

Stewartry Archaeological Trust

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THE NEWBARNs PROJECT

PATRIC de CULWEN: "When Patric succeeded to the Cumberland estates on the death of his younger brother, who died without male issue, he brought with him his surname of de Culwen, corrupted into Curwen at a later date – a name by which the family have been known ever since. How he parted with the Culwen barony is not clear, but very soon afterwards we find that Devorgoil, the daughter of Alan, son of Roland lord of Galloway, possessed the estate, and when she died John Comyn, John Baliol, William de Ferrers and Alan le Zouche were seised of the lordship as her heirs. Further we find that K. Robert Bruce granted to Isabel, countess of Athol, and Alexander Bruce his son "the lands of Culwen and a tenement in Sannaykis whilke was John earl of Buchan, William de Ferrers, Allan de Souche and John Baliols in Keltown, forfeited". In due course the lands passed from Alexander Bruce to Margaret McDougall and John McDougall by charter of David II.

A History of the Ancient House of Curwen of Workington in Cumberland by John F Curwen FSA.
1928

The above passage supplies us with the information of who owned Newbarns during the medieval period up until c. AD 1350. This may explain some of the archaeological discoveries of this last season when the walls and cobbled flooring of a medieval building were excavated on the south-east perimeter of the motte hill. The building was not recent even then as the original wall foundations underneath the later medieval stone wall base and supporting platform have been dated as being constructed during the Anglian era in Galloway. This would make the construction at the base of the motte hill contemporary with the last occupation phase of Mote of Mark and, therefore, we must assume that there was a direct connection between the two sites at that time in the late 6th and early 7th centuries. The earlier, Anglian platform was liberally sprinkled with what are obviously granite missiles and this therefore points at an early defensive element on the site.

I am sure that our local friends and some of our distant ones, too, will be intrigued to learn that our Neolithic Kerb Cairns were most likely constructed by migrants from the Pyrenees, Catalonia and Sardinia, who came into Galloway via Ireland. The source of this information are two highly respected archaeologists. Gordon Childe first suggested this in 1935 and Glyn Daniel, in 1965. So, maybe we all came originally from Southern France. This knocks the Project Director's ancestry on the head! Dating for the Neolithic passage graves on the North and South Cairns has been modified by academics to their being constructed during the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. It has recently been suggested that the relationship with the dead at these monuments during the early stages of the Neolithic was tentative. The architecture of the tombs did not allow easy access to the remains of the dead. Consequently, the dead were perhaps not intimately tied to the world of the living (See "*Ancestry, farming & the changing architecture of the Clyde cairns of south-west Scotland*" by Gordon Noble in "*Set in Stone*"

Ed. Cummings & Pannett. 2005).

A further eight cremation burials were excavated on the North Cairn and one on the satellite Cairn No 3. A large number of saddle querns and one broken rotary quern on this feature point to a date of c.500 BC inwards for the deposition of some of the cremation burials. We must now also accept that every cremation burial may have included the ashes of more than one person. The general shortage of timber at this time would make it sensible to cremate the bodies of several people at a time, therefore some of the depositions in the cremation pits may not be of single individuals.

The most exciting find of the season has to be the excavation of a small cist-type cremation burial which was covered by a shale capstone which bore 27 cup-marks and a possible axe-head over six surfaces. Various cup-mark fanatics have already visited us once the news was published on our website. The top of the capstone bears one large cup-mark, the base has five cup-marks and the axe-head and the holes vary in size from 15 to 50 millimetres in diameter. The interesting point is that the rock art on the base of the capstone was facing *inwards* and had to be for the edification of the incumbent or incumbents of the cremation pit only.

As our rock-art expert Eddie Peterson has remarked

"...our perception of this remarkable rock-art symbolism suggests part of the ceremonial ritual appertaining to the transfer of the spirit of the deceased to the heavens. The main difficulty in interpreting the symbolism of our ancient rock-art is early humans having illustrated a variety of designs in the form of hieroglyphics interacting with one another and having several symbolic meanings, providing tribal communication understood by all within the community. Many of these designs provide a dual thought process, where the capstone refers to their tribal beliefs of transferring the spirit of the departed to a new life after death and even after cremation".

