



Stewartry
Archaeological
Trust



SC040018

THE NEWBARNS PROJECT

***NEWBARNS, in the parish of COLVEND & SOUTHWICK, by DALBEATTIE
in the former STEWARTRY of KIRKCUDBRIGHT now
DUMFRIES and GALLOWAY
DG5 4PY***

Quote from the Galloway News of January 2012:

According to the Met. Office Observatory at Eskdalemuir, 2011 was the wettest year in their 100 year history. They recorded a total rainfall over the 12 months of 2,289 mm – that is 7.50 feet! Station Manager Ian Dawson said: “this easily beats the previous record of 2,223 mm recorded in 1928, nearly beaten by 2,214 mm. in 2009, and compares to an annual average of 1,590 mm. Rainfall was above average in all 12 months of 2011”.

“Given all the rain, it’s surprising that 2011 was not a sunny year with only 964 hours of sunshine compared to the long-term average of 1,182 hours”. April was the sunniest month when things looked promising for the summer ahead, which eventually proved a flop, Mr Dawson said “April 2011 proved to be the sunniest April ever recorded here, with 198 hours of sunshine.”

The highest temperature of the year was recorded on June 3rd, when the thermometer stood at 24.4°C. (*this was that day when Dave Wright and the Excavation Director with Dave’s Land Rover physically hauled a huge, 3 ton, capstone off a burial – we can pick ‘em!*).

The mild November was the warmest in their 100 year history and Mr Dawson said : “Mean temperature for 2011 came in at 8.13°C, well above the 100 year average of 7.18°C, and the seventh warmest year in that time. This means that the eight warmest years of the last 100 have been in the past 15 years – 2006,2007,2004,2003,1997,2011 and 2002.” (*Those of SAT diggers with longer memories will realize that we were excavating on the South Kerb Cairn at Newbarns during all of the above years, and on the North Kerb Cairn from 2006 onwards, with the exception of 1997 and although it may have been warm it was also very wet at times!*) And the harsh winter of last year (2011) saw the coldest temperature when -10.1°C. was recorded on January 7th.

Out of interest one of the co-authors of this Interim Report contacted the Met. Office at Eskdalemuir and was given the following information for 2012.

The rainfall in July 2011 was 134.8 mm, in August it was 150.8 mm and in September it was 236.0 mm. This totals 421.6 mm of rainfall falling on our site during the 2011 digging season. Now comes the crunch!

The rainfall in 2012 was July – 203.0 mm, in August it was 202.4 mm and in September (a better month for us) it was 169.40 mm. The total rainfall on Newbarns during the 2012

digging season was 574.80 mm.! That is 153.20 mm more than fell on us during the 2011 digging season! I must rest my case for the brevity of the Interim Report which will follow in the New Year. Who would be an archaeologist in Scotland?!!!!!!!!!!

Our mathematical Treasurer has worked out that during the 2011 digging season 1 foot 4.5 inches fell upon us and during the 2012 season the figure was even greater at 1 foot 10.5 inches!

We are also reliably told that one inch of rain per acre equals 100 tons of water per acre.

The South Kerb Cairn, the North Kerb Cairn and its Satellite Cairn are both situated in the southern end of the now largely drained loch (formerly Barnhourie Loch) on agricultural land on the Newbarns Estate which is situated in the merged parishes of Colvend and Southwick in the former Stewartry of Kirkcudbright and now a part of the Dumfries & Galloway Region in south-west Scotland. The fourth site is a Standing Stone situated above the former eastern bank of the loch and is half a mile to the north of the North Cairn being only approached westwards from the road leading to Newbarns House Only a small section of the loch has survived and it is 26 feet in depth at its deepest point and abounds with fish and is home to herons, shags, gulls and some Canadian geese plus a few ducks of indeterminate origin. .

