



Promoting awareness of the archaeology  
and history of North Devon

## Newsletter, Spring 2017

### The NDAS AGM, March 2017:

At the 2017 Annual General Meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March Chris Preece was elected Chairman for the coming year. Linda Blanchard was thanked for her three years of service to the Society. Alison Mills continues as Vice-Chair. John Bradbeer stood down as Secretary and is replaced by a joint secretariat (!) of Nigel and Rosemary Dymond. Bob Shrigley continues as our very efficient and dedicated treasurer. Lance Hosegood stood down from the Committee, so that now the Committee members are, in addition to the officers above, Faye Balmond (South West Archaeology), Derry Bryant, John Bradbeer, Matt Chamings (Barnstaple Town Council), Terry Green, Pat Hudson, Jonathan Lomas, Sarah McRae, Brian Fox, Steve Pitcher plus a representative of the Friends of Berry Castle.

*Your main contacts are:*

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The AGM was followed by a talk from Bryn Morris of South West Archaeology bringing us up to date on the results of the 2012 excavation at the rear of the former Exeter Inn in Litchdon Street. The post-excavation work, a project, which became known as 'The Missing Link', was funded through an HLF grant channelled through NDAS. An update on the publication of the results is at the end of this newsletter.

#### **Membership Subscriptions:**

*If you haven't already renewed for the current year, may we remind you that annual subscriptions (£16 per individual adult member, joint membership (couples) £24, junior and student membership £8) became due on 1st April. Subscriptions should be sent to the NDAS Membership Secretary, Bob Shrigley, 20 Skern Way, Northam, Bideford, Devon. EX39 1HZ. You can save yourself the trouble of having to remember every year by completing a standing order, forms available from Bob.*

## Barnstaple Castle

Barnstaple's most prominent landmark, and probably the most taken for granted, is the Castle Mound. Sitting on the edge of the Cattle Market carpark and covered in trees – and bluebells in April and May – is the motte of the Norman motte and bailey castle erected some time after 1066 to dominate the town and to command the highest navigable stretch of the Taw. The Castle Green occupies the site of the inner bailey of the castle and the carpark probably occupies the outer bailey. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the silted up ditch was used for gardens.



*The motte of Barnstaple's Norman castle beside the cattle market carpark*

Recently North Devon Council have concluded that the investigation of this very prominent ancient monument needs to be brought up to date. The site should be better presented to the public with interpretation boards explaining its place in the history of Barnstaple. To this end a grant was sought from Historic England under their 'Heritage at Risk' heading.



*Geophysical survey on the Castle Green March 2017*

With the grant money a geophysical survey was commissioned from Substrata and in March both the Castle Green and the area of the carpark closest to the mound were surveyed. At the time of writing, final results are not yet in, but on site Ross Dean said that the results from the Castle Green were showing 'possibilities'. These might include traces of any buildings in the inner bailey and/or very importantly any indications of further graves in addition to those found by Trevor Miles in the 1970s. At that time over 100 graves were uncovered to the north-west of the castle mound; these were evidently Christian Saxon, the graves being part buried beneath the rampart of the bailey and the graves oriented east-west and without grave goods.

The Council is putting in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to finance further investigation and interpretation.

## Clovelly Dykes

If ever there was an archaeological elephant in the room, it's Clovelly Dykes! This is perhaps the least known, least understood, but also one of the most spectacular prehistoric (Iron Age?) monuments in Devon. Anyone driving on the A39 from Barnstaple to Bude passes within metres of one of the ditches without realising it because the ditch is hidden behind a dense growth of trees and because the huge multivallate enclosure is largely on the flat and does not stand out. It is also on private land with no public access, being part of the Clovelly Estate.

