



Promoting awareness of the archaeology
and history of North Devon

Newsletter, Spring 2018

The NDAS AGM, March 2018:

At the 2018 Annual General Meeting on 20th March Chris Preece was confirmed as Chairman for the coming year. Alison Mills continues as Vice-Chair. Nigel and Rosemary Dymond were confirmed as joint secretariat, and Bob Shrigley will continue as Treasurer and Membership Secretary. The existing committee was re-elected. Committee members are now, in addition to the officers above, Faye Balmond (South West Archaeology), Derry Bryant, John Bradbeer, Matt Chamings (Barnstaple Town Council), Terry Green, Pat Hudson, Jonathan Lomas, Sarah McRae, Brian Fox, Steve Pitcher plus a representative of the Friends of Berry Castle. In addition Stephen George has been co-opted onto the Committee.

Your main contacts are:

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The AGM was followed by a talk from Ross Dean of Substrata, presenting the results of geophysical survey around Barnstaple Castle and on the fields to the south of the A39 at Clovelly. Details of the Clovelly results are presented and discussed in the following article by Chris Preece on this most significant site.

Clovelly Dykes



Fig. 1: Clovelly Dykes, aerial view to south – East Dyke Farm in the foreground, the A39 in the background. (courtesy North Devon AONB)

Hidden from view by the hedge which borders the A39, Clovelly Dykes is one of the most enigmatic yet impressive ancient monuments in the county. Assumed to be an Iron Age 'hillfort' or as some prefer 'multivallate enclosure', its purpose has been much debated. Although high up (c. 210m), it is located on a plateau and is not on the top of a hill in the classic style of 'forts' such as Hembury (near Honiton) which are interpreted as defensive. It does however have "far-reaching views in all

directions and excellent sea views” (Dept. for Culture Media & Sport 1999). Aileen Fox favoured an interpretation of it as a sort of prehistoric cattle market where livestock could be separated for grazing, milking, mating or slaughter while also being protected from cattle raiders (1996, 29). Others however point to the size of the internal banks and ditches and question whether such scale would be necessary merely for stock-keeping. It is of course possible that it had both military and stock-keeping functions. Whatever its purpose, the enclosure has until recently been subject to very little known investigation. In fact, the Historic England website records no investigation history.



Fig.2: Clovelly Dykes on the tithe map. Fields numbered 1-5 have 'moor' and 'marsh' names, fields lettered A – E have prosaic parliamentary enclosure names.

However, recent research by Stephen Hobbs (Hartland Digital Archive) has unearthed some documents which challenge the perceived view of this site. Place name evidence from the Clovelly tithe map of c.1840 provides numerous 'moor' names such as 'Over Marsh', 'Lower Marsh' etc. This suggests that prior to late 18th century enclosure and agricultural improvement, Clovelly Dykes sat in open moorland, much of which was marshy. This would have made it eminently more defensible than it appears today. There is also a document in the Clovelly Estate archive which details the use of Italian prisoners of war being employed in draining a field to the east of the earthwork in 1943 (Stephen Hobbs *pers. comm*). Some of the other fields surrounding the enclosure must also have been drained in the past for agricultural use judging by their present condition.

The assumption that there had never been any excavation at Clovelly Dykes has also had to be revised following another document that Stephen Hobbs has shared with NDAS. This is a letter detailing the findings from an excavation by Robert Burnard and the Reverend Sabine Baring Gould in 1903. Baring Gould was the archetypal renaissance man – antiquarian, prolific writer, folklorist and composer (best known for the hymn 'Onward Christian Soldiers'). The letter describes how 5 or 6 men were employed in the dig which was a fortnight in length. Burnard states that “The moats were in places sunk down through solid rock and for this I imagine iron tools were essential”. He also records finding iron oxide and charcoal “deep down in the clay subsoil”. Finds however were described as being 'insignificant'. There was also thought to have been some illicit excavation in the 1960s of which details are scant (Stephen Hobbs *pers. comm.*)

More recently there has been renewed interest in the site. In 2011 and 2013 as part of the National Mapping Programme, aerial photography was undertaken by AC Archaeology and the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team on behalf of English Heritage. This revealed some cropmarks of a group of banks and ditches situated to the south of the hillfort; it was suggested that these might represent the buried remains of the southern extent of the enclosure (if you look at the aerial photograph – Fig. 2 - you may think the southern part of the monument looks truncated by the toll road put through in the 1700s. Equally the 'improvement' of East Dyke Farm has evidently altered the original setting).

