



Promoting awareness of the archaeology
and history of North Devon

Newsletter Autumn 2010

First, some words of acknowledgement: During the last six months the NDAS West Yeo Project has developed apace under the guidance of Derry Bryant and Bob Shrigley, providing the kind of hands-on fieldwork experience that members enjoy and which, happily, attracts new recruits. A field-work project should ideally always be the core activity of a local archaeological society, enabling members of the local community to make a real contribution to the understanding of regional archaeology. The West Yeo Project is shaping up to fill out the history of a relatively unstudied area of Devon from pre-history up to the 20th century. We are grateful to Kate Palmer and Robert James of West Yeo Farm for their hospitality and unfailing co-operation and to the specialists who have freely given their advice. We should also extend thanks to members of Tiverton Archaeological Group (TAG) for the support they have given to the project. A report of the summer's activities is given below.

The NDAS Committee

Since the 2010 AGM the composition of the NDAS Committee has undergone some changes. Up to March publicity was in the very capable hands of Judy Parker, so following her departure from the Committee a new publicity officer was required. NDAS member Pat Hudson indicated that she was willing to take on the role and subsequently Pat was co-opted onto the Committee.

Following the resignation of Terry Green as Chairman, Malcolm Faulkner volunteered to act as Chairman *pro tem* and was accepted at the 2010 AGM. Subsequent developments have led to Malcolm giving up his temporary position, so that until the next AGM the Vice Chair, Derry Bryant will chair the meetings; the Treasurer Bob Shrigley has volunteered to stand in, should Derry be absent. Clearly the 2011 AGM will need to see the election of a new Chairman.

The Officers of the Society are currently:

Vice-Chairman: Derry Bryant (01769 572963, derrybryant@tiscali.co.uk)

Secretary: Margaret Reed (01271 325276; margaret.reed@talktalk.net)

Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Bob Shrigley (01237 478122; rvs@r6247.mail1.co.uk)

Publicity Officer: Pat Hudson (01271 863712; pathudson4@hotmail.com)

Newsletter Editor: Terry Green (01271 374429; gwyingala@talktalk.net)

The NDAS Website

The NDAS website has been ably handled by Stephen Hobbs since it was set up. He has now handed over the role of 'webmaster' to NDAS member Andy Woodcock. Andy has done some preliminary work on re-jigging the website and will soon have it up and running in a revised format. We owe thanks to Andy for taking on this task.

Members are welcome to make interesting contributions to the website – send material to Andy, archways@hotmail.co.uk

The NDAS Winter Programme 2010-11

All talks will take place at the Castle Centre, Castle Street, Barnstaple starting at 7.30pm. Free to members, visitors £2.50.

19 October 2010: *Exmoor & Empire: the Context of Roman Iron Production on Exmoor:*
Lee Bray (South West Archaeology)

23 November 2010: *Burnt Offerings and Loose Change: Recent Work in Roman Cullompton*
Bryn Morris (South West Archaeology)

8 December 2010: The NDAS Annual Dinner (Details below)

18 January 2011: *From Cob to Concrete - Journey through the Geology of Building Materials*
Paul Madgett (Retired professional geologist)

15 February 2011: *An Introduction to Identifying North Devon Pottery* (using finds from the West Yeo Project)
John Allan, Exeter Archaeology

15 March 2011: Annual General Meeting, Castle Centre 7.00 pm.

19 April 2011: *Where have all the Q pits gone? Lead smelting in the Mendips*
Barry Lane, CBA (South West)

The NDAS Annual Dinner, Wednesday 8th December 2010:

The annual dinner will again be held at the George Hotel, South Molton. Once again there is an excellent menu, and last year we enjoyed a festive and enjoyable evening. Arrival time 7pm, for 7.30pm sit down. Cost: £19.00 for 2 courses, or £23.95 for 3 courses.

If you would like to attend the dinner, please let Derry Bryant know (01769 572963, email derrybryant@tiscali.co.uk) and she will send you a copy of the menu. Choices need to be made in advance and sent to Derry by phone or email by **13th November**. Please let Derry know if you have any special dietary requirements. A cheque for the appropriate payment should be sent to Bob Shrigley (20 Skern Way, Northam EX39 1HZ) by **20th November**. Looking forward to pulling a cracker with you!

