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The North Site at Newbarns

What happened in prehistoric times when a person died? Where did they go? Their fate included, initially, some form of extinguishment followed by reincarnation and an afterlife into an Otherworld. Perhaps our ancestors believed in future re-birth and some form of continuing existence in this world although one cannot be sure just what form this might take.



The people who deposited the ashes of their dead on the stone cairns at Newbarns believed that to obtain re-birth in either this or the next world then the spirit had to be reincarnated in some way. It may have been the belief that the soul or spirit had to undergo a complete extinguishment and there is now a current school of thought that has put forward the theory that the dead body had to be completely rendered down to let this happen. Cremation was the most obvious and most popular way of bringing about the dissolution of the corpse. The living would be involved in that they would dispose of the ashes of their loved ones and then be responsible, at least during their lifetimes, for looking after the burial place and involving this ritualistic caring as part of their everyday existence. The burial area thus became a revered place, a place of ritual and of worship.

To date there is one Neolithic inhumation burial and at least 14 cremation burials on the South Cairn at Newbarns. There is one Neolithic Passage Grave and 47 cremation burials on the North Cairn and a further four Bronze Age cremation burials on the recently discovered satellite cairn immediately adjacent to the North Cairn.

There was no excavation this year on the South Cairn while investigation progressed into the possibility of there being further cremation burial features in the south east and north east quadrants. Due to the inclement weather during August it was only possible to identify potential features and mark them for future examination in 2010. The medieval field drains, excavated over previous seasons, are still working in conjunction with additional drainage put in place by our own team led by Dave Wright.

Excavation on the North Cairn provided most of the excitement for the season with many more cremation sites being identified and excavated. A further Early Bronze Age boat burial was investigated after the removal of its large granite capstone (1.2 m x 0.7 m x 0.4 m thick) which was ceremonially added to the digger's "Picnic Area" at the tail of Dave's Land Rover. The Gods of old may well have frowned in disapproval

upon us because the guilty vehicle proceeded to get bogged down in the old loch level and took most of a day to dig out. Unfortunately The General's tractor was in dock on that particular day and this does lead the more superstitious among us to hypothesise upon the fate of those who do not investigate ancient burials with sufficient quantities of due reverence. The capstone covering this cremation burial was supported only on four "cushion" stones.

A further complex of burials was found round a boat-shaped Early Bronze Age burial orientated north west/south east for a change as most are orientated on the rising sun in the east. It is all ritual! The sun rises and lifts the spirit of the dead person from its resting place and then it traverses the sky during the day to finally settle in the west in the evening – in our case the spirit is being deposited in the waters of the ancient loch to await the moment of reincarnation. It's a lovely, ritualistic scenario. The entire area around this burial, almost certainly that of a local V.I.P – a person of some distinction, male or female, we cannot tell – was paved with flat surfaced granite cobbles. The flat surface may well have been produced by the action of the feet of hundreds of people (or thousands of pairs of prehistoric feet over a long period of years) walking and standing upon them. This paved area, measuring 8.0 x 5.0 metres, is joined to the loch by a pathway again constructed of flattened granite cobbles and inset into it is the flattened upper surface of a red granite capstone removed from an adjacent burial. This does suggest that the pathway was constructed after the Early Bronze Age, the juxtaposition of what we, in the archaeological profession, refer to as *Terminus Ante Quem*. Quite simply put – the burial was there before the pathway was built over part of it! The fascinating thing about this complex is that after the boat burial was put in place and covered with a large granite capstone, the prehistoric occupants of Newbarns/Barnhourie must have worshipped or revered or merely paid homage of some sort to the cremated remains of someone who was permanently at peace under that big stone. At some stage it must have been decided by the local inhabitants that it was a good thing – or even a necessity – that they buried their newly dead as near as possible to the tomb of the VIP, so they proceeded to rip up the paving around the VIP burial and construct cremation graves. That space was at a premium was obvious to the diggers where we found the smallest burial to be only 0.4 long x 0.3 in width x 0.3 metres deep. That is small when we consider that the largest in that complex is 1.8 metres long x 0.6 metres wide x 0.3 metres deep. It would appear that the average depth is in and around the 0.3 metres or what we used to call a foot.

There is speculation for many more burials to the west and north of the VIP complex attested to by the presence of some very large granite boulders, the biggest is around 5 tonnes, which are either covering further burials or are the detritus of Victorian house builders or quarriers who obtained much of their building stone from the motte hill by the sometimes injudicious use of gunpowder. This has resulted in some largish chunks of stone being blown downhill towards the cairn.

Yet another, later, Iron Age burial was investigated lying on top of one of the very earliest burials on site, the Early Bronze Age boat burial, first in line in the linear cemetery of boat burials on the western extremity of the cairn.