Two later Iron Age cremation burials were excavated on the North Cairn and these were of a different type to any of the others. The method of moving the capstone had changed with these burials, instead of utilising the use of ice and snow as we suspect they did, our prehistoric ancestors must have had to change their method of transporting heavy stones and the only sensible reason for this had to be a change in climatic conditions. This would date the burials to sometime after 1160 BC.

Excavation will continue on all three cairns during 2011.

In spite of several days when rain stopped play so to speak we have had 42 diggers on site at Newbarns. The breakdown of these is 8 professional archaeologists (one from USA), 8 mature Veteran Diggers, 9 students of archaeology from Durham, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Stirling and Newcastle. In addition we have had 6 members of Y.A.C from as far apart as Stirling and Chester, 5 students from our local "Give and Take" organisation, one each of a Finds supervisor, a Site Surveyor, our deputy, Barbara on Newbarns, a metal detectorist, a geologist and one mature novice digger who became so enthusiastic that he would not go home. Finally Dave, the stalwart of our team. Many thanks.

386 adults and 54 children visited the site during the season, the highest number since 2005, including the Lord Lieutenant and his Lady and three very generous sponsors without whose financial help we would not be able to continue digging.

Alastair and Robert again reverted to doing paid consultancy work during the season to ensure that the petty cash was topped up.



Visit of Lord Lieutenant Malcolm Ross and his lady.



Alastair & the Beast Stone!



Donna and Callum hard at work.

THE INGLESTON MOTTE EXCAVATION

Once again our new Chairman, Robert McCubbin, and his small trusty team of enthusiasts, completed excavation on the north-east defences on the motte at Ingleston, Gelston. The burnt clay level of the first of the two timber towers destroyed by fire was uncovered and this season's work was concentrated on the western and southern perimeter. A medieval hearth was excavated close to a cobbled floor area and a putative drain, a soak-away for a tower construction, was investigated. The remnants of a third stone base for a defensive perimeter tower was found towards the end of the season and that promises plenty of work for 2011. Artefacts recovered included local and imported pottery, an easily dateable find, flint, slag and numerous iron fiddle-key-head nails. Excavation will continue through the winter into 2011.



Diggers on site August 2010



Excavating base of timber tower.

BARNHILLIES

A number of proposed circular agricultural features were identified on the Barnhillies Estate in the Glenkens just to the south-east of the 13th century farmstead of Armanillies. One particular feature adjacent to an ancient drove road was earmarked for excavation and a trial trench was inserted into it and excavation proved that the feature was the remains of a corn or grain-drying kiln used either for drying grain before threshing in an area where it might not be able to ripen before harvesting or used to dry damp grain before it was taken to the nearest mill.

Thick stone built foundations, 1.5 metres wide, delineated a circular feature with a tunnel-like structure inserted into and under the wall in the south-west quadrant points to heat being produced and used in the base of the structure. Excavation will continue in 2011.

Barnhillies in progress



Finally a small write-up of the Monolith found further up the road at Newbarns.

The NEWBARNs MONOLITH

A survey of the site around the standing stone was conducted by Paul Duck and this proved that the monolith was in isolation. It seems certain that there is no prehistoric connection, but evidence suggests that this feature was deliberately erected during the early years of the 1st millennium AD and, should this be the case, then the likely explanation for its presence must be that it has been part of a landscape marker for a route, ley-line or boundary marker as there are other similar, but smaller examples in the vicinity. It is possible that this stone may have been intended as a burial capstone, but when it was dug down round about it was discovered that it was too big to move.

Stones like this often attract a local story to account for their prominence in the landscape, a marriage site or the site where a belief in a God, a giant or even the Devil - "belongs to him" - and has some mystical or taboo significance.



Monolith

More importantly, to end this Newsletter, we would like to thank all the landowners of the 3 sites. Sir Norman and Lady Arthur of Newbarns, Mr & Mrs David Smith of Ingleston and Mr & Mrs Richard Peel of Barnhillies. Without your assistance these sites would not be being excavated and recorded for posterity.
