



Promoting awareness of the archaeology
and history of North Devon

Newsletter, Spring 2019

The NDAS AGM, March 2019:

At the 2019 Annual General Meeting on 19th March Chris Preece was confirmed as Chairman for the coming year. Alison Mills continues as Vice-Chair. Nigel and Rosemary Dymond were confirmed as joint secretariat, and Bob Shrigley will continue as Treasurer and Membership Secretary. The existing committee was re-elected. Committee members are now, in addition to the officers above, Faye Balmond (South West Archaeology), Derry Bryant, Matt Chamings (Barnstaple Town Council), Stephen George, 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:

Chris Preece: chrispreece@btinternet.com 01237 429882

Nigel and Rosemary Dymond: ndas.secretary@gmail.com 01237 478810

Bob Shrigley: rsv1120@gmail.com 01237 478122

The AGM was followed by a talk from Terry Green giving an overview of North Devon's archaeology. The talk presented the spectrum of evidence from the Mesolithic to World War Two, while pausing at intervals to raise questions about the nature of the evidence, its interpretation and its implications. Above all the aim of the presentation was to emphasise how far both we, as NDAS, and professional archaeologists have come in filling in what used to be a large North Devon and Torridge-sized gap in archaeological distribution maps.

Most prominent in that gap was always the massive earthwork known as Clovelly Dykes. Not that it was ever missing from the maps, more that it so loudly cries out for a proper examination and yet remains an enigma. Of course we're never going to fully understand any ancient monument; we can only ever arrive at a satisfying approximation. The process of gaining understanding has to have a beginning and in the case of Clovelly Dykes we have now, with last year's excavation, begun to lift the veil on a North Devon enigma. At the moment there is no certainty about any further digging, but a geophysical survey of the central area is on the cards. Let's hope that by the end of this year we shall be on the way to saying something meaningful about this important site.

The opportunity to take a close look at Clovelly Dykes as well as other coastal sites has arisen at this time principally because the North Devon Coast AONB is currently conducting a Coastal Heritage Project. The project is supported by Historic England and the National Lottery Fund. The following four contributions variously come under this umbrella. The appointed Project Officer, Joe Penfold has provided the first contribution to this newsletter.

In a Different Light: Photogrammetric survey of hillforts in the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



The hillfort at Windbury Head near Brownsham. Aerial photography helps to show the damage caused by coastal erosion and suggests the former extent of the hillfort

Many historical and archaeological remains along the North Devon Coast can still be seen today and are made accessible by Open Access arrangements and Public Rights of Way. Curiously, an unusually high concentration of these features are situated either on, or very close to the South West Coast Path. The coastal 'promontory' Iron-Age Hillforts are no exception.

However, path users could be forgiven for walking straight past these monuments without knowing they are there, subtle as the earthworks often are, and of course the splendid coastal vistas are a bit of a distraction!

Like other ancient monuments, hillforts are sometimes best appreciated from above. Whether by satellite maps, LiDAR or aerial photography it is then that their true scale and complexity are revealed. The Coastal Heritage Project recently commissioned an aerial, photogrammetric survey of five principal hillforts and defended enclosures along the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – at Embury Beacon, Windbury Head, Bucks Mills, Clovelly Dykes and Hillsborough, overlooking Ilfracombe.



Project volunteers and Adam Stanford (of Aerial Cam Ltd) making preparations for the aerial survey at Hillsborough

As the name suggests, photogrammetry involves making measurements from photographs and is in fact quite an 'old' science. However, a surge in affordable Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (or 'drones' to you and me) and sophisticated software mean that the use of photogrammetry in archaeology is increasing, delivering LiDAR-equivalent results at a fraction of the cost. Drone survey has revealed the hillforts in a different light, offering hitherto unseen perspectives.

The oblique aerial photographs that the survey generated reveal the nature and extent of coastal erosion while providing land managers with a reference for assessing the condition of the monuments and a tool to inform conservation management plans. Significantly the aerial survey produced high resolution orthophotographs and Digital Elevation Models. The resulting 3D views offer virtual access to the monuments which in some cases may be difficult for people to access physically. By their very nature almost all of the sites are in remote locations, accessed over steep terrain, or in the case of Clovelly Dykes, are on private land..