Due to the National Mapping Survey findings, an extension of the scheduling to the south was contemplated. However, after some consideration it was decided not to do so for a number of reasons, one being the uncertain extent of remains due to ploughing.



Fig.3: Results of the 2018 geophysical survey, showing in red the possible extension of an outer ditch. (Substrata)

In 2016 therefore, North Devon Archaeological Society (NDAS), in conjunction with North Devon AONB (NDAONB), decided to commission geophysical survey of the field south of the road in order to determine whether there were sufficient remains to warrant further investigation. Phase 1 of the survey was undertaken by Substrata in January 2017. Following

promising interpretation, this area was extended south. Phase 2 of the survey in January 2018 revealed more features, including an extension of what may be the outer boundary ditch of the monument, a sub-square enclosure abutting it and at least two ring ditches (Dean 2018). The term 'ring ditch' is a cover all but as one of the Clovelly examples has an apparent entrance and is within the diameter range of Iron Age roundhouses elsewhere, this might be seen as the most likely interpretation. Another ring ditch appears to have been cut by the possible extension of the boundary ditch, suggesting that the ring ditch preceded the outer boundary in date (Fig. 3).

Only excavation however can confirm these hypotheses and NDAS has drafted a project plan (which is in the consultative stage) proposing selective evaluation of some of these features.

References:

Dean, R. 2018 'Clovelly Dykes hillfort southern extension, Clovelly, Devon'. (Substrata rep. no. 1801CLO-R-1)
 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999, *Clovelly Dykes Hillfort* (Schedule Document). SDV336528.
 Fox, A. 1996 'Prehistoric Hillforts in Devon' (Devon Books).

See also NDAS newsletter autumn 2017

South Molton Rugby Pitch Update

Sam Walls of South West Archaeology Ltd writes:

Many of you will have had some involvement in the HLF funded archaeological excavations and subsequently some of the post-ex wet sieving for the new rugby pitch for South Molton Rugby Club. South West Archaeology are (finally!!) in a position to provide an update. The full report has been somewhat delayed by waiting for two phases of charcoal analysis and the subsequent returns of two rounds of radiocarbon (RC) dates. The samples from the 'roundhouse' type



structure contained charcoal suitable for dating the presumed truncated remains of a structure firmly to the Middle Iron Age (350-209 BC). The samples from the enclosure ditch, once processed and assessed by the charcoal specialist did not contain any material suitable for RC dating. However, the soil samples recovered from the enclosure ditch by South West Archaeology in the 2015 evaluation were subsequently processed and did provide datable material from the secondary fill of the ditch. These suggest that the enclosure was used, perhaps re-used, in the Dark Ages (485-642 AD). It is possible that the enclosure dates to the immediate post-Roman Britain, and perhaps this helps account for the paucity of finds!!

Full report to follow very soon.

Berry Castle



Drone's eye view of Berry Castle at the time of the open day in Summer 2017 (Friends of Berry Castle)

There is an opportunity this summer to get your hands dirty and your trowelling skills back in trim. The Friends of Berry Castle (Huntshaw) are planning a week of excavation (18th to 25th July) at this presumed Iron Age hilltop enclosure in Huntshaw parish (NGR: SS495223). If you want to volunteer, you will find attached to this newsletter a full explanation of the project together with an application form which has to be returned by 15th June. There is also an open day on Sunday 22nd July, 11.00 am to 3.00 pm.

