



Stewartry Archaeological Trust



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NEWSLETTER NO.6

The NEWBARN'S PROJECT

".....huge stones were erected...and served as an altar...whereon were burned the victims in sacrifice to the Gods. In proof of the fact to this day, there stands these mighty stones and whoso sees them will assuredly marvel by which mechanical craft or by what bodily strength stones of such bulk have been collected to one spot".

"History of Scotland" Hector Boece. 1527.



There can be no doubt that the three kerb cairns at Newbarns, Colvend, comprise a prehistoric cemetery. Two of them can be traced to the Neolithic era with the presence of one Passage Grave on both the South and North Cairns. Dating evidence, c. 2500BC, has been arrived at by the recovery of a number of easily identified flint tools. That these two cairns have been reused a thousand years later has now also become apparent and it may also be hypothesised that a third, smaller, satellite cairn was constructed at a later date.

In Galloway, as elsewhere, there is no clear dividing line between the funerary customs of the Neolithic and the Bronze Ages. By c. 2000 BC it would appear that the Chambered Tombs had all been sealed up and then the change went from the multiple inhumation graves of the Neolithic to the single cremation graves of the Early Bronze Age (EBA). Burial features, dating to the 2nd millenium BC, are now known to have been added to the sites of the earlier monuments no doubt out of some form of respect for the ancestors, but it must also be considered that with good agricultural land at a premium it became preferable to continue to keep the ancient burial places in use rather than construct new ones. Cairns and ploughing do not mix! After c. 1100 BC as the practice of cremation burial became more widespread the ashes of the dead tended to be deposited in shallow pits without even a funerary urn as a container. No doubt they would have been contained in something like a leather cloth bag, but it is presently speculated that, in many cases, only a representative handful of burial deposit was placed in a pit. This fact can be

proven by the size of some of the pits themselves - barely the dimensions of a modern tea cup. By c. 800 BC cremation burial rites had all but disappeared and this fact alone dates our burials at Newbarns to between c. 2300 BC - c. 800 BC. Burial No,1 South Cairn



Excavation continued for a seventh season on the South Cairn - the one where the Devil is regularly spotted dancing round the upstanding stones - and a further nine proposed capstones were lifted from putative burials in the South East Quadrant. Five of those were proved to be covering definite cremation burials. These will be examined in detail during the 2009 Season.

With the aid of Mr. Harper's digger it was possible to insert a sondage measuring 1.5 metres in width by 5.5 metres in length into the North West perimeter of the cairn. This established the construction of the original feature and it was apparent that a thick layer of boulder clay had been laid down on the former loch bottom and onto that a layer of aggregate had been placed. Another, thinner, layer of boulder clay had been added to this layer and onto that had been placed the stones which made up the base of the cairn. This would then have been built up with granite and shale boulders by the Neolithic construction workers to the required height, probably somewhere around three to four metres.



On the North Cairn a fifth season of excavation revealed a further eighteen cremation burials several of which exhibited two actual pits for the deposition of ashes. All of those contained ritual deposits of stone tools of one sort or another ranging from an anvil to a small rubbing stone or polisher. Examples of these ritualistic "finds" can be seen onsite if the curious care to visit during the season. By the end of the 2008 season we have excavated a total of one Neolithic Passage Grave, four EBA boat-shaped burials and thirty later cremation burials. It is no wonder that the deposition of human cremated bone and the unique burials, rituals of the Bronze Ages, have intrigued antiquarians for centuries. They intrigue us still today!

Unfortunately the weather could not be said to have been on our side in the summer of 2008 as we had to close down for nearly six weeks due to the

vagaries of the water table and the almost daily torrential downpours with which we were visited.

The third, or satellite cairn, a fifteen metre smaller version of both North and South Cairns, was gradually uncovered and with the aid of Philip Harper's digger three postulated capstones were removed and a further three were moved enough for the area underneath them to be examined. A further four EBA burials were confirmed and in one of those a flint blank for a barbed and tanged arrowhead was recovered. This confirms a date for the third cairn of c. 2300 BC at the earliest.

