



THE NEWBARNs PROJECT

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As our colleague Paul Bahn has said of us diggers- you can recognise an archaeologist from the beard, shapeless sweater or T-shirt, battered hat and sandals or rigger boots- and that is only the women. Beards lend an air of wisdom and maturity, but are basically a means of getting an extra five minutes in bed. The sweater conceals innumerable figure flaws (most commonly caused by too much beer) while T-shirts unfortunately draw attention to them especially those emblazoned with legends such as “Hot and Happy”. Clothing and footwear depend on the temperature conditions, and in the case of students, income and are often worn for days or weeks without being changed. It is important to pretend to believe that it is caused by the remoteness from a water source (students always claim this) or laundrette and is not attributable to a low standard of personal hygiene, or simply lack of interest (the veterans).

This is the fifth Newsletter which the Newbarns Project has produced to keep our supporters and diggers informed of our progress over the recent season. Not all has gone well this year.

The South Cairn at Newbarns could not be worked on at all due firstly to the stringent rules of DEFRA, which forbade us to spray weed-killer onto the site without the compulsory “certificate” and secondly, the two outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease in the South of England had a severe knock-on effect here, too, when restrictions on animal movements meant that we could not enter the field in which the South Cairn was situated. No-one’s fault, just one of those things. We can only hope that it does not happen again.

The competition to “guess the use of the parallel field drains” on the South Cairn is still open to entries, a prize of A new sweatshirt is still on offer (see Newsletter No.4).

However the North Cairn was unaffected by all these problems and we managed to have a very successful and rewarding season there. After the removal of some of the exposed capstones at the end of the 2006 season we were able to excavate several more burials. They all turned out to be “cremation” burials, as opposed to inhumations and we now have a total of eighteen excavated features. Several interesting artefacts were found in the burial pits including rubbing stones and a shale anvil. The remains of another boat- burial were found and excavated, but it was found to have been very badly treated in antiquity and a great deal of damage was evident. Our Iron Age ancestors had even built a later cremation burial on top of it.

Further examination of the Neolithic burial proved it to be a passage grave of the Late Neolithic era and another dateable flint tool was recovered from the vicinity of the burial chamber. Unfortunately whenever it rained the water table rose and flooded the passage and at times, it was possible to distinguish two struggling waterlogged figures (Barbara and Roy) fruitlessly trying to bale it out. This passage grave is very similar to others in Galloway which are termed “Bargrennan” graves. We uncovered a medieval floor level which had

been so badly constructed that it had tilted over several degrees and fallen into the passage of the grave and so it is possible to hypothesise that the house which it formed, the floor must have eventually been quite



Barbara excavating the
Passage grave with Keith
Drawing at the entrance.

unsafe to live in. The occupants would have had to climb uphill to get from one room to another. The floor level of another medieval building is in process of excavation as is an earlier feature in Area 5 where a series of sumps or tanks are gradually being exposed from underneath the cobbled floor of a later construction thought to be the latest building so far excavated on the medieval bailey, so far as it has got stone foundations.

We participated in the Council for British Archaeology organised National Archaeology Week and we had both diggers and visitors coming from the South to participate in this. In September we participated in the Council for Scottish Archaeology organised Scottish Archaeology Month, again with some success, and the last Open Event was that organised by Dalbeattie Initiative when some of the local people visited us and got involved in our project. We encourage these events and are delighted to participate in them as they bring in visitors and are great recruiting ground for diggers of all ages.

The Newbarns Project was again a prize in the Young Archaeologist Club of Great Britain annual competition. We were won by Hannah from Glasgow who came to dig for a day on September 1st accompanied by her father. While Hannah was shown the ropes by Ruaridh, her unfortunate parent was put to work in the trenches where he made quite a contribution to the investigation of the medieval occupancy of the site. This is the second year running that we have featured as a prize and we are delighted to participate in the encouragement of the youngsters in their quest for archaeological knowledge. In addition we have had several members of the YAC visit during the season and all of them had a go at excavation techniques.

We also have a fair idea now as to just who built the Motte to the North of the cairn (or Bailey) and one of our Researchers, Mark, has come up with the following information:

“The GOSPATRICK” family are recorded as Lords of Colvend in c. 1174 AD.” This ties in with the time scale of the construction of the Motte and Bailey on the North Cairn at Newbarns. Mark goes on to say that in 1513 the parish was named CULEVANE, in 1560 it was named COLVEN and by 1610, the last recorded naming, it was variously CULWEN, COVENN and CAWEN.

Through the kind offices of the Galloway News a series of illustrated articles were run in the paper over the Summer and as a result of our exposure in the press we attracted several donations which have ensured our continued work at Newbarns for the foreseeable future. A generous donation from Barend Holiday Village made up for the loss of Council funding which we would normally have had from the Stewartry Area Committee and Philip Harper from Dalbeattie has offered us the use of some of his heavy lifting equipment which we shall soon be making use of. Two anonymous donations were very gratefully accepted and have helped to ensure our continued success.



This season has seen thirty-seven diggers come and go. Some came for only a few days and others for a few weeks. We are truly grateful to them all as they were all volunteers, coming at their own expense and also boosting the tourist economy of Dumfries & Galloway. Of these brave souls nine were professional archaeologists, eight were students including three from abroad (Norway and Barbados), eight were veteran diggers, some of many years experience, eight others were mature diggers and there were four members of the Young Archaeologist Club.

Family participating in Scottish Archaeology Month



Our medieval site at Gelston, the Ingleston Motte Excavation continues apace with excavation of the defences surrounding a timber tower destroyed during the civil unrest in Galloway in the 13th Century. Ingleston too was affected by the Foot and Mouth precautions and the season had to be cut short. Even so the Site Director, Robert McCubbin, managed to make use of all the students and give them the benefit of his experience and some of the veteran and mature diggers also got a chance to dig there. Regrettably no visitors are allowed on Ingleston unless by prior appointment, but Robert will be looking for volunteers for 2008 and can be contacted on 01556 504859 or by email at mccubbin.hillowton@virgin.net



Our thanks to all our supporters, to “The General” and Lady Tessa for their encouragement and support and for letting us trek over their land and dig up great swathes of it at a time. To Barbara, whose enthusiasm for taking tours only outweighs her capability for being permanently clattered with mud and to our Committee who have supported us throughout a somewhat troubled season.