



## Newsletter Spring 2015

### **The NDAS AGM, March 2015:**

At the annual general meeting of the society held in March 2015 Linda Blanchard was elected to lead the Society for the year 2015-16. We thank Linda for accepting the role once again and look forward to another year under her chairmanship. Alison Mills was re-elected as Vice-Chair, John Bradbeer as Secretary and Bob Shrigley as Treasurer and Membership Secretary. Chris Preece was proposed and elected as a new Committee member. The NDAS Committee now comprises:

Linda Blanchard (Chair), Alison Mills (Vice-Chair), John Bradbeer (Secretary), Bob Shrigley (Treasurer and Membership Secretary), Pat Hudson (Publicity), Terry Green (Newsletter), Adam Bradford (Barnstaple Town Council), Derry Bryant, Brian Fox, Lance Hosegood, Colin Humphreys (South West Archaeology), Jonathan Lomas, Sarah McRae, Stephen Pitcher, Chris Preece.

Your main contacts are:

Linda Blanchard: blanchard.linda@live.co.uk 01598 763490

John Bradbeer: johnbradbeer@btinternet.com 01237 422358

Bob Shrigley: rvs1120@gmail.com 01237 478122

### ***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.*

### **Little Potheridge:**

The last two seasons of excavation on the clay-pipe manufacturing site at Little Potheridge (Merton) have produced vast numbers of pipe fragments, and a lot of extra questions, but as yet no kiln. However, materials that have come out of the excavations are identified as deriving from a kiln, so it can't be too far away. This season's excavation, 30<sup>th</sup> May to 14<sup>th</sup> June, will be the last and will try once more to locate the kiln. An interim report will appear in the autumn newsletter 2015.

### **Berry Castle:**

There are a number of 'Berry Castles' to be found on the Ordnance Survey map. Commonly these are hilltop enclosures described by Saxon settlers as a 'byrig' and seen by 19th century cartographers as 'castles' This one is in a wood near Huntshaw (at SS495223), and comprises an elongated



*Surveying Berry Castle*

rectangular enclosure on a spur overlooking a river valley. Technically, this is a univallate hilltop enclosure. The low banks and accompanying ditches can be clearly seen and followed through the plantation woodland. At what appears to be the entrance the topography of the low banks suggests a not too elaborate 'hornwork'. This is an arrangement of interlocking banks which would prevent anyone approaching the entrance directly, the purpose being to enable occupants to monitor the approach of visitors. In this way it echoes the lay-out of much more

formidable 'hillforts' further east, and is strongly suggestive of an Iron Age origin.

As is so often the case, trees planted on the site have the potential to cause great damage, either through root action, through storm damage or in the process of felling. For this reason a group of local people have formed a 'Friends of Berry Castle' group and, with the backing of Clinton Devon Estates who own the land, plan to carry out brush clearance and archaeological research. A permit from Historic England is being sought to carry out ground penetrating radar as this is a scheduled ancient monument. Friends of Berry Castle have approached NDAS for support and it has been agreed that the Friends should become a group member of NDAS and should be represented at NDAS Committee meetings.

This project has arisen out of research conducted in 2012 and following an appeal from the Oxford Institute of Archaeology for local groups to visit and record hillforts in their area. A positive response in our area is especially welcome, since we have numbers of modest hilltop enclosures that tend to be lumped together as 'hillforts', but are not in the same league as the major players such as Maiden Castle or, in Devon, Hembury hillfort near Honiton. Being modest in scale, they don't draw the attention that the major sites enjoy, but are an important element of the late prehistoric landscape of Devon and need to be better understood. So thank you to FOB for taking on at least one of them!

*The FOB group acknowledge permissive rights granted by Clinton Devon Estates.*

### **The Longstone Landscape Project:**

This project is now in its second year and has notched up numerous achievements. Geophysical survey of 'Chanter's Barrow' (the one that was excavated by Rev. Chanter in 1913) last year was especially informative, revealing a stone kerb and the suggestion of undisturbed archaeology. Two more barrows, the Longstone Barrow and barrow 10 of the Chapman Barrows group together with a barrow and rectangular enclosure at the west end of the moor (Homer Common) were surveyed in April by GSB with the assistance of local volunteers. The results have yet to be analysed but preliminary indications suggested that Longstone Barrow and the Homer Common Barrow have a stone kerb, but not barrow 10. Barrow 10 was a puzzle giving very confused results and we await explanations. The Homer Common enclosure appears to be rectangular with rounded corners, constructed in stone with an "entrance". It could be post medieval related to livestock farming. There appear to be enclosures and clear track-ways leading to the area some of which are still in use. All the survey methods used worked well and gave very good "pictures" – magnetometry, resistivity, ground penetrating radar and the topographical survey.

Less successful has been the search for flints in the areas around springheads. Not a great deal has turned up, but as this is not ploughland and finds are dependent on surface erosion, this is not surprising.



