on top. Local residents were very intrigued by our work, popping round to see what we were doing, to look at our finds and what they may possibly mean.

All the bagged and labelled finds have now been passed over to Andy Crabb who is co-ordinating their examination by relevant experts, especially the glass finds. We hope to be able to report on the various follow-up statements when they are concluded – and who knows, maybe we might have helped to solve a 500 year old cold case!

Postscript:

There are as you may imagine many, many other theories about the church, its window, the mysterious John Evans and the fate of Edward V and his brother – I uncovered numerous alternative thoughts, hypotheses and interpretations in just a quick 30 minute search of the internet. Many do not support the John Evans/Edward V proposal, nor the presumptions of TMPP, giving proven, known historical reasoning and documentation/records to back up their beliefs – it's as interesting reading these articles as it is trying to dig for the truth!

Acknowledgements: Huge thanks to ACE Archaeology Club and its enthusiastic and dedicated members especially Janet Daynes, Gordon Fisher and Erica Williams for organising this most interesting and intriguing dig; to Andy Crabb for directing us 'neath the gazebos; to Emma Inglis for suggesting the dig and for research information printed in the ACE Newsletter September 2022, Erica for additional research in her article in the June 2023 ACE newsletter. Additional information from www.devonchurchland.co.uk, St Matthews Church website, TMPP website, Historic England website, Also thanks to St Matthew's church for letting us undertake the project and to the many villagers, especially John Dike for their support and interest in our endeavours. **Pictures** care of Coldridge Church website; Derry Bryant, Sarah McRae, www.Devonchurchland.co.uk.

An NDAS Guided Walk at Hartland

Julie Philipps

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in late August 2022 NDAS members gathered in Hartland to be greeted by Stephen Hobbs, Hartland resident and historian and our walk guide for the day. Stephen set the historic scene with a potted history, telling us that since the 12th century, Hartland has been divided by two sets of owners, religious and secular. In the medieval period the religious land holding was based on the Augustinian Monastery while the secular portion was held by the Dinham family of Norman descent. Although these were seen as two separate entities, they were heavily interrelated. The Dinham family were the 'benefactors' of the monastery. They held the manorial rights until 1501, when they became dispersed due to the failure of the male line. The Dissolution saw the majority of the religious land holding pass to the Abbott family. After time and careful marriages, the Abbey Estate expanded and status was restored, giving us the extensive parklands, which are part of Hartland Abbey today, now the property of the Stucleys.



Stephen Hobbs, ready to guide.



Setting out in the August sunshine

Our walk took us through what Stephen describes as a 'landscape of lordship' so many of its features being the work of the historic landholders. Crossing the playing field, Stephen pointed out to us on the other side of the valley the two deer parks created by the Dinhams in the 12th century. Leaving the playing field behind us, we came to the Magnetic Observatory, built in 1957 to accommodate its move from Greenwich, whence it had to move due to disturbances in the magnetic field caused by industrialisation and expansion of the rail network. Who knew it was here? Then passing through woodland, we came to the river and the remains of a mill leat feeding Hartland Mill. In fact the leat was a recurrent feature as we continued on our way, feeding a fulling or tucking mill, machinery in the Abbey workshops, a mill with an undershot wheel and finally the reconstructed

Hartland Mill itself, which had ground grain for the estate. Above the mill were houses on the site of the parish workhouse

operational until the mid-19th century, when the Bideford Union came into being. Prior to the workhouse, it was the site of alms houses, established in 1620.

At Glen Cottage, the footpath that we had been following turned into the carriage drive from Hartland Abbey to Harton Town. Constructed by Paul Orchard in the early 18th century, the carriage drive led us through a meadow into a landscape characterised by decorative features introduced by the estate owners such as decorative stands of trees, ponds planted with flowering plants and a cascade designed to impress users of the carriageway.