In the last six months however, some first tentative moves have been made to investigate at least the fringes of the site. Cropmarks noted in recent aerial surveys suggested an extension of the site on the south side of the A39. This area is not scheduled, so it offered the possibility of at least a geophysical survey. NDAS applied to the Sustainable Development Fund (money allotted by DEFRA to the North Devon Coast AONB) for a grant of £500 with which to pay Substrata to survey the field on the south

side of the A39. The grant having been approved and permission having been granted by the landowner and the tenant, the survey was done in January this year.

As so often with geophysical survey, the results are suggestive, but need confirmation by excavation. They also tantalisingly suggest that further survey in a southward direction might be required to provide more clarity before any excavation is attempted. This is now up for discussion between NDAS and the landowner and tenant. Meanwhile, it has been suggested that members would appreciate a guided walk round the site, something that we haven't done for some time. See **Upcoming Events** below.

## Reports from South West Archaeology

*Our local archaeological contractor, South West Archaeology, has been busy in our area and has shared the following brief reports with us.*

### *Great Deptford Farm, High Bickington*

Building recording in advance of the rebuilding of the farmstead identified a large and well-built 17<sup>th</sup> century chimney breast within the garage, seemingly the remains of the original farmhouse. When this building was demolished, the chimney breast was also found to contain the remains of a cloam oven – 95% of which was retrieved – inside an earlier brick bread oven. The removal of the garage and the concrete floors revealed the footprint of a three-cell farmhouse with excellent cobbled floors surviving across most of the building. The 17<sup>th</sup> century chimney breast had been inserted into this building, suggesting it was medieval in origin. However, the surviving walls had no, or very shallow, foundations.



*The fire-place and chimney breast within the garage.*



*The floors of the farmhouse, after removal of the concrete*

### *Land at Pitt Hill, Shebbear*

Following a desk-based assessment and geophysical survey, five evaluation trenches (total length 160m) were excavated in the fields to the north of the church. The geophysical survey had revealed the edge of a large sub-rectangular enclosure. The evaluation demonstrated the enclosure ditches were up to 3.5m wide and 1.6m deep, and one of the ditches produced early Romano-British pottery (C1st AD) in a style



*A section of the Shebbear enclosure ditch*

harking back to late Iron Age cordoned ware. Most of the other features encountered did not produce dating evidence, but are likely to relate to medieval occupation in the area. The early date of the enclosure is of interest, as is the fact the pottery includes gabbroic material. This clay, brought from west Cornwall, must have been carried to Shebbear for very specific reasons, possibly spiritual.

## Iron Age Settlements in North Devon

The above report on a late Iron Age to Romano-British enclosure at Shebbear prompts thought on the current state of knowledge of the North Devon Iron Age. Our knowledge has hitherto been dominated by hillforts and hilltop and hillslope enclosures. This emphasis on high places arises perhaps because these are areas less subject to domination by medieval settlements and arable farming. A more balanced view would suggest that there ought to be lowland settlements too. Until very recently Iron Age settlements in the lowland have remained elusive, and it is one of the consequences of planning requirements for archaeological investigation ahead of developments, that we are now beginning to redress the balance. This is where commercial archaeology is proving its worth. Working ahead of a housing development at Tews Lane, Bickington, AC Archaeology recently uncovered an enclosure with a round house with dating evidence pointing to 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century BC and and pottery indicating re-use in the Roman period. (See Winter Programme below).



*Post-holes of the Iron Age and Romano-British enclosure at Tews Lane . (Photo AC Archaeology)*



*Bryn Morris of SWARCH taking levels. In the foreground, water worn stones in a post-hole.*

