



Promoting awareness of the archaeology
and history of North Devon

Newsletter Spring 2012

The AGM, March 2012:

We had a successful AGM evening in March. With a departure from the traditional programme of business meeting followed by socialising: this year we brought in a speaker. Unfortunately Tom Cadbury, who was to talk on Ice Age Devon and Early Humans had to cancel, but the gap was filled with an excellent talk by Bryn Morris from South West Archaeology on the excavations behind the Exeter Inn in Litchdon Street, Barnstaple. He was assisted by Alison Mills, Ollie Kent and David Dawson, explaining the significance of the 16th century kiln waste found during the excavations. Thanks to all for standing in with an excellent lecture at short notice.

Changes following the AGM:

Our previous secretary Margaret Reed, has stood down. We thank her for her valuable work as secretary (and for previously stepping into the breach as Treasurer and Membership Secretary) during the last several years. Margaret is remaining with us as a much valued member of the Society and continues to open the hall for meetings!

We are very pleased to welcome our new secretary Mandy Jones, who is beginning studies in archaeology and we wish her well in her new post. We also welcome two new members onto the Committee: Brian Fox and Steve Pitcher. Thanks to all for volunteering. The NDAS general committee now comprises:

Chair: Derry Bryant; **Vice-Chair:** Alison Mills; **Secretary:** Mandy Jones; **Treasurer and Membership Secretary:** Bob Shrigley.

Other Committee Members: June Aiken, John Bradbeer, Adam Bradford, Brian Fox, Terry Green, Lance Hosegood, Pat Hudson, Jonathan Lomas, Steve Pitcher

The NDAS Constitution:

The draft amended constitution which members will have received before the AGM was put to the vote and was accepted by the membership.

Progress at West Yeo:

Fieldwalking in March

Over 4 days in March members completed fieldwalking "Mead 2", the third and last field targeted. Finds included mesolithic flint bladelets, microliths, cores, and a fabricator as well as some small tools such as piercers/awls. Best of all was a beautiful neolithic transverse arrowhead found by Brian Fox – see photograph. Very little pottery was found, mostly 19th Century, suggesting that this field was only ploughed quite late in the farm's history, having previously been permanent pasture or unenclosed moor. Some quartz pieces were also picked up; research and recording of all the finds is ongoing.



Field walkers in Mead 2, March 2012



*Transverse arrowhead
found by Brian Fox*

Excavation 14-20 April:

Our intrepid team included several new members and a student, and in 3 days of glorious sunshine we cleaned up trench 4 in the garden and picked up where we left off last summer. The hard clay surface across the top of the trench (N) is evidently the surface of the natural orange clay, which may have been a working surface at some stage. Within it were some small stakeholes, but most prominent was a stone-lined drain feature running diagonally NW-SE and terminating in a stony wet patch in the SE corner of the trench – possibly a soak-away? Unstratified finds included sherds of thin sandy textured pottery, a small mesolithic bladelet and a flint core found in the softer wet soil. The small stone structure in the SW corner was cleaned and soft fill removed from behind it to reveal a layer of thin flat “paving stones”. The structure may have been attached to the walls found in trench 5 in the meadow.



*T4 view to NW showing the drain and
'soakaway' together with the 'privy'*



*Brian and Amelia recording the wall in
T5 on the last day.*

Excavation in the last few (wet) days in trench 5 was devoted to the area north of the east-west retaining wall. Removal of the very clean fill behind the wall revealed at the base of the wall a broad band of tightly packed rubble stone sitting in a shallow foundation trench cut into the natural clay. This was clearly the remains of a very substantial wall or perhaps revetment – there was no sign of a face on the north side. Whether or not this wall was tied in with the length of free-standing N-S wall previously excavated was not clear, but the two structures clearly form a right-angle enclosing what appears to be a stone-flagged floor with drains. The simplest conclusion is that we are seeing here the corner of a substantial building. To the north of the right angled junction of the two walls, a short length of coursed stone ran into the N section, heading towards the small and enigmatic stone structure in T4.

Unfortunately there is a baulk between the two trenches, holding the modern fence. It appears that the two structures are related but the small stone structure may be a later addition . Suggestion: could this be a later privy?

There is no record of a building at this location on the tithe map, though it appears that something was here and visible in the early to mid-19th century. It has been pointed out that the tithe surveyors did not record ruins. The absence of lime mortar suggests a very early building, and assumptions are that it could have been a dwelling turned into a barn or may conceivably have something to do with the chapel referred to in the Dean Milles Questionnaire, of the 18th century, which was “turned into an ox house and since to a dwelling house”.