The three stone Kerb Cairns are raised platforms comprising a layer of aggregate and small boulders laid over the natural clay level of the bottom of the drained loch. To this layer has been added another layer comprising boulder clay which has then formed a consolidated base for the mix of granite and shale erratic boulders which comprised the building material of the actual cairns and their kerbs. As stated in previous Interim Reports the water level on the cairns is controlled by the water table which, in turn, is controlled by the amount of precipitation during the summer months (see rainfall figures above). Both 2011 and 2012 have seen an unprecedented rainfall during the digging season resulting in many weeks being lost through flooding. With these high levels, all of the burials filled up with water and have remained unexcavatable and unrecordable during the last two seasons. Until the water does recede it will not be possible to carry out any further intensive excavation although some Resistivity Surveying has been possible and some of the results are as follows:

The field surrounding the South Cairn comprised clear natural and cultural features according to the magnetic field gradient results. Most prominent is the drain that runs across the field from the ancient loch bank. Many features having the same effect or outcome are present, such as rows of anomalies and large areas of homogenous magnetic flux density. As a test, the wire and dry stone dyke that delimits the edge of the survey and the wire fence around the site are evident. The field over the road contained an apparent extension of the drain and another complex linear feature; however the vertex has coincidentally been omitted from the survey so their relation is unknown. Further anomalies lead to the supposition that the palimpsest nature of Newbarns continues into the surrounding area. As a check the telephone line was detected in the data.

Ruaridh Ellison, Student at Durham University.

The Standing Stone is situated on rising ground to the north of the Cairns and has not suffered nearly as much from the wet. No further excavation was scheduled and the monolith has been fenced off by the landowner to enable the public to view and photograph it safely. Ruaridh Ellison reports again here that:

The data from the Standing Stone presents dataset, diverse in character, with few distinct features, which has been conjectured to represent interference due to the parent rock. The electrical resistance results provided limited information and this may be related to environmental conditions.

The South Kerb Cairn measures 33 metres in diameter and has been severely robbed in the past with some of the capstones over the burials being broken up by means of “feathering” to furnish building material for the nearby Thorniehill House. Evidence for a roundhouse and either a silo or a watch tower have survived in the form of postholes and this points to the feature having been adapted, at a later date in the Iron Age, as a crannog – what one could refer to as a palimpsest - with evidence of occupation in the form of saddle querns, iron ingot smelting moulds and votive offerings dating to c. AD 100 – 200. Later, medieval activity is apparent in the existence of three parallel drains, stone lined and covered with small capstones which may have been constructed around 800 years ago, the evidence for this being apparent in the still existing spade marks dug into the peat surround of the cairn. Resistivity Surveying, carried out in 2012 under very bad weather conditions, has verified the presence of stone-lined drains of indeterminate date outwith the perimeter of the cairn. The intriguing part of this cairn is, that since the initial excavation and the period of flooding, a later subsidiary insertion of a “boat-shaped” burial facing north has been inserted after the cairn has gone out of use in its initial burial phase. It was covered by the largest capstone yet to be found onsite and once this was removed and planned by two of our lady diggers over a period of weeks the burial was exposed. Then the rains came! Unfortunately this feature has now been under water for five years and has yet to be carefully examined by the surviving member of our ladies team who returns year after year in the hope that the water levels have gone down. Until this happens she now spends her time on the North Kerb Cairn as a Site Supervisor.

The North Kerb Cairn measures 35 metres in diameter and also shows some evidence of structural interference from the 19th century builders seeking local stone. There are three small rectangular quarries on the northern perimeter of the motte hill where granite stone has been removed and further similar material has been extracted from the summit of the motte hill aided by the use of gunpowder, evidenced by the random scatter of some granite boulders in and around the base of the feature and the intimate knowledge from a former life of the Excavation Director who is something of an expert in the use of various explosive materials (that is why he is now almost totally deaf!).

That the North Kerb Cairn has been the focus of ritualistic burial in the prehistoric era cannot be denied. It does not exhibit the evidence for the later occupation that the South Cairn does, but there is an element of important ritualistic death elements – what “Time Team’s” Francis Pryor refers to as a “pathway to paradise” and that is exhibited here in the palimpsest construction of a “pathway” constructed at a later date over the original part of the earlier cairn surface and even disturbing some of the early burials to give a

“terminus ante quem” dating for a second phase of cremation burial in what can only be postulated as a ritualistic shrine.