Holworthy Farm:

It is with great pleasure and relief that we can announce that the full academic report of the NDAS excavations at Holworthy Farm, Parracombe (2002-5) is now published in the *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society* 2009 (Vol.67). In terms of North Devon and Exmoor this is ground-breaking work. Now all that remains is to archive all the paperwork and finally move on!

Castle Hill, Filleigh

You will have received messages by email passing on a request from Exeter Archaeology for assistance with clearing the site of the 18th century 'temple' at Castle Hill, Filleigh. Briefly, this ruined building represents the remains of a prominent feature built into the landscape when the parkland at Castle Hill was redesigned around 1770. It was intended as a banqueting hall, but was never completed. In the 19th century it was converted into two workers' cottages, but in 1902 was destroyed by a fire. It is now a ruin, but is nevertheless Grade II listed. In order to prevent further decay, Natural England is funding repairs as well as archaeological work to investigate the details of the original neo-classical building. Volunteers would help with clearing the site and

digging out fallen stonework. A small number of NDAS members have volunteered to help on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you think you might like to help, let Derry (01769 572963) or Terry (01271 374429) know.

North Devon Pottery in the Museum:

Many of you will know that as a result of excavations in Barnstaple during the 1970s and 80s, huge quantities of medieval and post-medieval North Devon pottery were recovered. The material has been sitting in the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon awaiting sorting and proper study for far too long. Current efforts by David Jemmett to create an inventory of the hundreds of boxes stored in the Museum therefore represent a long overdue and welcome move in the right direction.

David needs help! At present he is looking for volunteer assistance from NDAS members on one day a month up to Christmas, namely 26th October, 23rd November and 21st December – all Tuesdays. This project could last a couple of years, but for the moment if you can help on these dates, please either email David at medievalpotman@yahoo.co.uk or phone the Museum (01271 346747) and leave a message for Alison Mills.

An Invitation:

If you weren't able to come to the joint NDAS/AONB day of talks (Time and Tide) at the Landmark Theatre last autumn, you will have missed hearing Richard Bass speak about the role that the North Devon coast played in the preparations for D-Day. At 7.30pm on the 4th November at the Castle Centre he will be talking on the subject to the Exmoor Society (Barnstaple). NDAS members are invited to attend as guests at a cost of £2. Richard is well worth listening to.

WEST YEO 2010:

1. SUMMARY OF THE YEAR'S WORK

March 2010 : 2 days topographic survey and recording of the causeway. Succeeded in creating both a profile drawing and plan drawing. Followed by fieldwalking of New Close. Successful collection of Mesolithic flints including some large chert flakes. Flintwork ongoing (distribution plotting, flint numbering etc)

April 2010: Geophysical survey of Pond Meadow to the South of the farmhouse, using earth resistance machine, over 5 days. Locating the old barn, looking for the row of cottages shown on the tithe map

Also surveyed platform area opposite quarry, interesting result of possible old building being cut across by a curved "wall" feature. Possibly a stone faced bank (described by F.Woollacott during oral interview).

May 2010: Oral history recorded interview with previous farmer Fred Woollacott and local historian John Usmar, who worked on the farm in the 1960s. Thanks to Exmoor National Park Archaeology Dept for the loan of the digital recording equipment and for training/advice on the use of the equipment.

July 2010: Two week evaluation excavation in garden to rear of the farmhouse.

Aim:

- to investigate/locate a possible "wall" feature visible on early maps
- to obtain dating evidence for the original farmhouse shown on the tithe map (burned down in the late 1870s.)

Hand-held gradiometry training:

We received one day of training from Barry Lane of CBA (South West) on a hand-held gradiometry machine, as an alternative method of geophysical survey. We are very grateful to Barry for coming from Somerset to teach us and explain the different technology. We set out a 20m² grid over our original grid used for earth resistance survey, opposite the quarry, so we could compare results afterwards. Members present all had a go at using the machine, with which you walk at a steady pace to coincide with bleeps from the machine and markers on grid tapes. We achieved 5 sets of results as 5 different people walked the grid. We used the laptop computer onsite to download images in the field and used Snuffler software to try and interpret results. Initial results show some correspondence to the results from earth resistance, but need to be studied further and in more detail.

The equipment was returned to Barry in Wells, but we can borrow it again if required in future. There is a waiting list, as several Societies are finding it useful for surveying.

August 2010: Completion of fieldwalk in Long Park (begun October 2009). Large quantities of flint waste, some medieval pottery.