One of the aims of the Coastal Heritage Project is to make heritage more accessible and to highlight the special landscape qualities of the AONB. Work is therefore underway to incorporate the aerial imagery on various media, such as outdoor signage and digitally, via the AONB website. 3D models of the survey can be viewed via the SketchFab platform but readers should be aware that due to the file sizes a good Internet connection is required: <https://sketchfab.com/aerial-cam/collections/the-hillforts-of-the-north-devon-coast-aonb>

For viewing the 3D model use a mouse with a wheel to zoom, left click and hold to rotate and right click to move.

We would like to thank all the staff, partners and funders involved in the project; Historic England, National Trust, North Devon District Council, NDAS, Aerial Cam, Cotswold Archaeology, and of course the many volunteers who assisted with the conservation and survey work.

Two NDAS members, Derry Bryant and Sarah McRae volunteered for a condition survey of the enclosure above Bucks Mills. Sarah has provided the following report of their activities.

Bucks Mills Hillfort Project (Condition & Archaeology Surveys)

We initially joined a group of volunteers for a training day looking at Windbury Hillfort (above Brownsham cliffs) as an example of a “monument at risk” last October. With Joe Penfold, Charlotte Russell (Historic England’s Heritage At Risk Officer) and a number of National Trust staff and volunteers, we learned how to assess and report the condition of a site – from noting existing vegetation cover, erosion, features such as banks or ditches, walls, “platform” areas, unusual “lumps and bumps”, animal grazing activity, damage etc. We were also encouraged to make suggestions regarding action that could be taken for the future preservation of a site.

Back in the warmth of the Brownsham NT office, volunteers were allocated a “monument at risk” to survey – these included a wide range of sites including hillforts, old buildings, earthworks, ancient wells/springs and also a couple of shipwrecks at Westward Ho!.



January – setting out to survey

So, on a windy, cold but beautifully clear January day, Derry and I made our way up the steep path from Bucks Mills to make our initial assessment of the site, armed with cameras, clipboards and a thermos of hot coffee! The fort area itself is principally a rectangular feature of worn banks and ditches, some flat-ish platform areas and dips and hollows all on a north facing slope. Toward the western edge the fort appears to have a slightly more “pointed” end but as this area slopes dramatically into the steep woods toward Bucks Mills it is not as easily defined as the rest of the site.

After an initial walk over the site, we began working in more detail, taking photos from various points inside and outside the fort and beginning to make a sketch map of the banks, ditches, platform areas and slopes, narrow footpaths, and two small platform areas. The ground cover was fortunately very low at this point of the year (it may be a little more challenging in the summer once

the bracken and brambles have taken hold!) but luckily the site is maintained by the National Trust who regularly check and clear the fort area and ensure the SW coast path, which runs through and around the fort, is safe for the hundreds of walkers and ramblers who use it.

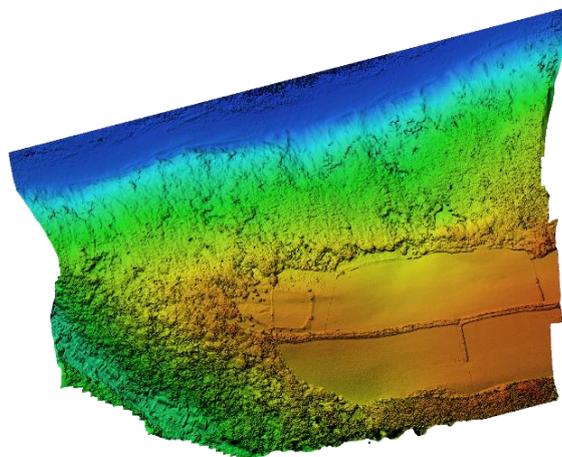
We prepared our initial report, noting that the site is well maintained (by the NT), has no visible signs of immediate damage and suggested an explanatory “information board” near to the coast path. The board could include a brief history of the site, a site plan to make the “humps and bumps” more meaningful and perhaps information on how the site is maintained. Most walkers and hikers are unaware they are passing by an ancient hillfort (if they are not looking on their OS map!) and many websites offering information on local walks mention Peppercombe Castle or Windbury Fort but fail to mention Bucks Mills.



