



Promoting awareness of the archaeology
and history of North Devon

Newsletter Autumn 2011

Welcome to the Autumn NDAS newsletter, we hope you find it interesting. It's blackberry and apple time again and we seem to have a touch of Indian summer –hope it lasts. Just a pity that we got torrential downpours during our last few days on the September dig, when we wanted to draw plans of the trenches – snorkels would have been useful. Welcome also, to any new members who have joined us this summer. Now the evenings are drawing in, we hope you will join us for the lecture season at the Castle Centre in Barnstaple.

Progress at West Yeo:

We had a busy summer excavating at West Yeo Farm, (April, June, July, August and September). An interim report including work up until June has been added to the website, with photos. www.ndas.org.uk. A big thank you to all who took part. We were delighted to have some new members, and 5 students joined us during our August dig.

We also enjoyed a super fundraising barbecue supper at West Yeo, thanks to our hosts Kate and Robert, for providing and cooking the meat, on a lovely summer evening. We were lucky to have live music from friends through Tiverton Archaeological Group, and the evening raised £175.00. Thanks to all who helped out and especially to Bob for organising tickets etc.

Trench 5 – the meadow trench

After removing layers of 18th/19th century debris, quantities of random stone and a layer of charcoal blackened silt, Trench 5 finally revealed possible yard surfaces on either side of the remnants of a heavy stone wall which may represent a NE-SW boundary shown on the tithe map of 1840. The wall peters out into a band of clean red clay, the stone having been largely robbed out. What we are seeing may be part of the stone base of a cob wall. There was a very definite wet gully along the eastern edge of the robbed out wall, which was covered with stones. Both to the west and to the east of the wall were possible yard surfaces of packed small stones with random stake- or post-holes; the stones to the east had abraded edges showing wear. Set within or beside this surface were two narrow, curving stone-lined gullies covered with flat stones, presumably intended to provide drainage. On the final day of cleaning up in September, after the rain, a small pit was noted in the edge of the west section. The trench was finally drawn and recorded and covered with terram to be backfilled by the owners.



Trench 5: One of the curving gullies is seen here right of centre.

It was noted that the stone of the wall included a fragment of volcanic trapp possibly from the Exeter area (T.Green pers.comm.). There was also a large piece of the same sunk into the yard surface to the west of the wall, possibly representing a post pad. Finds include masses of North Devon pottery, mostly post medieval North Devon glazed wares, including some sgraffito, as well as Bristol/Stafford ware. Other pottery included stoneware, 18th and 19th century china, and salt-glazed pot, in some cases with enough pieces to enable some reconstruction for drawing. Most notable was a large quantity of heavy dark green/black bottle glass, with complete bases, identified by Kevin Shaddick as dating from between 1710-1760 and from Bristol. Thanks to Kevin for his help with identifying them. There was also a quantity of very thin flat

light green glass, presumably window glass, as well as large heavy iron doornails. Burned cob, hand-made brick and fragments of lime mortar were all evidence of a demolished building. The pottery finds also included a significant amount of typical North Devon gravel-tempered medieval wares (characteristically, thin, gritty, salmon pink, unglazed). Most if not all of this was residual, mixed with much later material. There were several flints, among which one, recovered from the spoil during excavation, was examined by Dr Andy Woodcock on a visit, and was pronounced to be a gunflint! Then there was the strange bell shaped ceramic object illustrated here. What is it? A spout? Part of a candlestick?. Any ideas would be welcome.



Trench 4 - in the garden



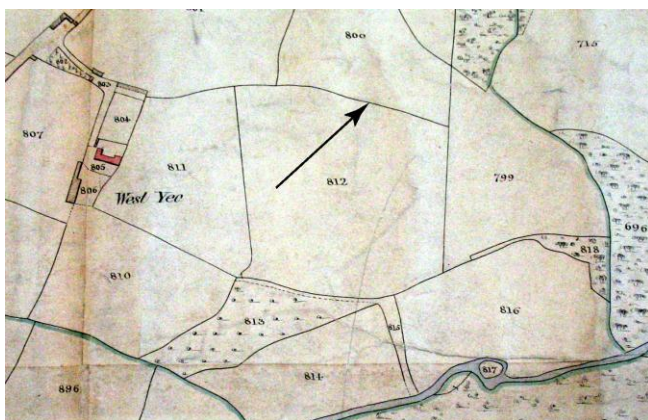
Trench 4: The "toilet" structure is on the left, the drain/gulley cutting the clay is above centre right

The structure found in the south of T4 in 2010 was fully excavated and is quite possibly a medieval(?) toilet! Well constructed with coursed stone and large flat stones on top (with a gap between them, perfect for the purpose, but not very comfortable), there is a channel underneath, blocked at the south end by a vertical stone on a stone pad. This neat structure sits within a feature which is cut into the natural clay and which has yet to be investigated.