2. THE EXCAVATION IN THE GARDEN, JULY 2010:

During two weeks of July, three evaluation trenches were dug:

Trench 1:

This was set out southwards from a previously exposed cobbled surface as far as the garden fence: Excavation revealed that the earlier garden wall (E-W) had been “robbed out”, leaving a ditch of soft dark soil with some bricks remaining. The trench exposed part of an area of compacted clay with an area of packed small stones towards one end, and some possible post holes. However, material from this area proved to be fairly modern. Potentially older finds included a possible stone gaming piece, and a very small rubbing stone. An extension eastwards showed the same subsoil features and continuation of the robbed out wall. It would be useful to extend investigation of the former garden wall to locate any earlier footings.



Brian and Bob working on trench 1; cobbled area to the left.

Trench 2:

A 2m² box section was set out beside the garden fence on the “corner” of a visible bump in the ground. This trench was extended both to the north and to the south, and a sondage was sunk in the NW corner of the original square. The south extension revealed the concrete pillar base of a modern garden wall. Under the topsoil a hard layer of clay was exposed, at first resembling a platform or floor, but excavation of this revealed “modern” pottery, glass etc. However, to the south and east of the hard clay, softer soil produced large amounts of pottery, mainly typical post-medieval North Devon ware, thick glazed pot, some with slip decoration, together with a lot of heavy black/dark green bottle glass. Examples of tin glaze, lead glaze, manganese/iron glaze, some thick rims, also finer glazed pot with crimped edges. Also lumps of orange clay daub. Suggestion: this may be part of a midden?



The wall footing revealed in Trench 2

The sondage in the NW corner of the trench was taken down to establish the “natural”. Below a layer of ash and burned soil (probably corresponding to the evidence of recent burning seen elsewhere – see below) and another layer of soft dark soil large stones began to appear. The sondage was extended into a box section to reveal a short length of coursed unbonded stonework apparently representing the footings of a wall leading off in the direction of the meadow to the south.

Typically the wall was found on the penultimate day of the excavation! It was recorded by plan and section drawings and photographed. The stonework seems to run on the line of the boundary shown in this location on the title map. Also found just above and below the stones were some small sherds of medieval pot (very coarse, orange coloured, heavily tempered) – probably 13th-15th century. It is hoped to revisit this spot for further excavation.

Northward Extension of T2:

Here we found just beneath the turf evidence of a large bonfire. The area had been used as a tip, perhaps when the old outbuildings were demolished in the 1960s. Finds included an old tin bath, a First World War gas mask, a lot of metal, a small flat-iron etc. Excavation was not continued beneath the burnt layer due to lack of time..

Trench 3:

A 2m² box section was opened across an evident ‘bump’ running north-south, in line with the cobbled area already exposed. The aim was to try and locate the boundary wall, and to see if the cobbled surface extended any further eastwards.

This trench quickly exposed an area of the same bonfire as in T2, the soil being very black and ashy. Finds included some nice ash glazed pot and a lot of scorched metal (modern). A sondage was sunk in the South West corner and taken down to look for the cobbled layer or “natural”. There was no sign of the cobbles. The natural appears to be orange/light red clayover gravel.

At the end of the fortnight Trenches 1 and 2 were covered with terram (breathable membrane) so they can be revisited if required, and were kindly filled in afterwards by the owners, Kate and Robert, which saved us a lot of work.

General:

Over the course of 11 days, we had 28 helpers, some “old hands”, 4 members from Tiverton Archaeology Group, and some newcomers completely new to archaeology. Ages ranged from 11 years to 84! The middle weekend included Open Days as part of the Festival of British Archaeology, when the owner Kate led guided walks and provided cream teas.

Some metal-detecting was carried out in Pond Meadow and in the garden. The field yielded some small lead lumps with holes (for holding down roof tiles?) and some horse furnishings (Chapple of Dulverton), one Victorian penny, bits of farm equipment, eg. scythe, chain, harness rings etc.

A lot of North Devon domestic pottery was found, mostly in Trench 2, perhaps from a midden. There was also a lot of bottle glass, some clay pipes (1 identified as made by John Seldon of Barnstaple, 1857-1865 (ref. C.Preece, NDAS newsletter spring 2005)). A lot of black glazed roof tile was found, also a substantial amount of red clay floor tiles. Building material such as plaster (T1), window fittings(T1), daub (T2) would indicate the presence of an old building. Finds were washed and recorded on site and this continued at the home of Derry Bryant. Thanks to June Aiken for coming to help sort pottery and finds!