In case you're new to NDAS or would like a reminder, Berry Castle is a sub-rectangular hilltop enclosure which, until it was befriended by a local group of enthusiasts, lay buried in woodland. It became a focus of attention in 2014/15 when Oxford University launched a nationwide appeal for information on all of Britain and Ireland's hillforts and hilltop enclosures for eventual inclusion in an Atlas of Hillforts in Britain and Ireland. Berry Castle was offered as an example and a local group was formed to research the site. Since then the woodland has been cleared with the permission and co-operation of the landowner, Clinton Devon Estates, and the site has been rescued from further decay. It now stands out as one of the best preserved small hillforts in the Torridge area. The site is scheduled, but Geophysical survey has pinpointed points of interest outside the scheduled area and it is these that will be investigated by excavation. The Atlas has now been published as an on-line database and includes Berry Castle among its 4,147 entries.

The Friends of Berry Castle (Fobbers) have produced a very informative website www.berrycastlehuntshaw.com and have recently arranged the provision of information boards on the site. If you have particular questions you can contact the Fobbers through their email address, berrycastle1@outlook.com

The Pilton Prior's Ring

Found in 1867 enclosed in a ball of clay and revealed when an oak tree fell, the Pilton Prior's Ring has gone international. That is to say, it is currently on loan from the North Devon Athenaeum to the Musée des Antiquités in Rouen, Normandy for an exhibition entitled *Savants et Croyants* (Scholars and Believers). The theme of the exhibition is broadly Jewish culture in medieval Northern Europe and the relevance of the Pilton Prior's ring is the Hebrew inscription on the bezel.



The Pilton Prior's ring: Left, the cabochon sapphire with Hebrew inscription on the bezel;

Right, the reverse with Latin inscription 'Jesu Adonai nobiscum sit' (May Lord Jesus be with us). (North Devon Athenaeum)

The ring is of gold set with a cabochon sapphire. The Hebrew inscription translates as 'May Jesu Emmanuel Jehova be with us' while on the reverse an inscription in Latin similarly reads 'May Lord Jesus be with us'. When it was discovered in 1876 it was taken to the British Museum for identification where it was judged to be ecclesiastical and to date from the early 12th century. These two conclusions suggested that it had belonged to the Prior of Pilton Priory, had probably been presented to him on the foundation of the Priory in the 1180s and may have been hidden away on the Dissolution of the Priory in 1535.

The exhibition catalogue entry for the ring presents a very interesting interpretation of the ring's significance, suggesting an ambivalence between Christian belief and quite un-Christian superstition. Medieval sources ascribe prophylactic powers to sapphire which was said to ward off 'envy, deception, captivity, fear, ulcers and witchcraft'. It could also cure snake bites, promote chastity, peace and the thermic equilibrium of the body, while preventing eye troubles, headaches and stammering. Such powers were considered appropriate to royal personages and to churchmen. The Latin inscription on the reverse would ensure its close contact with the body and enhance its efficacy. In addition there was apparently a belief among Christians that writing in Hebrew would provide additional mystical powers.

The catalogue entry goes on to indicate that the form of the name of Jesus in the Hebrew inscription was used only in the context of Christian belief and that the ring must definitely have belonged to an important personage within the Christian Church. It also confirms a late 12th century date and suggests a continental origin. There is nothing here to contradict the idea that the ring belonged to the Prior of Pilton and in addition casts an interesting light on the somewhat conflicting beliefs of a 12th century man of the Church.

The exhibition in Rouen goes on until 16th September, so if you happen to be heading off to Normandy, you might pop in. Otherwise wait until the ring returns to Barnstaple and goes back on display in the Barnstaple Guildhall.

Grey Literature in North Devon: an update

Grey literature is that produced in the form of reports for developers and local planning authorities by commercial archaeology units and historic buildings consultants. It is in the public domain and an archive of such reports is held by the Archaeological Data Services (ADS) at the University of York. The archive effectively starts around 2006. For several years now Steve Pitcher and John Bradbeer

have taken on the task of combing through reports that are relevant to North Devon and Torridge. The results of their research are posted on the NDAS website (ndas.org). Following the 2018 AGM, you can now find under Grey Literature an index of sites by District, Parish and Address. The site has been most recently updated with reports for 2015 (Torridge) and 2016 (North Devon). Steve and John would welcome feedback from users.