Leaving the carriageway by way of a track and crossing a stile, we found the 13th century deer park wall on our right. This was designed with high ground on the outside and lower ground on the inside allowing the game to jump into the park, but not out. The Dinham household accounts show that they hunted extensively, their surviving park now being one of the most complete medieval deer parks in the West Country.



The clock in the Square.

Finally we arrived at Springfield, a small cul-de-sac used for monthly markets, with pens set up along the street. Here we would have had been a bowling green, burgage cottages and cultivation strips which would have radiated off along the streets. Walking west from here

into The Square, we arrived at the centre of what was the ancient borough of Harton established c.1290. Here The Kings Arms and Providence Place are on the site of the medieval Dinham house. The public clock is one of the oldest in the country still in continuous use, having been purchased by the borough in 1622. It still chimes the hour. Our thanks go to Stephen for a most interesting afternoon.

Historic Graffiti Survey at St Petrock Church Parracombe

Linda Blanchard

Way back at the beginning of 2018 I was in contact with Pru Manning of Devon Archaeological Society who is leading a project to encourage the recording of historic graffiti in Devon churches. Rather foolishly I agreed to attempt to record St Petrock. I gathered a few volunteers and after a good part of a day we managed to record about one panel of the pulpit. A bit time consuming, I thought. I then had other commitments for a while, then Covid and then long summer holidays when camping became a priority. Finally, in 2023 and with the help of dedicated volunteers, especially Jill and Mike, we are well on the way to completing. Whilst it would be good to finish the survey this year (2023) the lack of electricity, meaning no light or heat at the church, as well as our ageing joints may defeat us!

Recording

The Devon Project website gives a good introduction to church graffiti and recording so I won't repeat it here, but essentially we are recording every mark, scratch or drawing that appears to have been deliberately made. Sometimes that's not so easy – we have often nearly dismissed some marks as random, then, volunteer Jill (aka Hawkeye) gets out a different torch, all becomes clear and she deciphers words and numbers.



A clear example of the St Petrock graffiti

St Petrock Church (cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust) is important for its ancient pews, the oldest of which date to the 16th century and the most recent to the 18th century (Blaylock 2022). That means around 500 years of use with everyone from joiners, worshippers, musicians, schoolchildren and visitors making their mark on the woodwork. Marks on the stonework are more likely the

work of a stone-mason but we have them too. In other words, there is an awful lot of graffiti at St Petrock and it takes a lot of recording.

As a “dirt” archaeologist it's taken me a while understanding the whole three-D concept of locating each mark and working out a terminology for each pew, trying to be consistent, but without a detailed plan. I feel a little embarrassed at some of the rookie mistakes I've made. Questions such as “Is it on the front of the backrest?” “Is that on the bookrest or on the ledge above the bookrest?” are frequent. Then there are squabbles “It's a drawing of a boat. No it's

just scratches” “Try a different torch.” “Is it carved , cut or scratched?” “No it’s pencil or maybe ink”



On the left, a (relatively) comfortable, happy recorder. On the right, a cold and uncomfortable recorder ready for a hot pasty and a cup of tea!

The method we have evolved is that Jill and Mike survey a pew, one with the camera and the other with a tape measure and scale. I sit in the pew behind with a laptop typing in descriptions and measurements and acting as referee. If the marks look a bit special, then they are recorded individually, the distance from the south end of the feature measured and then photographed individually with a centimetre scale. If they are a bit more mundane scratches and the odd initial then we run the tape measure along the length of the feature and batch record them and then take photos along the tape in sequence. Of course we take all the measurements from the south so that means the tape is often upside down. We also read from left to right but record from south to north which equates to right to left. Are you confused yet? I am.

When I extricate myself from the cramped benches we go home to warm up (often after a pasty at the new Community Café in Parracombe).

Once home, the photos are uploaded to the laptop and before completing the record I check that the next person to come along can actually locate the graffiti we have recorded – and that the photo numbers match the record. Who knew that when I put the camera SD card into the laptop the photo numbers all change by one or two? I have just spent three days rechecking every photo number and amending the record sheets.