We had been carefully cleaning back the northern part of trench 4 which is dominated by a thick clay pad, thought at first to be natural, when removal of loose dark stony soil from the western part of the trench revealed a drain feature running NW – SE and leading into a stony layer which appears to lie underneath the clay. This made us wonder if in fact this thick, very clean and hard packed clay is a man-made floor surface. Sherds of medieval pottery were then

found sealed under a collection of larger stones at the terminus of the drain feature. This material appears to be in context, ie. not residual, suggesting that the drain is a medieval feature. Other stray finds include flints and round stone balls which appear to have been used for rubbing or grinding.

There were some postholes within the clay – random small stake-holes and one large, deep posthole which was thought to be from a fencepost on the line of the old garden fence. Samples were taken from postholes, still to be examined, and the soil from the 'toilet' gulley was sieved, with no specific results.



Extract from the 1839 tithe map. The arrow indicates the curving boundary which may be found to have continued to the east (right).

The Landscape

On a rainy day in September we walked the farm to locate a missing section of boundary which might have been an extension of a curving boundary recorded on the Tithe map. We did find a slight ridge in the meadow which would correspond to this feature, and may return to carry out some earth resistance survey next year, to ascertain whether in fact this boundary might partially define an enclosure with the settlement on its west.

West Yeo: Work in 2012:

In March we will continue fieldwalking in Mead 2 – finds collected and washed so far once again seem to be Mesolithic bladelets, quite fine, some with serrated edges. Also a small hammerstone.

We will complete excavating T4 and hope to put a trench across the “medieval causeway” to prove the metallated surface.

Flintwork: final work on the databases for New Close and Long Park is in progress; identification continues on Mead 2, with the assistance of John Newberry and Dr Andy Woodcock.

Derry Bryant, September 2011

A medieval loo??



Drawing by Diana Warmington

A Former NDAS Chairman:

Regrettably we were informed during the summer that Ann Goodwin who was Chairman of NDAS during the 1990s and a life-member of the Society has died at her home in Shropshire. Derry Bryant, current Chair has sent a letter of condolence on the Society's behalf.

The NDAS Constitution

The NDAS constitution has suffered a number of amendments during the last decade and in the process has accumulated some anomalies which require correcting. Rather than adding another amendment, the NDAS Committee thought it best that the document should be redrafted. A sub-committee has worked on the matter and has come up with a redrafted constitution. The resulting changes mostly concern categories of society membership. When members receive notice of the 2012 AGM they will be provided with copies of both the old and the new constitution for consideration. Acceptance of the new version is, of course, subject to members' votes at the AGM.

The NDAS Winter Programme 2011-2

Meetings take place at the Castle Centre, Castle Street, Barnstaple at 7.30pm, except for the AGM in March which begins at 7.00pm.

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| Tuesday 18 October 2011 | John Bradbeer (Historical Geographer): " Northern Devon in Domesday " |
| Tuesday 15 November 2011 | Chris Mandry (Local diver with 40 years' experience of diving the North Devon coast and around Lundy): " Shipwrecks of North Devon " |
| Tuesday 6 th December 2011: | NDAS annual dinner, The Bank Restaurant, Boutport Street, Barnstaple, (For details see below.) |

Tuesday 17 January 2012	Terry Green (Archaeologist): " <i>The Archaeology of Devon Place-Names</i> "
Tuesday 21 February 2012	Barry Lane (Curator Wells and Mendip Museum): <i>Where have all the Q-Pits gone? Lead Smelting in the Mendips</i>
Tuesday 20 March 2012	NDAS AGM and social evening with a speaker, Tom Cadbury (RAMM Museum Exeter): <i>Ice Age Devon and Early Humans</i>
Tuesday 17 April 2012	Steve Minnitt (Somerset C.C. Heritage Service): <i>The Frome Hoard</i>

The NDAS Annual Dinner

We like to choose a different venue every year, and this time have chosen The Bank Restaurant in Boutport Street. If you have not been there, then it's worth signing up for the dinner just to see the magnificent 17th century plasterwork ceilings.

