

The Newbarns Project

Stewartry Archaeological Trust
NEWSLETTER NO.1 November 2004



This will be the first Newsletter that The Newbarns Project has attempted to produce. By popular demand from our diggers, both young and old, we have tried to put together an informative and up to date report of what has happened on site by the end of 2004 Season. If it is successfully received, then we may use it on site as a useful free handout to visitors in the hope that they may feel more inclined to put a coin or two into our donations boxes.

The Committee must now cease its constant references to the "kerb cairns" at Newbarns. In reality what we have are two "chambered cairns", this after it was pointed out to the Excavation Director by one of our mature students that a "kerb cairn" varied in size from 3 to 6 mtrs diameter, was of low drumlike appearance, rather than a bowl-shaped mound. Her tutor had read this in Anna and Graham Ritchie's "Scotland: Archaeology and Early History". Well picked up on Marlene. As a reward you will receive two valuable (collector's item)copies of the Newsletter No.1. Consider us suitably chastised.

To sum up. At the close of the 2004 Season the South Site at Newbarns comprises a round cairn (32 mtrs diameter) with a kerb, which has two chambers and passages set within it. The North Site is also a round cairn (approx 37 mtrs in diameter) which also has had a kerb and, to date, has got one burial chamber with a passage. All of the burials are set directly into the kerbs of the cairns and face outwards into the former loch. Both sites have also had a Bronze Age burial inserted into the sides of the cairns, again right on the loch boundary and, in addition to this, the South Site exhibits a later concentration of posthole evidence pointing to its having been reused as a crannog base during the Iron Age in Galloway. Confirmatory dating has been confirmed by the presence of two redundant saddle querns and a quantity of broken stone tools.

Preliminary excavation of the South Site revealed evidence of extensive damage to one of the chambered tombs and robbing during the Victorian era when it is known that Thorniehill House, which overlooks the sites, was built "with stones from Newbarns". There is also some evidence of even earlier robbing and the once round cairn has had

several "bites" taken out of it in antiquity (the robbers even left a pile of stones to the south of the cairn which they either did not want or forgot to come back for). The south-western kerb of the South Site is relatively undamaged, but both the north-east and south-east excavated quadrants exhibit considerable robbing out of the kerb in antiquity.

As the North Site is at a much more recent stage of excavation than the South Site it has not yet been possible to do anything other than conjecture as to just where the kerbstones are or if anything untoward has happened to it in antiquity. Some very large stones are, however, already in evidence in both Areas 5 & 6 and there is little doubt that the kerb, here, has been robbed and reused for later construction purposes which have not involved any major moving of the orthostats a distance other than a few metres from their original siting.

We must bear in mind that there is no uniformity about the positioning of the Neolithic chambered cairn. It is to be found both on hillside and in valley. Seldom were they sited on prime agricultural ground. They most likely served as boundary markers, on land reclaimed from the wild, in place of the later paper sasine and deed proof of ownership. An interesting fact was recently pointed out to us by Vicki Cummings and Chris Fowler, the excavators of Cairnderry, on a recent visit to our site - the cairns at Newbarns must be the nearest to the coast and at the lowest sea-level point in Galloway.

The highlight of Season 2002 was the finding of a putative votive offering in the shape of a small bronze bell or *tintinnabulum* dating to the 1st/2nd centuries AD. This is proof that the Crannog on the South Site was still in use then. So the highlight of the Season 2004 must therefore be the unearthing of a Bronze Age burial on the western rim of the North Cairn in Area 6. With the timely assistance of our own diggers and the visiting Research Group from the University of Sheffield - "Arteamus" - the many problems associated with excavating such a feature were rapidly surmounted. The burial was undisturbed, a pleasant surprise, and comprised a large capstone or orthostat supported on a series of "cushion" stones laid on a cobbled surface within a deep boat-shaped cut which had been covered over by the later construction of two layers of medieval flooring. Immediately under and to the west of this orthostat a selection of broken stone tools, - hammers, polishers and rubbers etc. - had been placed immediately over a cremation deposit simply made in a hole dug through the cobbled layer lining the grave into the underlying boulder clay. In this void had been deposited a barbed and tanged arrowhead which has survived in excellent condition. One can theorise that there was originally a complete arrow. Should we now refer to this as "The Newbarns Archer"? Your comments please!

Why had this Bronze Age burial been made into the cairn of an earlier Neolithic burial? Burials dating to the later 2nd millennium BC were sometimes added to an earlier burial site because of the respect of the sanctity of such a place. This fact cannot be denied. There is also a possibility that the reuse of an earlier monument owed something to the shortage of good agricultural land on which to construct any further new burial areas. During the Bronze Age there was a tendency towards single burial and many sites were covered by a cairn. The burial could be placed in a pit or even, occasionally, on the old land surface. The practice of cremation continued until after 1000 BC when the tendency to deposit ashes in shallow pits without even a pot as a container was the rule.

By 800 BC cremation had virtually disappeared and we know very little about the methods of the disposal of the dead for a while.

The Interim Report 2004 will undoubtedly carry much more information and research into our burial which will also be featured in a variety of archaeological publications in the next few months.

Ingleston Motte Excavation carries on as ever under the able supervision of Robert McCubbin. To date the bases of two of the defensive towers of the outer defence ring have been excavated and the intention is to excavate the entire palisade/tower defence ring prior to the final phase of opening the last trench on the top of the motte. Prolific quantities of artefacts unearthed include imported French pottery, local galena-glazed pottery of the medieval period in Galloway, and numerous bits and pieces of ironwork described as "Fe Obj"! The star find to date still has to be that silver penny dated 1217. Robert is always looking for experienced assistance on his windy and exposed motte hill and can be contacted on 01556 50 4859 or e-mail him at mccubbin.hillowton@btinternet.com We are sorry that we cannot allow visitors to this site as it is set amidst prime agricultural grazing land.

This season we have had 75 volunteers on site and we are truly grateful to you all for invaluable assistance in all weathers and under somewhat trying waterlogged conditions at times. The break-down of the diggers, not including the unique Dave Wright who continues successfully to defy any known archaeological category, is 7 Professional diggers, 24 Veterans, 3 Mature students, 13 assorted other students, 13 members of the University of Sheffield Research Group, 5 Metal Detectorists, 6 tourists who just dropped in and forgot to leave, 1 Surveyor (Rodney) and Ken Cooper's 3 grandchildren.

Sadly, this season, one of our great friends and an experienced veteran digger, Elizabeth de Lewandewicz, passed away. Elizabeth will be sadly missed by us all. We were her retreat for many years and she loved this area so much that she kept coming back, both to dig and to visit. To her family we express our condolences and thanks for her life. She was a good friend to us all and we shall miss her dearly.

To Jane Farley, a big thank you for photographs.

Thanks to our Site Supervisors, Site Illustrators, Webmaster (Stephen Clancy) and artists and the various experts who have visited us to generously dispense advice and encouragement and our special thanks must, as ever, go to "The General" - Sir Norman and to Lady Tessa Arthur for their unqualified support, generosity and good humour.

Lizzie & Alastair

Last but not least, if anyone can design a new logo for our sweatshirts it would be most appreciated. A sweatshirt or polo shirt will be given to the winning entry.