The Bucks Mills hillfort in its landscape – view towards the surviving enclosure bank.

Since our initial report, an archaeological drone survey has produced some amazing close up and 3-D images of the site, enabling us to start to try and unravel its story and its importance.

Following the aerial survey, a more detailed “walk over” field exploration was held with assistance from Cotswold Archaeology (Zoe Arkley) along with NT staff and local volunteers. This gave us the opportunity to look more closely at the area in the woods with steep ditches and banks and a curious semi circular feature revealed by the Lidar imaging.

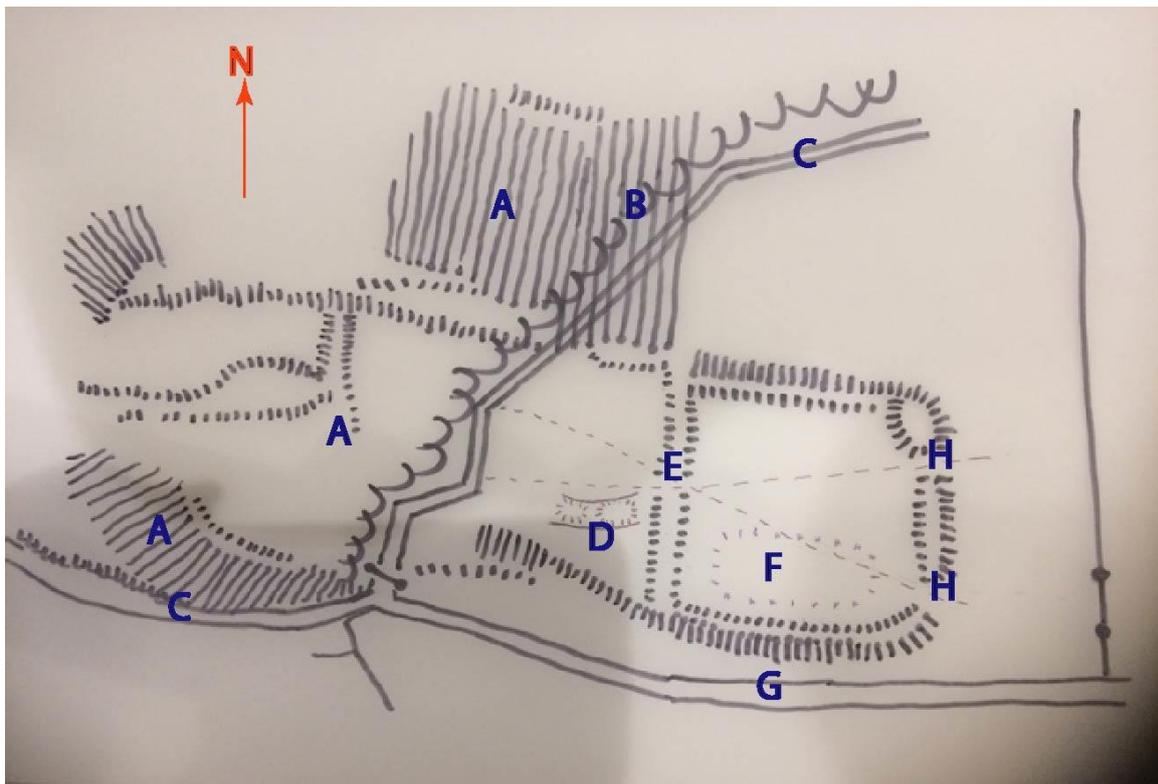


Bucks Mills enclosure. A LiDAR-equivalent Digital Elevation Model, highlighting the subtleties of the earthworks

It is still to be debated however, whether some of these deep ditches are in fact natural “slump” as the land slips over toward Bucks Mills, rather than man made features.