During the week a small team went down to the river to put an evaluation trench across the causeway to look for evidence of metalling. This showed the centre of the causeway has a stone surface, with softer edges on either side. The causeway is shown on the tithe map as a “Bye Road”, and may have been a droveway.

We were unable to establish any further evidence without digging up the whole meadow, and have to content ourselves with what we have. Post excavation work will continue, with pottery identification and analysis. The trenches were photographed in detail and drawings completed. Results will be collated and a final report produced. Once again we were pleased that members new to archaeology were able to take part in excavating, drawing and recording.



The metalling in the centre of the causeway.

My sincere thanks go to all who have taken part in our activities at West Yeo, in whatever capacity. I hope everyone has enjoyed themselves, it has been a huge learning curve in many respects – once again I would like to thank Kate Palmer and Robert James at West Yeo Farm for their unstinting help and hospitality.

Derry Bryant

The Exeter Inn:

In November an invitation was extended to NDAS members and to the general public by South West Archaeology to join in a rescue excavation to the rear of the old Exeter Inn in Litchdon Street, Barnstaple. Previous evaluation here had revealed pits filled with pottery, apparently kiln waste with a 16th century date, a period which has represented a gap in the history of Barnstaple potteries. During November excavation of the pits was extended, and very large quantities of pottery were extracted, cleaned on site and subsequently sorted at the museum. This work is on-going and volunteers are still required. For whatever reason, rather few NDAS members have volunteered themselves so far, but the opportunity to help with this significant work still exists. If you are able to contribute some time, contact South West Archaeology on 01769 573555.

Hillsborough:

Report by Dave Edgcombe.

In 2011, the North Devon AONB, in conjunction with landowners North Devon District Council were involved in delivering a project at the Hillsborough Iron Age promontory fort overlooking Ilfracombe harbour and now a Local Nature Reserve.



View of the Hillsborough promontory fort: survey focused on the eastern (right-hand) end of the ramparts.

The project, was part of a Regional Project linked to the South West Coast Path, called “Unlocking the Coastal Heritage” and was grant supported by the Rural Development Programme England (RDPE). It involved the clearance of the Iron Age earthbanks and provision of on site interpretation through a series of information boards.

Part of this work involved undertaking an archaeological survey on site to try and understand more about this historic site. Hillsborough is recorded as a fine example of an Iron Age Promontory Hillfort, or “Cliff Castle”. However little is known about its use, or why it was constructed.

Clearly the site is linked to the historic harbour of Ilfracombe, but it is unclear whether the earthworks were constructed to form a defensive site, or were used as a status symbol, or statement of power

constructed by the local chieftain, a sort of Iron Age equivalent of Castle Drogo or Watermouth Castle.

The geophysical survey was based mainly around the lower entrance of the hillfort, but also covered a section across the earthworks, in an attempt to locate a Bronze Age Burial Cist, which was uncovered in 1937. It was undertaken by local contractor Ross Dean of Substrata and involved both survey by gradiometer and by earth resistance meter. Local volunteers recruited from the Hillsborough Volunteer group and the North Devon Archaeological Society also assisted with the survey. Work commenced in October 2011 after the site had been cleared and a report of the findings was published at the beginning of 2012. The results proved interesting, though without excavation, are currently inconclusive. Nonetheless the survey has done much to increase our knowledge of this little surveyed Scheduled Ancient Monument.



Ross Dean explaining the process to volunteers.

Firstly, the survey concluded that the banks and associated ditches were indeed constructed and that some of the banks may have been stone faced. An intensive survey of the lower gateway revealed some interesting finds, suggesting an elaborate construction, with several phases of development, including additional trackways ditches and walls. Sadly the area of search across the banks to the west, failed to locate the supposed Bronze Age Burial cist, which had been discovered after a gorse fire on Hillsborough in 1937. Photos taken by the then curator of Ilfracombe Museum, Mervyn Palmer, seemed to suggest that it was located at the base of one of the

earthen banks. The most significant find was the evidence of a roundhouse outside the entrance to the hillfort, the first indication of human habitation on the site.

As with many surveys, the results raised as many questions as it answered. There was no indication of the depth of the banks and ditches, which might have answered the question whether or not it was a defensive structure; and the survey failed to reveal why the defences apparently run out on the eastern side before

reaching the coast. Nonetheless this was a very worthwhile survey and the apparent location of an Iron Age roundhouse at the site entrance adds greatly to our knowledge of the site.

St Anne's Chapel, Barnstaple:

A report on the archaeology uncovered during building works St. Anne's Chapel by Peter Doel

Sitting in the middle of the Parish Church cemetery is Barnstaple's last surviving chantry chapel, St. Anne's. Dating to the early 14th century, it is a rare survivor. In addition to the chapel room there is an undercroft which may make it unique.