The cost of the Christmas menu (see the menu sheet at the end of this newsletter) is £19.95 per head. **Payments together with your choice of main course and dessert, should be sent to Bob Shrigley, 20 Skern Way, Northam EX39 1HZ by 19th November. Cheques should be made out to NDAS.**

Clovelly Dykes

A couple of months ago I was asked to lead members of the Taw U3A Local History Group on a walk over Clovelly Dykes. Some years ago NDAS members visited the site on a summer outing, but since then we have many new members among whom, I wouldn't mind betting, there are those who know nothing about Clovelly Dykes. It is a constant source of wonder that this stunning and unique archaeological monument is unknown to so many people in North Devon, though I must admit that it's easy to miss if you don't know where to look.

If you're driving on the A39 towards Hartland, you pass the site on your right between Clovelly Cross and the turning to Hartland. Or if you turn right into Clovelly you pass through the site with the main body of it on your left. But you don't see anything because of the high hedges and because the three kilometres of banks and ditches and the 8.09 hectares that they enclose lie on a flat hilltop. Seen from the air however, this is clearly a very impressive piece of work.



Clovelly Dykes from the air.
(North Devon Athenaeum)

Although it is classified as a hillfort, the site is unlike any classic Iron Age hillfort, being laid out on a plateau rather than the usual hilltop. The best comparison in terms of its lay-out is Milber Down in South Devon. The site consists of a pair of concentric central enclosures defined by a bank and ditch, possibly representing the earliest phase of construction. This central area is then enclosed within outer banks defining a large, subdivided area on the west and a smaller crescent-shaped area to the east. It may be that this eastern enclosure extended eastwards, its outline being reflected in the current field boundaries. Access may have been from the east and possibly also from the north

Although thought to be of Iron Age date (c.500 BC – AD 50), no dating evidence has ever been recovered from the site. It was thought by Aileen Fox that the purpose of the large outer enclosure was the seasonal gathering, trading

and slaughtering of cattle. Whatever its purpose, it is quite clear that in prehistory this site would have dominated the Hartland area. It is an obvious 'central place' and is built to impress. The resources required to build it in terms of man-power, food-supply and time would have been enormous.

The banks and ditches of 'hillforts' are usually interpreted as defensive, but in this case, without the advantage of a steep hillside, they may be more symbolic than effective. Since the 19th century, structures such as this have been seen as evidence of tribal hostility and rivalry, but the construction of such an elaborate earthwork could not have been completed if there was always danger of attack. It is more likely that Clovelly Dykes represents a statement of personal – or dynastic – power and thus tight control over the neighbourhood and hence stability.

However, we must be cautious with the interpretation of 'hillforts' and other prehistoric sites, since the interpretation itself may reflect the spirit of the age or the experience of an individual. In the 1920s, G.E.L.Carter, having spent time in India, attempted an interpretation in terms of a spiritual journey comparing the form of Clovelly Dykes with sacred sites that he had seen in India. Who knows??

This is one of the numerous Devonshire prehistoric sites of which we have no real understanding because the survey and excavation that might begin to clarify the nature and purpose of the site have never been done. Clovelly Dykes cries out for investigation by modern methods. A geophysical survey is desirable and is something that the society could organise, however, negotiating the jungle of permissions and licences that lies in the way is not something for the immediate future.

Terry Green

The Rolle Canal:

You may recall that in the spring newsletter NDAS members were invited to join Chris Hassall for a guided walk on the Rolle canal. Bob Shrigley has provided the following brief account

A Walk Back in Time

During the summer Chris Hassall provided a guided walk for NDAS members along a stretch of the Rolle Canal. The walk commenced at Loxdown Cross and proceeded to the disused River Torridge ford crossing. After taking in the river bank fauna and flora we eventually reached the magnificent Beam Aqueduct which carried the Rolle Canal over the River Torridge. Further on we examined an old carriage bridge still bearing the scars where the ropes of the horse drawn canal barges had cut into the stone work. We returned via the Tarka Trail.

Many thanks to Chris for a very enjoyable and informative afternoon's walk.

An Opportunity to Get Your Hands Dirty:

At the end of October you have the chance to get involved in some hands-on archaeology in Barnstaple. Back in December 2010 South West Archaeology Ltd excavated two trenches ahead of a proposed housing development at the rear of the old Exeter Inn in Litchdon Street. The excavation uncovered a large quantity of late medieval pottery suggesting that this area was important in the production of Barnstaple pottery in a period which is at present little understood. On the 28th, 29th and 31st October there will be some further excavation with which volunteers are invited to help. In due course an invitation will go out to the general public via a press release, but as numbers on site are necessarily limited, here is your chance to get in first! The need is for some diggers but many pot washers. If you wish to volunteer to dig, you should be ready to commit yourself to all three days, and preferably should have experience. If pot washing is your bag, then there will be plenty to do. If you are able to help or would like to know more, then telephone South West Archaeology on 01769 573555 or email samwalls@swarch.net.