Both the South Kerb Cairn and the North Kerb Cairn each show evidence of having had Passage Graves constructed into their perimeters leading into a stone chamber. The one on the South Kerb Cairn has been virtually destroyed, but that on the North Kerb Cairn is still discernible in part of its original construction including the presence, at the entrance of the passage of what Eddie Peterson had termed the “Newbarns Magnificent Beast”- a name soon taken up by our diggers - and we do feature in Eddie’s books two of which are still available from SAT secretary Lizzie at a greatly reduced price.

The third cairn – the Satellite Cairn – is 15 metres in diameter and has been some form of extension – presumably for burial purposes – to the North Kerb Cairn as it is possible to step from one to the other. It is also a Kerb Cairn and has been constructed into a wetter area of the site. Excavation is difficult here due to the levels of the water table and the growth of peat right up the kerbs which makes the removal of capstone very difficult as we are unable to get either JCB or Land Rovers with winches into place.

The Standing Stone set into a granite outcrop to the north of the sites still presents a mystery. Although now fenced off for Health& Safety reasons it can still be viewed by the public and a final survey is due to be carried out to determine whether it is merely an interesting feature in isolation or part of a greater ancient complex. Through careful excavation we do know that it is not prehistoric in origin and the present presumption is that it may have been some form of way-marker sometime back in the Iron Age era. There are several other similar features situated on the hillside between our Standing Stone and the ancient track-way leading to the sea in the region of Castle Point.

On the cairn sites, without any knowledge of the Bronze Age religion we, the excavators, can only guess at what happened here, we can only guess, too, at the ceremonies associated with the interment of the ashes of the dead and there may well have been other ceremonies being carried out under the roof of what we have now speculated as being a shrine deliberately constructed around the burials of No 30 and No 59. Although these “shelters” may be deduced as not having been directly associated with the dead, but with the need of an illustrious ancestor being involved in later ritual, may well explain what was once a large paved area constructed around the two early burials. What must be said is that the effort expended on constructing the earlier burials and then on locating, moving and installing the huge granite capstones over them and the fact that many were in use for long periods and even re-used over lengthy periods of time, shows us that they were of great importance to their builders and must have played a central role in the organization of Galloway society between 2150 BC and 1000 BC.

The sites are just off the A 710 Colvend to Sandyhills road and are situated on ground to the north of the main road and to the west of the drive leading up to Newbarns House. The South cairn is surrounded by a timber fence with an entrance gate set into the south-west corner. With the kind permission of the landowners, Sir Norman and Lady Jillian Arthur, both volunteers and visitors may park their cars in the field overlooking the South

cairn to which the entrance gate is situated immediately on the left on the main entrance off the A710. There are strategically placed notices to aid and inform the public who are welcome to visit us at any time during or out of season. Access to the North and Satellite Kerb Cairns and the Standing Stone is by foot only.

John McFarlane, a family friend who was visiting the site with our son-in-law, found, to our surprise, a Green Tiger Beetle. Unique to this area! More on this will be published in our Interim Report with pictures. Further details, if required, from the secretary e.penman2012@btinternet.com

There is a stile at the north-east corner of the car-parking field which leads onto the road up to Newbarns House and visitors should follow this for 200 metres and then turn left onto the site following the directional sign. We ask that everyone follows the marked paths as there are some deep excavation trenches quite near the road.

As a footnote we ask both the archaeologist and visitor alike to please not park their vehicles, other than bicycles or cars displaying the blue badge, in the lane, as this may interfere with the free passage of heavy farm machinery, animals and delivery vehicles.

We hope that you will visit us in 2013.

Our thanks must go to General Sir Norman Arthur and family for allowing us the freedom of their estate and for their unflinching support through a summer of adverse weather conditions and for financial sponsorship from Hamish McRae, the Dumfries & Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society, Mrs Jane Elvy, and from an anonymous donor. Many contributions in time, kind and equipment have been given to us and these will be duly acknowledged in the Interim Report due out early next year.

Alastair Penman, Excavation Director
Lizzie Penman, Secretary
Stewartry Archaeological Trust SC040018