Following the Suppression of the chantries in 1547, St. Anne's became a grammar school, a place of worship for Huguenot refugees and latterly a museum.



St Anne's Chapel in the churchyard of Barnstaple parish church.

Following extensive consultations, Barnstaple Town Council decided to bring the building back into use by developing it as a community and cultural centre in the heart of the town. The project was made a reality with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Devon County Council.

It was never expected that the refurbishment would be significantly invasive. It is, perhaps, for this reason that no archaeological watching brief was attached to the planning and listed building consent. It was anticipated that some archaeological material would be encountered from contexts known to produce finds. A large assemblage had been collected in the 1980's from under ventilation covers in the chapel room floor.

This was almost exclusively Victorian and Edwardian

school room paraphernalia, pens, slate pencils, scraps of paper, marbles, sweet wrappers etc. Imagine the contents of a Victorian schoolboy's pockets and you get the picture!

Early Finds

Several floorboards were lifted to investigate the relationship between the chapel floor and the ceiling supports in the undercroft. As anticipated, the finds reflected those found in the 1980's. The relationship between the ceiling supports and the chapel floor was established with the floor joists sitting directly on top of the beam in the undercroft. With the internal scaffold in place it was possible to inspect the roof space. Amongst the rubble and dust we found some darts, constructed from folded paper squares and pen nibs. In archaeological terms, just like the finds under the floorboards, the darts came from an open context. We can never be sure of the date but the evidence that they are from the late Victorian and Edwardian school period is compelling.

Under the Plaster in the Chapel Room

The archaeology included the paint layers exposed. There was a modern top coat overlying an oil-bound distemper. Under this layer there was a green powdered distemper. Presumably the chapel was once a pale, pastel green inside. This green was found throughout, including on the ashlar surrounding the windows. It proved impractical to strip the paint from the plaster and the extent of cement render meant that it all had to

come down. This process was observed and the rubble inspected, just in case any paintings or decoration had survived; none was observed.

A series of highly regular 'voids' were uncovered in the walls. They were loosely backfilled with a matrix of rubble and mortar. All were rectangular and had substantial lintels. These were recognised as scaffolding sockets or putlog holes; the lintels went full depth of the wall, with daylight visible at the ends of many. The putlog holes were clearly in groups and the platform positions clearly discernible. Some produced finds; pottery sherds, animal bone, oyster shell, two pieces of hemp string, birds -nest material and gnawed acorns. The putlog holes were recorded in all elevations.

In the east elevation two distinct areas of loose fill were observed either side of the window. The fill of these became indistinct from the wall matrix although it was possible to suggest the extent of the features. It is suggested that at least one of these features might be an aumbry (a store for the chalice). A large fragment of a stone moulding and gnawed acorns were found in the backfill.

In the north elevation the extent of the intrusion made by the chimney breast was clear. Also, high up just below the roof plate, east of the existing window a distinct vertical straight edge was observed perhaps indicating a backfilled opening of some kind. In the south elevation a large area of disturbance was observed, roughly opposite the feature in the north elevation. The fill of this needed to be removed prior to plastering. The excavation revealed, possibly, two features. At least one plastered edge was clearly revealed. Further investigation was not possible and no finds were retrieved.

Other features exposed included a brick vault forming the entrance to the chapel behind the stone vault of the main door way. A second niche was uncovered in the east window, a mirror image of the niche in the west window dedicated to John Gay.

Other Works

The works in the 'outhouse' between the tower and the south elevation were invasive. The 'outhouse' is known to date after 1820, although the current structure is a remodelling, so it has been built on the cemetery. The ground surface was reduced within by around 0.20 metres. No features were observed other than the existing drainage. The soil below the flag floor was extremely dark and humic. This layer is certainly cemetery soil although contaminated by foul water.

Conclusion

The archaeology revealed at St. Anne's Chapel is significant. The finds from beneath the floorboards and from the eaves, despite being from open contexts, were to become hugely important to the project. The features revealed under the plaster were also significant. The finds await further investigation.

The archaeology has allowed people to connect with the building. The school room paraphernalia has allowed the voices of generations of grammar school boys to be heard. The putlog holes allow a different story to be told, one of the medieval mason and builder.

The archaeology has met with a very favourable response from the media which has raised the profile of the project as a whole and strengthened the relationship between St. Anne's, the press and the public at large.

St. Anne's Chapel hopes to reopen its doors August 11th 2012.