The Neolithic Passage grave was further excavated and a massive tree root was removed from the vicinity of the passage and all was set for more investigation when the heavy rain in August inundated the entire passage. In the Neolithic Burial, part of the entrance passage was excavated. This yielded a huge stone in the shape of an animal. Christened the "Beast Stone" or "The Magnificent Beast" it was examined by our stone expert, Eddie Peterson, and he confirmed our suspicions that it may have been totemic – the guardian of the passage into the tomb – and he has hypothesised

that it may have been standing upright at the entrance to the grave and since fallen and fractured, seemingly unable to be raised to its former position. His perception is that this did not deter the resourcefulness of the local tribes-people who then used the toppled monolith as a sacred recumbent stone to illustrate and document their faith and belief in a new life after death. Early hominids of Western Europe and the majority of senior scientists throughout the world today believe that we, as humans, have evolved from the sea, along with other creatures, by a multi-mutation process over millions of years. Regeneration of the departed spirit is indicated by a narrow passageway leading to the chamber of the burial, the last resting place of the bones of the ancestors. The narrow passage had been a main funerary theme used by early hominids who believed that this was the pathway leading to a new life after death. Another monolith, excavated by a mature student, would appear, at first glance, to be a human figure which has been toppled over away back in the mists of time. This awaits further examination and translation by Eddie Peterson. Further investigation of the area round the later burials on the western perimeter of the cairn yielded yet more evidence of Victorian tourism in the shape of a Windsor & Newton water colour paint pot. Taking it to the other extreme our Deputy Director, Barbara, also found medieval evidence of occupation in the shape of iron pin heads.

A Standing Stone at Newbarns.

During the season Sir Norman asked us to look at a large upright free standing stone which was situated in a field nearer the house.

The base of this granite monolith, which stands at the base of a natural granite outcrop, was excavated and an 800 year old layer of peat was exposed. This lay over the natural yellow clay levels and they had been cut down through to accommodate the base of the monolith which has been spragged into place at the rear by a series of flat stones which have been placed against the natural stone of the hillside. A further shaped boulder had been inserted at the bottom right of the monolith which ensured that it was standing upright.



Standing Stone

The present hypothesis, prior to any survey work being carried out, is that the actual granite outcrop upon which the monolith is leaning may have been the central focal point of an ancient ceremonial site. A number of collapsed granite stones are in the vicinity of the monolith and it is possible to discern the shape of a semi-circle which may have been constructed to the west of the monolith. A survey will be carried out early in 2010 and depending upon its result further excavation of the area may be put in place.

The Ingleston Motte Excavation.

Excavation under the able supervision of Robert McCubbin has continued on the north-east end of the perimeter defences of the motte hill where the excavation levels have reached deposits of burnt clay signifying the presence of the base of the original, first of two, timber towers. Supporting evidence for burnt support timbers in the form of charcoal, iron nails and rivets has been prolific. The remnant of an earlier excavation, carried out and backfilled in the 19th century, were also discovered. Further excavation on the south and west perimeters of the summit revealed an area of cobbling which had been the paved surface between the second tower and the outer defences.

Important finds recorded this season include a gilded bronze ring loop with screw and decoration in the form of animal heads at each of the circle (see photograph). Any suggestions as to its use will be welcome (contact Lizzie) and it is in the hands of one of our expert curatorial archaeologists, John Pickin, at Stranraer Museum. It will be interesting to see what John makes of it. A clench nail of approx. 8.0 cms in length was recovered and it proved to have been annealed by extreme heat and, as a result, was in almost perfect condition (it reminded the Project Director of a Roman nail from the Inchtuthill Hoard which the late Alf Truckell gave him many years ago as a bribe to hand over a Secondary Neolithic scraper which he had found on the Raised Beach at Rockcliffe). Numerous iron nails and rivet heads, charcoal, burnt daub, butchered animal bone and the local green galena-glaze pot sherds of the locality were in evidence along with fine examples of iron weaponry. All of these were recovered from the later medieval layer on the summit of the motte hill.

Ingleston Motte ended its function in 1235 when, as *John of Fordun's Chronicle of the Scottish Nation; Vol 2: Chapter XLIII* tells us:

"In the year 1235, Alexander, king of Scotland, mustered an army and entered Galloway, to quiet the land, and revenge himself upon the rebels. ...all the Gallwegians came with ropes round their necks and begged for peace and the king's favour; so the king kindly accepted their submission. The Scots of the king's army despoiled the lands and churches of Galloway with unheard of cruelty."

There is little doubt that this was the time when Ingleston Motte was destroyed for the last time.

Last season we had a total of 11 Professional, 7 student, 3 mature, 7 YAC and 5 visitors digging with us. I Surveyor, 1 Metal Detectorist and 5 novice diggers. Out-with the season tours can be arranged by phoning; **01556 680478** or by email; **e.penman@virgin.net**



Gilded bronze ring loop.

Alastair Penman, AIfA, FSAScot Projector Director of SAT
Robert McCubbin, PIfA, Excavation Director of Ingleston