At the time of writing we are pleased to report that a geophysical survey is planned by Substrata and Cotswold Archaeology for 22nd May – we look forward to taking part and to find out more about this ancient site.

BUCKS MILLS ENCLOSURE General Site Plan Sketch



Key:

- A Area of site in wood
- B Tree line
- C Southwest Coast path
- D Walls and platform feature/hut?
- E North-south bank
- F Platform area
- G Green Lane
- H Entrance/Exit points? Bank worn down

Another site which is currently coming under scrutiny is the pair of medieval deer parks at Hartland. The following report is provided by Steve Hobbs and Chris Preece.

Hartland Deer Parks

Little is known about deer parks before the Norman Conquest but it is likely that they existed in some form, however basic. After 1066 however, with the Normans' taste for the chase, a considerable number of deer parks began to be constructed with a high point in the late 14th century. These were formal, enclosed areas which confined the deer and made for relatively easy hunting!

A report by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust gives a succinct summary of the form they took:

Medieval deer parks were generally situated in open countryside, either on marginal land or adjacent to a great house. Contemporary records describe parks as bounded by a pale usually an earthen bank topped by a palisade and sometimes a stone wall. Within the park there would be a range of components directly related to its use such as lodge, warren, decoy pond, prospect tower, dower house or dovecote. The size of deer parks varies, but the majority within this study area were on the small size better suited to the management of deer as a resource rather than to provide an area large enough for a recreational hunt. In the post medieval period the function of the deer park shifted away from being an economic asset for the wider estate to being part of a designed ornamental landscape for amenity and prestige values. This process included imparking new areas adjacent to the house, reducing in size existing parks and erecting stone walls around the park. (2015, 5)



Fig.1: A section of the medieval deer park wall – note the thin medieval levelling courses.

There were two medieval deer parks at Hartland, just to the west of the village: the north park (80 acres) and the south park (50 acres). The latter is the focus of this article. In places, much of the original wall is intact (Fig. 1). It is throughout an impressive construction and given that it is clay-bonded, its survival is remarkable. However, vandalism, erosion and tree growth are threatening parts of it and thus it was suggested that a thorough record be made.

The Coastal Heritage Project of the AONB has encouraged a small group of Hartland volunteers to begin doing just this and for now they are working out their own methodology. It may be that NDAS will assist in the future

depending on results. Where NDAS are being asked to help is with geophysics. In Fig. 2, the south deer park is shown as the enclosed area (hatched green) in the bottom left. There are two potential areas of interest (shaded green) just to the north of the park. The smaller one to the right appears to be a platform and could be one of the constructions which were associated with the parks.

There is for instance, a mention of a park keeper's lodge within documents dating to the late 1500s and in the 1800s a building close to the shaded area is recorded. Another possibility is that the platform might be a viewing area for those enjoying but not participating in the chase. The report on the excavations of a deer park in Cornwall (see link below) gives further possibilities.

In 2015 a survey of deer parks in Wales was carried out for the Heritage body CADW in order to assess the threat to the parks within its ambit. A few of the aims are highlighted here to indicate the desirability of a similar strategy being implemented in the South West.

Morte Point in the north to the mouth of the Taw Torridge estuary in the south and much of the training took place on Braunton Burrows.



Practising attack runout from Landing Craft Personnel (LCP) on Braunton Burrows

The Americans were originally allocated this section because the British army did not want it, but soon it was realised that the topography, beaches and tides were very similar to the conditions likely to be encountered on the designated American landing beaches of Omaha and Utah. There they would be faced with steep bluffs, low-lying dunes and only a few narrow valleys leading to a vast area of flooded farmland. The Americans had no alternative but to secure the beach-head on a heavily defended coast with infantry alone and the training

facility in North Devon was designed with this in mind. On Braunton Burrows, lots of concrete structures were built to replicate pillboxes and other fortifications likely to be encountered in France.