Peter Doel

May 2012

Merton Mysteries

Derry Bryant.

Two of our members, Philip and Dave, have pointed out some intriguing features in the locality of Merton, south west of Great Torrington. These include:

1. A field with a large scatter of worked flint – nodular and pebble, including debitage, scrapers, notched flakes, bladelets and cores. There are definitely some Mesolithic pieces, colours varying from black lustrous, to grey, toffee, pink and red. Small pieces of worked quartz have also been found.
2. Close by is another field with two large circular features which show clearly in an aerial photograph. A quick walk across the site showed two distinct areas of soft dark soil in a roughly circular pattern. There is a small river a few yards from the circles, while stones in this field (which gets very wet) are waterworn and smooth. The circular features appeared to be less stony than the surrounding ground. There is also a barrow nearby.
3. The site of an 18th century clay pipe factory and possible kiln with hundreds of clay pipe stems and bowls in the soil around the small building, which is partially overgrown. Documentary evidence shows a pipe maker John Pardon manufactured pipes there in 1761, with an apprentice. The pipes have been examined by local enthusiast, Heather, who has identified 20+ different styles, with a stamp of *IP* (for John Pardon). Heather has also carried out some experimental archaeology, making replica pipes.
4. A rectangular feature with banked sides to the west of the church at Merton, previously referred to as a “medieval fort”, but more likely the site of a moated manor house. This feature is a scheduled ancient monument.

Some questions come to mind, such as the source of the clay for the pipe making? Philip has a reference to clay from Speccott in a document from 1710. Where is the source of the flint? Petrockstowe is one of the two known sources of flint naturally occurring in North Devon, the other being Orleigh Court (plus, of course, the beaches).

NDAS may be able to carry out some surveys/investigations after obtaining relevant permissions, with the possibility of excavating the pipe factory/kiln site at some stage. Philip, who is Chairman of Merton History Group, has already carried out documentary research into all of the above. It is possible that Merton could be an interesting project for NDAS in the near future. Watch this space..

Programme of events and talks 2012-13

Summer Visit to Clovelly Dykes:

You may recall that in the newsletter of autumn 2011, there was an article on Clovelly Dykes, the most impressive prehistoric site in Devon north of Dartmoor, yet unknown to the majority of local people. This fascinating site is on private land, so that opportunities to visit it are few and are by private arrangement. For the benefit of NDAS members, we are planning (with the kind permission of East Dyke Farm) to lead a walk over the site starting at 2.30pm on Sunday 15th July. If you would like to join in, please let us know by contacting Terry Green on 01271 374429 or email gwyngala@talktalk.net. We need to know numbers by Friday 6th July. Parking is at East Dyke Farm, entrance on the right hand side of the B3237 which leads from the A39 down to Clovelly village.

Training Day: Lithics

Some years ago the late Anne and Martin Plummer led a training day on the identification of lithic (flint and chert) artefacts. On 15th September 2012 Henrietta Quinnell will lead another training day for NDAS members from 11.00 am to 4.00 pm at the Castle Centre, Barnstaple. This is the rescheduled event which was due to be held in March. There are at present a few spare places. If you would like to be included, phone Derry Bryant on 01769 572963.

Provisional Winter Programme of Talks

Tuesday 16th October: Archaeological Investigation of Hillsborough Promontory Fort: Dave Edgcombe

Tuesday 20th November: The Archaeology of some West Dartmoor Farms: Dr Tom Greaves

Tuesday 15th January: Excavations at Mine Tenement, Combe Martin: Mary Houldsworth and Patrick Moore

Tuesday 18th February: Ice Age Devon and Early Humans: Tom Cadbury

Tuesday 19th March: NDAS AGM plus talk to be announced

Tuesday 16th April: To be announced.

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 banker's order, forms available from Bob.

Two more miscellaneous items before signing off:

1. Having completed the excavations at West Yeo, we need somewhere to store the Society's digging equipment (barrows, shovels, buckets, etc.). If you have access to shed, garage or barn space in which you could offer to store the kit, we should be very grateful. Please contact Derry on 01769 572963 or Mandy on 01271860179 or Bob on 01237 478122.
2. We still have copies of our 50th anniversary publication *Bronze Age to Bottle Seals* for sale. The book is available to members at the discount price of £7.00. If you don't yet have a copy or would like one to give as a gift, please complete the order form which you will find on the NDAS website (www.ndas.org.uk). You should add £1.50 for packing and postage.

Terry Green, Editor

Note: The next newsletter will appear in October. If you have any information or a report which may be of interest to other members, please forward it to Terry Green (email: gwyn gala@talktalk.net) for inclusion in the next edition.