A Walk on Exmoor:

On Wednesday 23rd November, Rob Wilson-North, Archaeologist for Exmoor National Park, will be leading a walk from Two Gates on Parracombe Common, taking in Chapman Barrows and other sites in the vicinity. If you would like to join in, meet at 10.30a.m. at grid reference SS692443. For those who struggle with grid references, follow the A39 from Barnstaple to Parracombe Lane Head (Millennium memorial stone on your left) and turn right towards Chapman Barrows. Follow this road, ignoring first turn left and meet where the track goes off left to Roe Barrow and goes straight on to Two Gates. Bring a packed lunch and waterproof clothes."

Any queries please call June Aiken on 01598 763316

A New Committee Member:

Adam Bradford has recently joined the NDAS Committee as representative of Barnstaple Town Council. To introduce himself, he has written the following:

I am delighted to be the Town Council representative on the NDAS Committee. History was always a subject I have loved. I have a degree in History from the University of Stirling. I focussed particularly on industrial, social and political developments in the UK, America, Europe, and Japan, rather than on earlier periods. It was a 4 year degree and I wrote my final year dissertation on the contribution of the Western Infirmary in Glasgow to the decline in mortality between 1874 and 1914, after reading through large volumes of ward journals in a freezing old ward at Ruchill Hospital.

My focus at Stirling was on words rather than objects, but whilst living in Japan for 2 years after university I became very interested in their castles and gardens. I have extremely fond memories of Himeji Jo in particular, and the Japanese museums are fascinating.

I returned to Britain to study law, and returned to North Devon 10 years ago. Now married and with 2 little girls I am a solicitor at Brewer Harding and Rowe and look from my office across to the North Devon and Barnstaple Museum. Elected to the Town Council last year and District Council this year, and representing Central Barnstaple, I am keen to give something back and also rekindle my interest in history and learn more about the history of North Devon'.

Kind regards

Adam Bradford

NDAS Contacts:

Chairman: Derry Bryant, email: derrybryant@tiscali.co.uk, telephone 01769 572963

Secretary: Margaret Reed, email: Margaret.reed@talktalk.net, telephone 01271 325276

Membership Secretary: Bob Shrigley, email: rvs@r6247.mail1.co.uk, telephone 01237 478122

**NDAS Christmas Dinner at '62 The Bank', Boutport Street, Barnstaple
7.30pm - Tuesday 6th December 2011.**

Price (Three Courses): £19.95 per head

Starters

Bank's Combo Party Platters:

Cheesy Bites, Onion Rings, Spicy Chicken strips, bowl of Beef or Vegetable Chilli, with Tortilla Chips, BBQ Sauce and Sour Cream

Main Courses

Roasted West-Country Turkey:

Thick sliced Turkey served with a Sausage and Cranberry Patty, Sage, Onion and Chestnut Stuffing, Baby Roast Potatoes, Chunky Farmhouse Vegetables and Gravy

Thai Mushroom & Green Bean Noodles:

Pan-fried mushrooms with chilli, curry paste, coconut milk, bean sprouts, green beans and Thai Noodles. Served with crusty Bread (v)

The Bank's Burger:

Exmoor Beef Burger, with melted Cheddar Cheese, Crispy Bacon, and served with Chunky Chips and a Salad Garnish

Baked Salmon Fillet with Black Bean Sauce Served with stir fried Noodles, Vegetables and Ciabatta Bread

Spicy Piri Piri Chicken:

Butterfly Breast of Chicken marinated with Piri Piri seasonings, pan fried and served with French Fries, a Dressed Salad and coated with the Creamy Piri Piri Sauce

Desserts

Individual Christmas Pudding served with a Creamy Brandy Sauce

Double Choc Chip Ice Cream served with Clotted Cream and a Cadbury's Flake

Homemade Banoffee Pie, a Banana and Toffee Classic

Fresh Fruit Salad with Devon Clotted Cream

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I should like to book place(s) at the NDAS Annual dinner 2011. (Closing Date For Booking – Saturday 19th November 2011)

I enclose my cheque for £..... payable to NDAS

My menu choices for the main course and dessert are:

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.....
.....

Name:

Address

Phone number

Email

Post to:

Bob Shrigley, 20 Skern Way, Northam, Bideford EX39 1HZ

Telephone: 01237 478122