Meanwhile at South Molton, on land designated for a new rugby pitch on the edge of the town preliminary survey had identified what were probably prehistoric enclosures and possibly a round house. Under the direction of South West Archaeology (SWARCH) an HLF funded community dig was organised in late May in which a number of NDAS members took part. After the stripping of the topsoil a number of features were revealed, Rather than the expected roundhouse, a narrow gully was exposed defining a small sub-oval enclosure, with a clear entrance on the south-west side flanked by double post-holes. These held large, water worn stones, presumably packing stones and obviously brought to the site from elsewhere. Straddling the gully there were also the post-holes of what might have been a rectangular building which must have pre- or post-dated the enclosure. The only artefacts were a very small quantity of crude pottery, a possible hone-stone and also, significantly, lumps of iron slag recovered from the post-holes, which strongly suggests Iron Age or later occupation. The very distinct cropmark of a sub-rectangular enclosure observed in the initial survey was also

investigated. On excavation, the enclosure ditch proved to be nearly 3m wide and 2m deep. No dating evidence was recovered (although soil samples were taken) and it looks like it was deliberately backfilled relatively soon after it was dug.



*NDAS Treasurer Bob Shrigley working on the narrow gully on the South Molton*

To these recent developments we can add a site at Gunswell Lane on the other side of South Molton where in 2012 AC Archaeology excavated a prehistoric circular double-ditched enclosure with internal features including a total of six pit-like features and containing Middle to Late Iron Age pottery. In addition, in 2014, AC found at Winsford Park, Bideford evidence of a possible Iron Age field-system. With the frantic amount of house-building going on at present, it is likely that there will be occasions when our knowledge of the Iron Age in North Devon is even further expanded. From a landscape archaeological point of view it will be very interesting to see how these late prehistoric settlements, which are all within the

lowland, might relate to the early medieval settlement pattern represented by existing farms, hamlets and larger settlements. The photograph below suggests intriguing possibilities.



*Aerial photograph of cropmarks of a double-ditched enclosure adjacent to a farmstead with medieval origins near Westleigh, Bideford.*

*Photo: North Devon Athenaeum.*

## **Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon: 100 Objects**

As part of the effort to raise funds for the proposed Long Bridge Wing extension to the museum and to raise awareness of the treasure that is North Devon's principal museum, the museum staff, volunteers and friends are contributing occasional short articles to the J2 section of the North Devon Journal under the general heading 'North Devon in 100 Objects'. The idea is inspired by the British Museum's 'History of the World in 100 Objects', and although somewhat less ambitious, the aim is similarly to write about selected objects from the museum's collections that illustrate the history of our area, and ultimately to compile all the articles into a book. Just to give a taste, here is one of them.

### **Roman Pottery from Brayford**

As you enter the first gallery on the left you will find facing you a display case containing scraps of pottery. These are fragments of Roman pottery that came to light at Brayford in the early 2000s. People in Brayford had known for years that when they dug their gardens they turned up lumps of heavy, knobbly material that they called 'black ram'. Examination by experts from Exeter University identified this as slag resulting from the smelting of iron. Its association with Roman pottery and the widespread occurrence of this industrial waste clearly showed that in the Roman period (AD43 to AD410) what is now the quiet village of Brayford had been an industrial hell-hole with smelting furnaces, smoke and noise and heaps of industrial waste, as iron was extracted from ore mined on Exmoor probably to supply the Roman army. In fact as you drive through Brayford on the A399 you are driving over a huge dump of Roman industrial waste.



The pottery fragments that you see in the museum are a small selection out of around 1600 sherds that came out of one excavation site in the village. They represent the day to day domestic wares used by the workers probably over a period of about 150 years in the first and second centuries AD. These would have been local people with local roots - decidedly not 'Romans' - whose lives had become embedded in the economy of Roman Britain. They clearly had long distance connections because not only did they need to export their industrial product to a market, but they also imported the materials of everyday life. The pottery that you see displayed comes from

widespread sources. There are South Devon 'grey wares', black-burnished ware from Dorset, decorated red Samian ware from Gaul and amphorae (oil and wine jars) from Spain. It has sometimes been said that 'the Romans never came to North Devon'. Maybe they didn't, but their consumer goods certainly did!

Some of this pottery gives an insight into day-to-day working. The neatly cut off pieces of rim that look like large commas were probably used as 'feet' for standing vessels on, the red decorated Samian ware often has corners worn smooth and may have been used as a crayon to mark up batches for export (it makes a good red mark), while the large bottomless bottle seems to have been used as a 'tuyau' or funnel to direct a stream of air into the bottom of the furnace. These people were resourceful and perhaps we could all learn a thing or two from this ancient recycling!