The Crow Point area, being located near to the Taw Torridge Estuary was extensively used for practicing embarkation, loading and debarkation. This included the use of actual landing craft which were based in the estuary near Instow, but as these were in short supply it also included practice on concrete replica landing craft which were located immediately behind these embarkation points on Broad Sands Beach.

The main practice ground for landing troops in simulated conditions, was located at Woolacombe beach further north. Here a series of scale outlines of landing craft were marked out with scaffold poles and troops practiced on these mock ups before moving to assembly areas for actual embarkation on Broad Sands beach.

Further north of the mock up area, six Landing Craft tank (LCT) and two Landing Craft Mechanised (LCMs) were constructed. These were much larger and substantial structures with concrete bases to represent LCTs with lowered ramps as if they had just been beached. Originally constructed to the dimensions of the Mk IV LCT, once it became clear that the larger Mk V would be used, additional aprons were added to the rear of the existing bases to represent the extended area. Inscribed in the concrete of one such extension is the mark of its constructors, "146th Eng, Co C, 1st Platoon". Usually the jaws, bases and ramps were produced in concrete and six-foot high scaffold poles stood around the edges with canvas curtains or corrugated metal sheeting. Units that trained here included the Engineer Combat Battalions, who would be the first ashore on D Day.



American troops loading concrete LCT on Braunton Burrows

Once the final countdown to D Day had started in May 1944 training finished and most of the structures were abandoned. However, after the 2nd World War, the Estate continued to lease large parts of Braunton Burrows to the Ministry of Defence and it is still used as a military training reserve to the present day. The site is currently used for simulated infantry attack. Live firing permitted for a certain number of days in the year has traditionally been in the form of controlled demolitions.

To that end, during the 1960's and 1970's many of the 2nd World War Training Structures were destroyed/demolished, including parts of some of the concrete landing craft. Today few structures remain intact and during the 1970's one of the Volunteer Nature Reserve Rangers Norman Dunn heard that the structures were to be demolished and he was instrumental in preventing any further damage by the military.

Later, a plaque was placed on one of the Concrete Landing Craft recognising the important role that the members of the Allied Forces who trained here played in the Liberation of Europe. Every year now, there is a memorial service held on the Landing Craft by members of the Braunton British Legion and in the past few years, the Friends of the Assault Training Center, have organised a memorial event, which includes a ceremonial drive through the concrete structures using old period military vehicles.



Today a small information board has been erected by the Friends of the Assault Training centre to raise awareness of these important structures. To secure long term conservation, the North Devon Coast AONB, operating through its new Coastal Heritage Project, has been working with landowners, The Christie Devon Estate and Historic England to conserve these structures. During the winter, Volunteer Tasks were organised in association with the Friends of the Assault Training Center, which involved clearing sand, vegetation and scrub away from the concrete structures to reveal their true extent. The Project has also been working with Historic England to get further protection for the structures and in early June, 75 years after D Day the structures will be Listed.

New Wreck discovery at Westward Ho!

David Morrison and Chris Preece

As many NDAS members will know, two of the wrecks revealed periodically at Westward Ho! were designated as Protected Wrecks (i.e. of national importance) in 2016. There are two other sites further to the east which are also revealed on occasions (NDAS members visited and recorded them recently). However, this year a fifth wreck was discovered by David Morrison far out by the extreme low tide mark. David was quick-witted enough to appreciate its importance and record it. He tells the story in his own words below...

“I’m a regular beach dog walker and also a campaigner for plastic-free, clean beaches. I walk my dog almost daily on the North end of Westward Ho! beach. While doing this I’m always looking out for plastic and ghost net washed up on the beach. On the 23rd of March at just before 2pm I came over the pebble ridge where the lifeguard hut is in the summer, and looked towards the low tide line to the North. In the distance I could clearly see something dark and large on the tide line and suspected it could be a large ghost net. By the time I reached the area it was 5 to 10 minutes after the -1m approx. low spring tide, 2.10pm. What I could see was an area of rough/jagged rock partly enclosing a shipwreck with its exposed timbers. The width of the wreck may have been 3 or 4 metres. I quickly tried to take a few photos but the tide was coming in very quickly, so it was being covered up again before I could do much. I used the map app on my iPhone to try to store the location, but don’t think that it’s very accurate. My recollection of the location is that it is between the South Gut and the pebble banks, before crossing North onto Zulu bank. Hopefully this is helpful.”