North Devon and Newfoundland

This is the fourth and final part of an extensive report by John Bradbeer on the transatlantic connections of North Devon revealed by archaeology on both sides of the water.

ARCHAEOLOGY AT FERRYLAND

Ferryland is a small community on the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland, some 65 km south of St Johns. It is of interest in many ways and in particular as one of the Newfoundland's oldest settlements and one that has seen extensive archaeological investigation and also as it became the focus of North Devon's fishing expeditions to Newfoundland. Because of the peculiarities of the Newfoundland migratory fishery, the magistrates of the fleet's home ports acted in Newfoundland too, so one could regard Ferryland in legal terms as a part of Barnstaple and Bideford in the early eighteenth century. The name is an English form of *Farilham*, which was recorded on a map of 1529 and probably derives from the Portuguese *farelhão*, meaning steep rock or point, which perfectly describes the site.



Remains of Lord Baltimore's mansion, as excavated by the Colony of Avalon archaeological team. (Colony of Avalon website)

Ferryland was used by the native Beothuk people from around the twelfth century and then by French, Portuguese, Spanish and English fishermen from the sixteenth century. In 1620 it became the site of a small colony promoted by Sir George Calvert, later Lord Baltimore (who quite quickly transferred his colonial ambitions to what became Maryland). After the Restoration, the English government finally decided against formal settlement and colonial status for Newfoundland and Ferryland became a focus for the migratory fishery and also was of sufficient importance to be raided by the Dutch in 1673 and destroyed in a French attack in

1696, which left a group of destitute Ferryland residents in Appledore. The slow transformation of Newfoundland from a migratory fishery with a few settlers with indeterminate legal status to something more akin to a colony on American

and Canadian lines saw St Johns emerge as the island focus and Ferryland quietly slipped into relative obscurity.

More is probably known about Ferryland than for any other archaeological site in eastern Canada. This is in large part thanks to the work of James Tuck, who after pioneering work on Inuit and Basque sites in Labrador, began a series of excavations at Ferryland in 1984, which has been carried on as a joint venture between Memorial University in St Johns, where Tuck remains an emeritus professor, Parks Canada and the local community.

The main focus has been around the Pool, a back-water off the inlet sheltered by the headland, shown on the sketch map. Work has taken place here at seven sites, also shown on the second sketch map. Area C was the waterfront and the first wharf, probably dating to the early 1620s was found to comprise old barrels filled with rocks and sand. This seemingly was quickly replaced by a more permanent stone structure. Later this area was paved using beach cobbles. The area has yielded clay pipes from across the period c1620-1720, with some being attributable to Barnstaple. A variety of structures existed in this area and in areas B, G, E and F suggesting that the community had smithy, brewhouse, slate workshop and storehouses. Area F contained two timber-framed structures, with one of these probably being the kitchen for Captain Wynne's house, built in the 1620s during the Calvert proprietorship of Ferryland. The other was tentatively identified as a storehouse, probably constructed during the rebuilding after either the Dutch or possibly the French attacks in the late seventeenth century. Middens associated with the former have yielded large numbers of pottery fragments, including Spanish lusterware and North Italian sgraffito ware confirming that at least one higher status building was nearby as well as much coarser ware from North Devon. During the late 1990s and early 2000s digging continued down to lower levels and Breton coarseware fragments came from contexts without any clay-pipes, pointing strongly to a date before 1570 and suggesting French, rather than English occupation. Finally, the team found worked bone fragments which they interpreted as evidence of Beothuk occupation, probably from the fourteenth century or possibly overlapping with the earliest European contacts. Calvert's Mansion House yielded relatively little of interest but the associated middens have produced several significant finds. In 2015 a copper crucifix, with unmistakable Catholic iconography, was found, the first tangible proof of the Catholics whom Calvert sought to recruit for his Colony of Avalon.

Editor's Note: The 'Colony of Avalon' website is well worth a visit – well constructed with plentiful information.