## Newfoundland Again

*In the Autumn 2016 newsletter we previewed events planned for 2017 to commemorate the historic connection between Devon and Newfoundland. In the last NDAS talk of the 2016/17 season John Bradbeer reviewed the history of this connection and the chronically overlooked significance of the Newfoundland fishery for the prosperity of Northern Devon in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a follow-up, John is offering a history of this important period, but in instalments....*

## Northern Devon and Newfoundland: Part 1



19<sup>th</sup> century map of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia

Members may know that the Devonshire Association held a symposium in Exeter and parallel events across Devon during April 2017 to celebrate the long established connection between Newfoundland and Devon. The verb has to be 'celebrate' rather than 'commemorate' as 2017 was not an anniversary of any particular event. In this and the next three newsletters I want to summarise around three centuries of contact between Newfoundland and Northern Devon, and in particular, Barnstaple and Bideford. The legacy of this important but neglected aspect of Northern Devon's maritime history is still just discernible and men who had sailed in the Newfoundland trade were still living in the late 1940s. For around two hundred years, ships sailed from

Northern Devon to fish off Newfoundland and then trade the salted cod, chiefly into Iberia and the Mediterranean. In the nineteenth century, the contact with Newfoundland was maintained through carrying salt cod, now exclusively caught by Newfoundlanders, to what had become the traditional markets of Southern Europe. In Newfoundland there has been a long running series of archaeological excavations at Ferryland, the former centre of the Colony of Avalon and a particular focus of Northern Devon's attentions.

In this first piece I shall discuss the history of Newfoundland prior to the voyage of John Cabot in 1497. In the second piece, I set out to explain the operation of the English fishery in Newfoundland from c.1570 to c.1770. In the third piece I want to explore the rise and fall of Northern Devon in the Newfoundland trade and the brief revival in the carrying trade during the nineteenth century. Finally I shall endeavour to summarise the archaeological work at Ferryland in Newfoundland, which I have to confess that I have not seen and which has yet to be written up as a full account.

Newfoundland's first nation inhabitants were the Beothuk, a people related to the other first nations in what are now Canada and the United States. Inuit peoples had reached Newfoundland after the Pleistocene glaciations but appear to have died out prior to the arrival of the Beothuk. Unlike many other first nation peoples who actively sought out European contact to obtain guns and alcohol, the Beothuk kept to themselves and their eventual extinction was caused more by loss of access to traditional resources at the coast and by the inevitable spread of contagious diseases than by open warfare or genocide.



*The bleak coastal landscape of L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland*

It is now certain that Norse voyagers reached Newfoundland around AD 1000, almost certainly from Greenland. However there were never very many of them, perhaps a peak population of 50 to 100 at any one settlement at any one time and at the largest so far excavated, at L'Anse aux Meadows, at the northern tip of Newfoundland, significantly there is only a small midden and no burials, suggesting either seasonal occupation or occupation measured in years rather than decades. There are radiocarbon dates centring on 1000 AD. Whether any folk memories of these voyages survived to circulate in maritime communities in Western Europe is

open to conjecture. It is also quite possible that whalers from the Basque Country of France and Spain had reached the western side of the Atlantic by this time. Thus, when John Cabot secured backing in Bristol for his approach to King Henry VII for a royal licence to sail to Newfoundland in 1497, he was not venturing into the complete unknown and his Bristol backers were confident of his success. Cabot's reports to the king stressed the abundance of cod in Newfoundland waters. In the event, Bristol did not really follow up Cabot's initiative and for most of the sixteenth century the principal exploiters of Newfoundland's great fisheries were the French, Portuguese and Spanish. The French Wars of Religion in the second half of the century curtailed voyages from the chiefly Protestant ports of Western France and thus offered an opening for the English to become more prominent. It is sometimes said that Spanish and Portuguese (the kingdoms of Iberia had been united in a single crown in 1580) losses in the Armada was a set-back from which they never recovered but the reality is that Spanish policy favoured the development of Latin America with its precious metals over Newfoundland and its fish. However by the start of the seventeenth century the English, and Devonians in particular, were fishing in Newfoundland on an increasingly large scale.