These are the photos that David took of the wreck and we can see that there is better preservation than on some of the other beach wrecks, possibly helped by its remote location. You can clearly see the frames either side, what looks like the bow section and transverse planking in between the frames. This suggests there has been little illicit excavation (the 'Sally', one of the designated wrecks, has frequently been dug into over the years).

The County Historic Environment Service and the Maritime Section of Historic England have both been notified of the find. The former were impressed, the latter have yet to respond. We await further developments.



Just a reminder – the wreck of the Sally that we featured in Autumn 2016.

Using his background in academic geography, John Bradbeer has been conducting an analysis of the 1840s' tithe apportionments covering the parishes of north Devon and Torridge. Here he shares with us some of the insight this study provides on the distinctive agricultural history of our area.

Beat-Burning or Devonshiring in the Tithe Survey

The Tithe Survey of 1836-1845 was made to allow a money payment to replace the tithe in kind and so the Apportionment, which gives the money values calculated, had also to include details of land-use. The Tithe Commissioners in London had laid down the principal land-use categories and the surveyors on the ground were left to map and record their distribution. Many surveyors felt that some further distinctions were possible, especially when it came to pasture, with lower valued pasture being distinguished by adjectives like coarse or rough. Some surveyors also noted 'arable occasionally'. This is the only qualification that was ever made of arable land.

This almost certainly refers to land that was 'beat-burned' or 'Devonshired' as it was often known. This practice seems to have been medieval in origin and clearly was still being employed in the 1840s, although it was soon to die out. Many Devon farms were in effect divided into an 'in-field' on rather better land and close to the farmstead, and an 'out-field' of poorer quality land, usually at a distance from the farmstead. The 'in-field' would be worked on a complex rotation system, often as long as seven or eight years with cereal crops grown perhaps three or four times. These lands were regularly manured and more intensively grazed when under temporary grass. In Devon the bare earth fallow of many rotational systems in the rest of England was not employed. The lands in the 'out-field' were used to grow cereals roughly once in each generation. The fields to be worked in any year would be prepared by having their vegetation stripped off, usually by a special veiling plough. The turves were stacked and allowed to dry out before being burned. The ashes plus any available manure, sea-sand and lime were spread on the soil and then two or three cereal crops would be grown, with oats always sown in the last year. After this the land was allowed to revert to rough grazing and anything from 15 to 20 years would elapse before the cycle was repeated.

The Board of Agriculture's reporter William Marshall writing in the 1790s was particularly critical of the practice and could see no good in it. Marshall was pretty harsh in his comments on most aspects of Devon's agriculture and on the absence of wheeled vehicles on the roads. A decade later, Charles Vancouver was a little more accommodating, agreeing that the practice had some merits but that it was far too indiscriminately applied.

Not all of the Tithe Survey's surveyors used the land use 'arable occasionally' and so it is not possible to say exactly how much land was treated in this way across northern Devon, nor whether it was done in other parishes but not recorded by their surveyors. In Halwill parish, about a third of all the arable land (or roughly one fifth of the total agricultural area) was returned as 'arable occasionally' and most of this now lies under the sitka spruce plantations of Cookworthy Forest. In Bulkworthy parish, two fields of the Stowford holding, both quite large and over a kilometre and a half from the farmstead were so described and these now form part of Devon Wildlife Trust's Stowford Moor Nature Reserve and are valued as excellent examples of culm grassland. The fact that such areas were tilled, perhaps as recently as one hundred and fifty years ago, comes as a surprise to many botanists and ecologists and offers challenges to modern land managers seeking to maintain these now rare and highly regarded areas and their distinctive habitats and species.

Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon: Recent Acquisitions



Left: The Barnstaple fire pump acquired by the Borough in 1914.

Below: The fire pump restored and in working order, now returned home and due to be displayed in the new extension of the Museum.



Two of a set of five 16th century silver spoons recently bought at auction, these two designed and manufactured by Barnstaple goldsmith Thomas Matthew.

These valuable additions to the Museum's collections were acquired through a V&A grant as well as generous donations from former Barnstaple businessman and local benefactor Keith Abraham and from the Barnstaple and North Devon Museum Development Trust.

Berry Castle Update

Simon Carroll of FOB (Friends of Berry Castle) has news of the group's recent activities.

The Friends of Berry Castle have been busy, over the past few months. From site survey training, to planning our dig, for the Summer.

Back in March, we organised a cross-group site condition survey training, with Historic England. After the theory, we moved onto a filling lunch, at the pub in Bishops Tawton, before heading up Codden

Hill, to put what we'd learnt, into practice. One of our objectives, is to create stronger links across organisations, in order to make the most of the expertise and resources, in North Devon.

Our website (www.berrycastlehuntshaw.com) will be recording the dates of site condition surveys in the Torridge area, on behalf of Historic England. The idea was to avoid several groups surveying the same sites and also take a little of the workload off the already overstretched co-ordinators. If an individual, or group intend to carry out a site condition survey, please let us know, as we can send through the current list of dates (from the last survey) and information, as well as noting the intended survey monument.



*The site of the holy well at Newton St Petrock.
A worthy object for restoration.*

As an offshoot from the training, we have been approached by Historic England and the National Trust, to carry out surveys on Lundy. Our original date was rained off, but we hope that our reserve day won't be affected by the usual Summer weather – more rain!

We are currently trying to establish a joint calendar of events, for groups to add to. We hope that this will offer people an easier way to become involved in archaeology, as well as highlighting the activities of smaller groups. This will soon be on our website (see above), with links to each group's own website/online platform.

Bringing archaeology to the community, is important to us. This is why we're planning to locate and restore the ancient holy well, in Newton St Petrock. In a chance conversation with the landowner, we learnt that it was traditional for families to be christened in the well. He had originally bought the land, in order to restore the well, but due to age, he hadn't managed to carry it out. Having previously researched the history around the village, we presented our findings to the local community, including previously unrecorded features, detected from a drone during last summer. The enthusiasm generated, was fantastic and has hopefully sparked a new interest in archaeology, with many of the residents.

The dig will take place during Wednesday 3rd -10th July. Further details will be sent out in the next few weeks. If you are interested in volunteering, please drop us an email at berrycastle1@outlook.com , where we can send the information directly to you.



Simon would like to know what we make of this photo taken from his drone last summer. The site is near Newton St Petrock. You can get a sense of scale from the tractor tramlines and the trees to the left of the picture. You can share any thoughts with Simon using the email address that he has supplied above.

NDAS Winter talks programme 2019/20

The October and November talks will take place at the Castle Centre Barnstaple; From January onwards the talks will transfer to the new David Butt Learning Room in the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon.

All talks start at 7.30 pm, but note that the AGM on 17th March will begin at 7.00pm.

- 15th Oct** Ruth Downie: 'Stories in Stones; *Writing Murder Mysteries set in Roman Britain*'
- 19th Nov** Prof. Steve Rippon, Exeter University: '*The Ipplepen Excavations.*'
- 21st Jan** Dr. Martin Gillard, Exmoor National Park: *Bogged Down in the Past: the Exmoor Mires Project*'
- 18th Feb** Joe Penfold, North Devon AONB: *Conclusions: The AONB Coastal Heritage Project.*
- 17th March** AGM at 7.00 to be followed by Chris Preece: *Clovelly Dykes; Excavation and New Research Discoveries*
- 16th April** John Smith, who entertained us once before with his impressive recreations of Roman military life, this time gives us : *Roman Life in Devon.*

Finally, here is a reminder from our Treasurer and Membership Secretary:

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.

Terry Green