Findings

We have taken over 500 photographs to date and many have several different graffiti on them. There is more to record so it will be a big archive. Most of the carvings on the pews are initials but there's lots more. This sample is in the series of box pews which are thought to be the musicians' gallery (centre back of the church) and it's intriguing to speculate that maybe it is a note of the readings for the coming months to aid the music master in his music choices.

May 11 Chap 4 18 Act 4 Corinthians 1
June 15 10 Chap 1
July Chap
July 20-12 Chap 32 Mark
August
Sep 28 -22
Sep indecipherable
Oct 22 Luke
Pecked "TD" ?
Pecked W carved I
"Corinthians
May 11 Chap Acts 9 Verse
Luke 11 9 1" 3 pecked "T" s Pecked "B" scratched
rectangle, Carved "I"

Jill's transcript makes it look simple but the writing is in a faded cursive script some of it slightly indented. It may be pencil or ink or have been overwritten by subsequent generations who have added their own marks to the originals

Many of the marks are scratches, notches or scores which are hard to interpret. There is a possible tally, cut into one bookrest and sometimes people have left their name with a date e.g. "GH Burgess June 24 1908" or "Mary Lock" "Rowley Parracombe" There is also a fine "CG" carved into the stone of the main entrance door jamb which may have been the initials of a benefactor.

Elsewhere we recorded spiritual references. There are several occurrences of circles or partial circles inscribed on the wood work and also on the stonework. These have a spiritual meaning being a symbol of eternity. On one pew end we have interlocking circles which could represent the Holy Trinity. (However one is partial and there is a fourth which looks like a failed attempt!) Notably on the stone column close to the font there is an apotropaic mark (intended to avert evil) which is a compass drawn daisy wheel or hexafoil. There are also several "Marion Marks" which are two overlapping V's denoting reverence for the Virgin of Virgins or if upside down can be read as "M" for the Virgin Mary. In St Petrock these appear mainly on the 18th century pews.

Conclusions

Would I record another church? Only if I knew there wasn't such a lot of graffiti! It is a hard grind working in tight cold spaces. I also live in dread of finding something inappropriate added by my own sons who were marched up to St Petrock for services as schoolboys. It is rewarding though and it will be interesting to see if we can match initials to some of those in

the graveyard. An unexpected bonus was that close examination of the rood screen revealed traces of coloured paint underneath a later covering.



Left, a double V, right, interlocking circles.

The survey has opened my eyes to a forgotten history of churches and indeed abbeys. On recent visits I have found plenty of graffiti carved into the stone work of the ambulatory of both Tewkesbury and Wells Cathedral (where there is also plenty of historic graffiti on the exterior. On a recent visit to Armenia we noticed many beautifully carved “Tree of Life” type crosses randomly carved on the exterior of monasteries by local stone masons who were commissioned by pilgrims to commemorate their pilgrimages. Another church had quite a palimpsest, graffiti by activists imprisoned in the church during the Soviet occupation, overlain by that from their guards and then again overlain by those expressing anger at the occupation following independence. A survey and translations of those could be very revealing.

If you want to have a go, the project website lists all the completed churches in Devon, not very many and not in North Devon. I am sure that Pru Manning and Devon Archaeological Society would be pleased to have more volunteers. <https://devonhistoricgraffiti.org.uk/>

Stop Press: We finished recording yesterday just more collating and checking to do. Surprisingly we all agreed we had actually enjoyed ourselves!

With grateful thanks to Jill Jones and Mike Vardy who have shivered in the church and shared coffee and biscuits.