The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon

It will soon be obvious to you that the plan to extend the museum with a new wing is going ahead. A contractor has been appointed and construction will begin in June. Meanwhile, the museum is now closed and a 'pop-up' museum has been established in Bridge Chambers (entrance from the Strand opposite Queen Anne's Walk). The accommodation does not allow of full museum displays; instead the 'Pop-up' is acting as a collection point for personal stories of Barnstaple and North Devon life in the 20th century. The focus of the new wing will be a Social History Gallery reflecting the experience of North Devon people during a century marked by war and profound change. A valuable part of the displays will be information and personal stories provided by individuals who have come into the 'Pop-up' to share their memories. If you have a story to tell, then head for Bridge Chambers any day of the week where a volunteer will be available to record what you have to say.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme

Wil Partridge, the PAS officer for Devon and Somerset, will be visiting Barnstaple on July 14th when he will be based in the Pop-up museum. If you have finds that you would like to be identified, put the date in your diary and bring them along for Wil to examine.

Appended to this newsletter is a copy of the NDAS Data Protection policy. You should already have received a copy of this from the Secretary, but just in case...

Visits:

We haven't had a programme of summer visits for some years, so it is a pleasure to announce three NDAS visits for members to enjoy this summer as well as a couple of other occasions to get out and about. These are...

Sunday July 15th: Guided walk on Clovelly Dykes led by Terry Green and Stephen Hobbs. Numbers are limited to 20, so get in touch as soon as possible with the NDAS Secretary who has the details.

Thursday August 2nd: Visit to Weare Gifford Hall and a village tour. Opportunities to visit this very well presented late medieval hall are rare. Again, numbers are limited to 25, so contact the NDAS secretary for details asap.

Sunday 23rd September: Visit to Tawstock Court and Church. Tawstock Court (formerly St Michael's School) has recently been restored by its new owners and with their permission we are able to offer to NDAS members this unique opportunity to see inside the former home of the Bouchier-Wrey family. The church is described by Pevsner as one of the most interesting in North Devon and its large collection of monuments is unique. Cost £6 per head to include a cream tea. Once again, numbers are limited.

For all of the above, book your place through the NDAS Secretary ndas.secretary@gmail.com. In all cases numbers are restricted, so the sooner the better.

In addition:

Sunday June 24th: An opportunity to join a tour of Holwell Castle, Parracombe, guided by Rob Wilson-North and Faye Balmond. Tours begin at the church at 1.00pm and 3.00pm. The very well preserved motte and bailey castle is on private land, so this is a rare opportunity to visit.

Sunday July 22nd, 11.00am to 3.00pm – open day at Berry Castle, Huntshaw. Bring a picnic and see the excavation. See the article on Berry Castle above.

Membership Subscriptions:

If you haven't already renewed for the current year, may we remind you that annual subscriptions (£16 per individual adult member, joint membership (couples) £24, junior and student membership £8) became due on 1st April. Subscriptions should be sent to the NDAS Membership Secretary, Bob Shrigley, 20 Skern Way, Northam, Bideford, Devon. EX39 1HZ. You can save yourself the trouble of having to remember every year by completing a standing order, forms available from Bob.

TG.

North Devon Archaeological Society (NDAS) Data Protection Notice.

1. NDAS holds the following information you supplied on the joining form:

- i Your name and address.
- ii Your telephone number and/or your e-mail address (if you provided them).
- iii Your preferred method of paying your annual subscription.

2. This information is used for the following purposes:

- i To maintain society records.
- ii To enable us to contact you by post, e-mail or phone about NDAS events and to circulated reports, notices, publications e.t.c. that might be of interest to you.
- iii To forward information from third parties that might be of interest to you.

3. Your information is not shared with third parties without your express permission.

4. Your data is held in electronic form by the Membership Secretary (who also acts as NDAS's Data Compliance Officer).

Your data is made available to some members of the committee for the purposes outlined in para.2.

5. You have the right to:

- i Request a copy of your data by contacting the Membership Secretary (e-mail *****).
- ii Request your data to be deleted by contacting the Membership Secretary (e-mail *****).

2nd April 2018