The burial levels have been covered by later medieval floors pointing to the more recent occupation of the site as a bailey to the adjacent motte hill. Startling new features in the form of boulder infilled water channels relating to this era were beginning to be uncovered as the end of the season approached and it will be of interest to see both where they lead and what their function was.

Excavation will continue on all three cairns in 2009.

In spite of the atrocious conditions in 2008, we have had forty diggers on site at Newbarns, all brave souls who have worked hard in spite of the trials and tribulations of the "summer in Galloway". The breakdown of those is as follows: 11 Professional Archaeologists, 7 Mature Veteran Diggers, 9 Students of Archaeology from Kirkcudbright, Durham, Glasgow, Newcastle, Bradford and the University College of London. In addition we have had 3 Mature Novice Diggers, 4 members of the Young Archaeologists Club (YAC) one each of a Finds Supervisor, a Sites Surveyor, a Metal Detectorist, a Site Artist, a Digger Driver. The one person not included is the indefatigable Dave Wright who it is totally impossible to classify as he could not be included in any category which we deigned to mentionand "Mack" and "Sedge" the two "Dig Dogs" who always seem to manage to get into the photos on the website.!

267 Adults and 54 children and a "mother and baby" (see photograph) visited the site during the 8 week season and we were lucky to have two very generous donors whose contributions have ensured our continuing ability to Dig at

Newbarns in 2009. Alastair and Robert even reverted to doing paid Consultancy Work during the season to ensure that we had enough money to pay the bills.

Youngest digger ever
(4 month old Blair)
With Mum Ally.



The INGLESTON MOTTE EXCAVATION

Under the watchful eyes of Robert McCubbin and Roy Riches excavation, for an eleventh season, on the motte hill at Ingleston, Galloway, has continued to the south and western perimeters of the summit and has exhibited burnt timber construction and defence lines. This was highlighted by linear features comprising iron nails and rivet heads from burnt timbers along with charcoal, burnt clay and daub. Further sherds of local galena-glazed pottery were also in evidence this leading to the dating of the site to c. 1180-1230 AD. A double furnace was excavated on the South east perimeter of the summit and produced fiddle-key head nails, glassy slag and furnace waste.

The burnt remnants of a timber tower were gradually uncovered in the shape of burnt timbers and large quantities of iron nails. An area of flooring to the inside of the tower exhibited some cobbling and a hint that part of the tower base may have been based on the sill-beam construction method. On previous excavation evidence it has been determined that there were two phases of a timber tower on site and that both had been destroyed by fire during a period of civil unrest in Galloway between 1175 and 1234 AD. South of this tower feature was an apparent area of smithying where a cobbled yard or floor exhibited a quantity of hammer-scale. An iron arrowhead, illustrated below, was found adjacent to this feature.



Further excavation of the outer perimeter of the summit has

defence line on the uncovered evidence of a third stone tower base for a small defensive timber tower and an item of particular interest found on the edge of the northern defences was an iron

arrowhead. An iron spearhead, a broken loom weight and a spindle whorl, recovered from the western perimeter, suggest occupation by both men and women in the medieval era. It is more likely that the timber towers provided a permanent home for some of the retainers of John de Gevelston who built the defences in the late 12th century.

Although the progress of the excavation has been adversely affected by record rainfall during 2008, the excavation is ongoing and further developments are expected next season.

The thanks of the Stewartry Archaeological Trust, now a Registered Charity, are due to all those who have given up their time and knowledge towards helping us to write more pages in Scotland's history. To the Lanbdowners of both site, Lt Gen Sir Norman and Lady Tessa Arthur at Newbarns and David and Claire Smith at Ingleston our grateful thanks for allowing us on their land and lending us their support in our archaeological ventures.



SAT team investigating 17th-18th century features at Barnhillies, Balmaclellan