Reference

Blaylock, S.R. St Petrock's Church Parracombe pp19-20. Parracombe Archaeology and History Society 2022

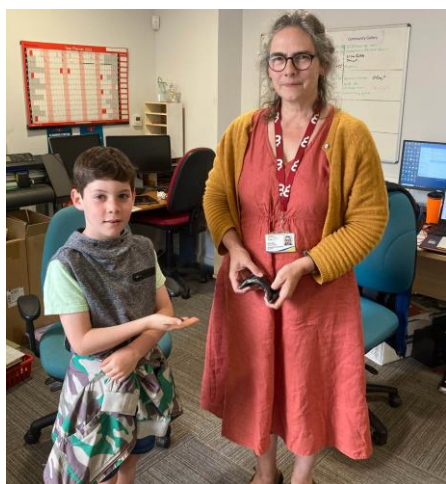
(Editor's note: I see from the list of churches recorded so far, that Braunton is missing. I know from my own observations that St Brannock's Church holds some interesting graffiti. Anyone up for it? TG.)

A Recent Find from Pilton

Eight year old Billy Lugsden found this bottle seal, together with the base of a second bottle at Mannings Pit, Pilton in May 2023. They both date from the 18th century. Billy has donated his find to the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon. The Museum is grateful to Billy for his donation.



Bottles were hand made and quite expensive in the 18th century. Many wealthy people had bottles made decorated with their coat of arms. They would have bought wine in barrels, imported from Spain or France, and decanted the wine into bottles, which could be reused many times. The seal and the bottle base date from the 18th century. This “seal” (in reality stamped with a metal die into the molten glass of a newly-blown bottle) shows the coat of arms of Henry Incledon, from Buckland, near Braunton. He was born in 1674 and died in 1736. His brother, Robert, built Pilton House, very near where the bottle seal was found.



Billy handing his finds to Museum Manager Alison Mills.

If you have a copy of the NDAS 2009 publication ‘Bronze Age to Bottle Seals’, you will find an article on the topic written by Chris Preece on pages 51-56.

An Update on the Barnstaple Excavated Pottery Project.

The project to tackle the long delayed study and publication of Barnstaple pottery mainly from excavations in the 1970s-80s now finds itself in a newly created regional context. Progress on this frankly huge task has been glacial, but the following provides hope of progress.

Following the success of a recent pilot in Somerset, Historic England has awarded a grant to museums across Devon and Cornwall to create a Fabric Type Series for medieval and post medieval pottery. The project will bring together medieval and post-medieval sherds found across the region in an easy to access reference collection that can be used as a comparative resource for excavated material as well as unexpected finds.

The project will see The Box, Plymouth, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, The Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro and The Museum of North Devon and Barnstaple working together to provide access to their collections and archives.

It will be split into three stages. The first, which got underway in October, will create the Fabric Type Series in Devon. The second will focus on Cornwall, while the third will look at the collections of imported foreign pottery that arrived in Devon and Cornwall from AD400 to 1800 due to their extensive maritime networks.

Kate Berlewen Conservator at The Box explains:

The maritime peninsula of Devon and Cornwall contains a unique medieval and post-medieval archaeological ceramic sequence, which is of significant value to archaeological study both within and beyond the region. In line with the aims of Historic England, the Medieval and Later Pottery Research Group, and regional partners to improve the standards of research and documentation of this material in the region and nationally, this project will create a fabric type series of medieval and post-medieval pottery from each county. The project will produce a physical regional fabric type series for each county, along with a digital database of fabric descriptions in line with national guidelines. The physical and digital type series will be formed from a core collection of representative sherds, starting with the most well understood site specific fabric type series from each county and building out in stages. Targeted petrographic and chemical analysis will also improve understanding of less well defined key fabrics.

The project will bring together regional and national specialists in the project team and will work with five key regional partners, The Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter, The Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro, The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, Barnstaple, The Box, Plymouth, and English Heritage. The two physical type series collections will be held respectively in the primary museums in each county, The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, and the Royal Cornwall Museum. These central locations provide equitable access by car as well as public transport for the public, professionals, and future researchers, while the online database will provide the 'landing page' for users to find out where they can find the physical sherds most relevant to their queries.

TG.