Thanks to everyone who took part, to Bob Shrigley for his untiring efforts in helping to organise the excavation and providing an excellent drawing frame out of steel mesh! Also to Brian Fox for being joint supervisor, helping out with surveying levels and doing a lot of the plan drawing. To Terry Green for providing expert advice and finally helping to discover the wall. Mostly of course, to Kate and Robert for allowing us to dig up their back garden and for their kind hospitality.

We are grateful too to Helena and Peter Jaeschke, who examined the gas mask for identification purposes and gave us advice on treatment.

As our first excavation for several years, it was a great opportunity for training new members in trowelling techniques, mattocking, the use of context sheets, drawing and recording and surveying using the dumpy level. As always, it was a pleasure to be in the company of like-minded folk who enjoy the fresh air!

3 FIELDWALKING IN LONG PARK 28-30 AUGUST 2010

We returned to Long Park to try and complete the fieldwalk started in October 2009. We had two good days of weather, but the middle day was ghastly, with intermittent heavy showers. We had about 10 members walking each day, so were able to cover 28 grids, and completed the field, which was a brilliant achievement. It was good to be joined by a new member, Rebecca, plus our colleagues from Tiverton Archaeology Group again, and a member of the public from Witheridge.

It was our last opportunity to visit the field in a ploughed condition as it will now be grassed and left for the next three years. We collected lots more flints, which are being washed and recorded in the usual manner and will be added to those already listed for the field, and compared with previous flint finds. In addition to more Mesolithic blades, we have some possible Neolithic leaf shaped arrowheads, and some cores. Early indications are that the flint has come from various sources, including white flint (porcelain in appearance), Haldon being the most likely source (ref. DAS Proceedings No. 60 2002 John Newberry). Terry found an unusual lustrous red/amber flint scraper, possibly from the Orleigh Court source near Bideford. Some chert was also found.



Volunteers old and new: From the left: Terry, Bob, Lance, Fiona, Paul, Diana and, in the front row, volunteer dog Molly.

Ann Plummer has kindly offered to look over this collection when she has recovered from her recent illness.

There was only a small amount of pottery, which includes several small sherds of 13th – 15th century pottery similar to that found during the July excavation.

Thanks to all who took part. Our next fieldwalking opportunity will be in March 2011 when we hope to complete New Close and start on Mead 2, the large field to the south of the farmhouse.

Derry Bryant

Tailpiece:

Finally, you may like to know or may already know that there once stood in Rock Park, Barnstaple a Discobolus. This is a copy of a now lost Greek bronze of the 5th century BC depicting a discus thrower. The statue was commissioned in the 19th century by William Frederick Rock, was designed by William Baron and made in terra cotta by Brannams pottery. It stood at the edge of the sports field representing the spirit of sport. Over the years it became damaged and was taken down in the 1960s and apparently buried. Graham Avery, citizen of Barnstaple, is keen to see the statue recovered from the ground and would welcome support from NDAS members. If you think you might be interested in helping (preferably, but not necessarily having some experience of digging) – should the necessary permission be granted – then please let Alison Mills know at the Museum (01271 346747).

And Finally Finally...

We have received via Linda Blanchard of North Devon AONB the following appeal from Julian Gurney of the National Trust

Watersmeet Valley and the Lynrock Bridge
Bovril Outdoor Revival website <http://www.bovril.co.uk/revival/>

Some of you will be aware that the Lynrock Bridge in the Watersmeet valley was struck by a falling tree last Year and damaged beyond repair. This is an important pedestrian route across the East Lyn River and is used by many of our visitors to Exmoor as well as local people.

Because it is on a permitted right of way there is little chance of replacing it using grants and money normal for definitive rights of way, I estimate a replacement will cost £20,000 - £25,000!

Please can I ask you all to go to the link below and visit the Bovril Outdoor Revival website; there you can vote for one of 75 projects countrywide. I would be hugely grateful if you could vote for Watersmeet which is currently 3rd on the list.

There is a long time to go before voting finishes in the New Year, if we drop out of the top five visible options the post code to use in the search engine is EX35.

Please do vote and forward this to your friends, relatives and colleagues so they can do the same. <http://www.bovril.co.uk/revival/>

Many thanks. Julian Gurney

Newsletter Editor: Terry Green