*The very well built and maintained cornditch defining the northern edge of the field-system*  
(Photo: Keith Denby)

between principally natural boundaries plus one very well built cornditch amounts to a little more than 30 acres. In addition, certain strong internal cornditch-style boundaries divide the area in two, i.e. into two half virgates, which would correspond to one for the lord and one for the three villagers as implied by the Domesday record. Moreover, as was pointed out in last autumn's newsletter, the field boundaries at Radworthy are not typical Devon hedge-banks. Apart from the very well built cornditch on the north side of the enclosure and the major internal division, most of the field boundaries are low balks reminiscent of the landsheds of Braunton Great Field. It is as if Radworthy was never subject to the pressures that encouraged the building of strong hedge-banks and maintains its early medieval boundaries. In fact it looks very much as if Radworthy has changed very little since it was recorded in 1086. If this were a medieval desertion that would not be surprising, but Radworthy was not abandoned until the 1860s, in which case the degree of preservation is remarkable. The next step in this part of the Longstone Landscape Project is to produce a drawn survey of the remains of the house which was abandoned in the 1860s. In addition we need to do a geophysical survey of two possible building platforms. This may not be until next year now, as in the summer the bracken growth makes access difficult.

The boundary survey of the deserted settlement and field-system at Radworthy (Challacombe) has produced interesting results. This is the first time that this remotely located settlement has been systematically examined in tandem with the documentary record. The earliest documentary record is the Domesday Book of 1086. Although there is some doubt that the Radworthy listed there among the land of William of Poilley is the Challacombe Radworthy (there are at least two others in Devon), the acreage recorded in Domesday presents a persuasive argument for

its identity. The area of Radworthy is taxed as one virgate with half a virgate in lordship. A virgate was a taxable unit amounting to *about* 30 acres, and the land enclosed at Radworthy



*Remnants of the house and barn abandoned in the 1860s* (Photo: Keith Denby)

### **The North Devon Record Office, North Devon Athenaeum and Local Studies Library:**

The fate of these valuable resources remains unresolved. As a result of local government cut-backs, the decision of Devon County Council to move its officers out of the Barnstaple Civic Centre and the inception of the South West Heritage Trust, it is certain that a large proportion of the records currently held in North Devon will be removed to Exeter. It is also certain that the Athenaeum and the Local Studies collection will move from the second floor to the first floor of Barnstaple library. The timetable is still in the balance at the time of writing. Whenever the move comes about, it is certain that researchers will still have access to materials held by the North Devon Athenaeum, but access to the remaining Record Office records will be dependent on the presence of a qualified archivist. One potential 'spoiler' is the fact that the new arrangements will need a 'plant room' (for environmental control) and there is a proposal to build this on the library staff car park. This happens to be where the remains of further 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century pottery kilns are almost certainly located. Any holes dug on the site are bound to disturb sensitive and important archaeology. Proper investigation is essential. Watch this space!!

### **The Grey Literature:**

Last autumn we told you that the Society was minded to respond to Andrew Selkirk's suggestion that local societies should delve into the so-called 'grey literature' (unpublished archaeological reports) that can be accessed through the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) on the web. Steve Pitcher and John Bradbeer have taken this on board and have compiled a list of reports relevant to North Devon and to Torrington and have produced a digest of what they have found. So far Steve and John have worked through the reports for 2013 and 2014 and plan to work on backwards through previous years. The results of their research will in time be posted on the NDAS website. This is a time-consuming, but worthwhile task. The Society owes thanks to Steve and John for their efforts.

### **The A-Z:**

Last autumn we reported with regret that progress with this project had been slower than we had at first planned. We are happy to report that, apart from a couple of photographs, the text is now complete and ready for the next move towards publication. We are also happy to report that, through the efforts of John Bradbeer, we have been able to secure funding to the tune of £3250. For this we have to thank the Barnstaple Bridge Trust (£1000), the Bideford Bridge Trust (£1200), the Fullbrook Community Interest Company (£800) and Lyn Financial Services (£250).

The book is now to receive the title 'The Heritage Handbook', described as 'an A-Z guide to the archaeology and landscape history of Northern Devon'. We reckon to retail it at a price of £12.50 with a discounted price to NDAS members of £10. It *should* be ready for the early autumn.

### **Churchyard Yews:**

In the process of compiling the Heritage Handbook and trying to find a subject to place under Y, we happened upon the matter of churchyard yew trees. It came to our attention at Shirwell where there are two massive yews in the churchyard which have been assigned an age of around 1500 years. This makes them very interesting from an archaeological point of view, since it raises questions about the age of the church and the topographic and cultural significance of yew trees.



One of two ancient yews at Shirwell.

In fact we realised that there is no complete list of churchyards with yew trees, nor how many yew trees there are in churchyards. The diocese of Exeter has a list containing some of the ancient and veteran yew trees, but this is probably not complete and it ignores yew trees of lesser age. It seems an obvious longish term project for the society to attempt to compile a list of all yew trees in churchyards in North Devon and Torridge Districts and to record a few basic details about each tree, such as its location, its approximate girth and, where the information is available, its apparent age.