## Update on the 'Missing Link' (Exeter Inn) Project

*Exeter Inn, Litchdon Street*

The draft article for the HLF-supported post-excavation process has been prepared and submitted to the DAS editor for inclusion in the next edition of their *Proceedings*. John Allan's pottery report concludes the pottery at the Exeter Inn was active during the period c.1500-1600, with clear differences in the types of pottery being produced (e.g. shift to the classic large panchions and tall baluster jars in the later period). He has devised a new type series for the period, and speculated on the apotropaic\* stamps and marks on some of the pottery. David Dawson and Oliver Kent have discussed the kiln technology, and Imogen Wood the clay sourcing and processing undertaken; it looks like most of the clays are from Fremington, but some may have been sourced locally. We await the anonymous reviewer's comments with interest!

\*Apotropaic – *warding off evil*

## Upcoming Events

### Archaeology Week

This year the annual Festival of Archaeology takes place between 15<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July. At the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon the newly appointed Finds Officer for Devon, Will Partridge will be hosting a finds day on 29<sup>th</sup> July. If you have objects that you've picked up on a walk, found in the garden or the attic, metal detected, had handed down or whatever and would like to know more about them, this will be the time to bring them along to the museum and have an expert cast an eye over them. The exact date will be announced nearer the time.

### Days Out

It's some years since we last organised a Society visit. We are now offering two, both in September.

#### Visit to Fairlinch Farm, Braunton

We have arranged a visit for NDAS members and friends to the historic farmhouse at Fairlinch near Braunton on **Saturday 9th September**. The visit will start at 2pm and will end with tea and cake. Fairlinch is a Grade II\* listed C17 farmhouse with particularly fine plasterwork ceilings and interesting features. NDAS last visited it about 10 years ago and the farmer, Richard Dyer, has kindly agreed to host this visit. Richard's family has a long association with Braunton and with Braunton Marsh in particular. It promises to be an interesting visit as Richard will no doubt tell us about running a family farm and grazing the Marsh, as well as the history of the house. There will be a small charge of £5 per head payable on the day.

#### Guided Walk at Clovelly Dykes

The tenants of East Dyke Farm, Clovelly have kindly given us permission to take a guided walk over Clovelly Dykes. This will be on the afternoon of **Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September**, meeting at 2.00 pm at the farm. A number of members will have done this before, but there must be newer members of NDAS who have not had the opportunity to see behind the hedgerows and marvel at this truly impressive ancient monument. There is no charge, but be aware that you will be walking on rough ground, so suitable footwear is highly recommended.

**If you wish to take advantage of either or both of these offers, please let NDAS Secretaries Nigel and Rosemary Dymond know by email or by phone (contact details above). Directions will be provided nearer the time.**

## **The Winter Programme of Talks** (so far!)

The winter talks will, as always, take place on the third Tuesday in the month, viz: 17 October 2017, 21 November 2017, 16 January 2018, 20 February 2018, 20 March 2018 (AGM), 17 April 2018.

As it stands right now, the first talk of the season will be by Ross Dean on geophysical survey with reference to sites that we know. The final talk in April will be Bryn Morris (South West Archaeology) on excavations behind the Luttrell Arms at Dunster. There will also be a talk by Paul Cooke (AC Archaeology) on excavating an Iron Age site at Tews Lane, Bickington. No date as yet. Shirley Blaylock of Exmoor National Park has agreed to give a talk, subject yet to be determined. More definite information will follow in due course.

*Compiled and edited by Terry Green.*