John Bradbeer is prepared to further this project and writes:

*I shall try to produce and test a recording sheet for such a project and liaise with Dr Bob Hodgson, who is the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's plant recorder for Vice-County 4 (northern Devon) so that both archaeological and botanical interests are served by our efforts. I would envisage the project commencing sometime in July 2015 and probably running until at least the end of 2016. If anyone would like to participate, even on a very casual basis, please contact me and I'll send you further details and a copy of the recording sheet. It might also help if you could indicate which parish churches you might like to visit. I know that few NDAS members live SW of Bideford and probably not many are regularly in the Holsworthy and Halwill areas. I am probably one of those who do get down that way and I'll take on the task of visiting the Tamar and Carey valley parishes.*

## Upcoming Events:

### Longstone Landscape Project

#### Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in the landscape, 6<sup>th</sup> June:

The Longstone Landscape members are organising a day with Henrietta Quinnell 'Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in the Landscape - background to the Longstone Landscape Project', on **Saturday 6th June**. Meet at 10.30am at Parracombe Village Hall. The morning will start with an indoor introductory session with Henrietta, followed by lunch (please bring a packed lunch). In the afternoon we will go up to the moor to visit some of the Neolithic and Bronze Age sites that we have been looking at during our project. Please bring suitable footwear and wet weather gear.

We are very fortunate to have Henrietta with us for the day. Henrietta has worked in archaeology all her life, mainly in South West Britain. Based in Exeter she was a lecturer in archaeology for Exeter University Adult Education Department 1970 -1999, and still enjoys voluntary training work with local groups. She has excavated a range of sites in Devon and Cornwall, especially barrows; these include the most recent Exmoor site in that class to be excavated, at Shallowmead. She now works as a consultant on prehistoric pottery from South West Britain on which she is the recognised expert, but maintains her long term interest in Bronze Age and ceremonial sites. She also works with lithics. She is currently a Vice President and Trustee of both the Devon and Cornwall Archaeological Societies.

This is a free course and everyone is welcome. For more information and to let us know if you are joining us, please contact Julia Holtom- 01598 763295. Email: [julia.holtom@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:julia.holtom@yahoo.co.uk)

### **Lithics Recording Workshop, 20th June:**

This is a reminder to members that we have organised a Lithics Recording Workshop day with Henrietta Quinnell (Exeter University) on Saturday 20th June at South Molton Assembly Rooms from 11.00 – 4.00 pm (in the Old Assembly Room). Please arrive at 10.30am for an 11.00am start. There will be a lunch break of about 45 minutes.

Henrietta will be assisted by Trev and Sue Dymond who have been working together with her in a Devon Archaeological Society lithics group towards the publication of lithics from the Tiverton area and have been developing digital recording systems. The lithics to be examined during the day are from the new collection recently found at Huish, near Merton, i.e. in the Petrockstowe Basin, by Phil Collins and Dave Locke.

This is a follow-on from the flint recognition day held a couple of years ago but open to newcomers. It will include an introductory/reminder session on the recognition of worked flints, followed by a more in-depth session on how to record the lithics found on walks/excavations.

If you have a copy of C Butler Prehistoric Flintwork (Tempus 2005) please bring this along. Bring a laptop if you like, preferably charged up.

Places are limited but we still have some spaces. There is a small charge of £6.50 for the day to cover the cost of the hall, refreshments, etc. Bring your own lunch, although there are many places to eat in South Molton town centre.

Parking: Park in the Cattle Market car park to the rear of the Assembly rooms and walk through the Saturday market. There is a lift up to the Old Assembly Room, located just behind the vegetable stall on the market. Or else access via Broad Street, by the museum. We are on the first floor.

*If you would like to attend, please let Derry Bryant know on 01769 572963 (email [derrybryant@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:derrybryant@tiscali.co.uk)) and send a cheque for £6.50 payable to NDAS, to Bob Shrigley, Treasurer, 20 Skern Way, Northam, Bideford 39 1HZ by 14th June.*

### **Festival of Archaeology North Devon Museum, 25th July:**

NDAS will be promoting archaeology at the North Devon Museum on the 25th July as part of the British Festival of Archaeology. On a theme of "Meet the Archaeologist" members of the public will be invited to chat to professional archaeologists and volunteers and to handle artefacts. The event will be very informal and aims to raise awareness of the rich local heritage.

So far we have Devon County Council and Exmoor National Park each hoping to send a team member, Sadie Green who will talk about her trips to the US to look at collections of North Devon Pottery and some of her local finds, John Bradbeer who will be talking about coastal archaeology and others. *If you would like to help or talk about your interest please email Linda Blanchard ([blanchard.linda@devon.gov.uk](mailto:blanchard.linda@devon.gov.uk)).*

More details to follow.

TG.