



ULSTER
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

Newsletter

Autumn 2022

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A message from the President

The 15 October 2022 marks the 75th Anniversary of the first meeting of the Ulster Archaeological Society. We have come a long way since then, with the original single annual meeting evolving into monthly meetings (bar the summer months). We owe a great debt of gratitude to the foresight of the original members including E. Estyn Evans and Oliver Davies. Despite the challenges of the last few years caused by the Covid Pandemic, the Society has continued to grow despite the curtailment of many of our activities.

However, we have come through it and are now delighted to be able to meet up again this month, and hopefully without interruption in the future. We look forward to reinstating our field trips, study tours and Survey Group activities, along with our lectures and workshops.

2022 is the anniversary of other notable events of archaeological interest. It is the 1900th Anniversary of Emperor Hadrian's decision to order the construction of a wall that stretched 73 miles (118 km) from the Solway Firth in the west to Wallsend on the River Tyne in the east. It is also the 200th anniversary of Jean-François Champollion's announcement that he had broken the code of the Rosetta Stone, subject of the latest exhibition (13 Oct 2022 - 19 Feb 2023) at the British Museum. November marks the 100th anniversary of Howard Carter's discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun, a real game changer in bringing archaeology to public notice and interest. 2022 is also the 50th anniversary of Butser Farm, a unique experimental archaeology site, featuring archaeological reconstructions of ancient buildings from the Stone Age to the Anglo-Saxon period; the 40th anniversary of the raising of Henry VIII's flagship, the Mary Rose; the 30th anniversary of The Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland (HERoNI); the 20th anniversary of the discovery of the Newport Ship, a 15th-century merchant vessel; the 10th anniversary of the discovery and identification of the remains of King Richard III.

In this good company, I raise a virtual glass to all who strive to further the knowledge and interest that archaeology brings to enrich our lives. Who knows what the next 75 years will bring?

Anne MacDermott
President, Ulster Archaeological Society

Lectures 2022

As we can again hold face-to-face meetings, we will try to have as many in-person lectures as possible. These lectures will also be hybrid.

Links to join the virtual lectures will be circulated by the Hon. Secretary

Lectures start at 7.30pm

In-person lectures take place in the Elmwood Building, Queen's University Belfast. This is on Elmwood Avenue, opposite the Catholic Chaplaincy.

28 th November	The Archaeology of Hunter-Gatherer Ireland Prof. Graeme Warren, University College Dublin
12 th December	Lesser Spotted Europe: a bioarchaeological approach to early farming lifestyles in southern Europe Dr Eoin Parkinson, Queen's University Belfast

You can watch most of the previous lectures on our YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/c/TheUlsterArchaeologicalSociety>

Discovery 2022! Sixth Annual Review of Archaeological Discoveries in Ulster conference

The sixth Discovery conference will be held on Saturday 12th November 2022. This year will be the first hybrid conference we've held. The in-person conference will be held in the Elmwood Building, QUB, with the talks happening in the main lecture theatre. This lecture theatre is set up to present over Teams, so we will use that for the online part of the conference.

Some of the confirmed papers include:

Dr Rena Maguire (QUB & UCD) - "Doors and Corners, kid – that's where they get you": a new examination of horse skulls found in vernacular post-medieval buildings

Stuart Alexander (NAC Ltd) - A Multi-period Site at Killinchy Road, Comber, County Down.

Brian Sloan (CCA: QUB) - Further excavations at Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

Ruairí Ó Baoill (CCA: QUB) - A Community Excavation at Lisdoon Fort, Lisnaskea, County Fermanagh.

Tickets for the full, in-person conference will be £20 (£10 for students). Tickets for the online conference will be £15

You can find more information and book on the UAS website - <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/Conference/>

If you have any questions, you can get in touch:

discovery@ulsterarchaeology.org

June Lecture

The June lecture was given by Dr Eve Campbell, Archaeological Management Solutions. Her talk was titled: Idols, ards and severed heads: 3,000 years of deposition in a Roscommon Fen.

Gortnacranagh was one site along the N5 road scheme in Roscommon. It was originally identified as a burnt spread, only later was the oak idol found. Excavations lasted for a year from July 2020.

Only a handful of anthropomorphic timber figures have been found in Ireland. Most date to the Bronze Age, but the one at Gortnacranagh was dated to 252-413 CE. It also comes from one of the richest finds context of any excavated figures. Gortnacranagh has evidence of activity from the late Neolithic through to the early Medieval period.

Gortnacranagh is located 6km east of Rathcroghan on the banks of the Owneur River. Ballyslish

Bridge, to the east of the site, was identified in the Táin Bó Cuailnge as the boundary of the Mag nAí (territory of Rathcroghan). There have been several finds of human skulls from the river and there are prehistoric mounds in the wider landscape.

The site at Gortnacranagh was divided into three areas. Area 1 was a dry land area, Area 2 contained a trackway heading from the shoreline into deeper peat and the river, and Area 3 contained platforms parallel to the shore and within the wetland.

Prehistoric tools and pottery were found across the dryland area of the site. There was also grooved ware from the wetland area, indicating deposition in the prehistoric period.

The platforms of Area 3 were built of stone and timber. They measured about 40m by 20m and ran parallel to the shoreline. They were probably constructed to give access to this part of the wetland. Brushwood and stones were used to create a surface, sometimes

overlain with hurdles. The platforms appear to have been late Bronze Age, but there was earlier activity in this area.

A large number of animal bones were recovered from the platforms. One function of these features could have been rituals and deposition in the wetlands. Butchering of animals could have been occurring in this area, possibly as part of a ritual. It's also possible that animal processing (tanning, bone/antler working) was being carried out in this area.

A fragment of an ard plough was recovered from the edge of the peat. It was radiocarbon dated to 80-214 CE. It may have been a ritual deposition, as seen in Denmark. Other pieces of worked wood included what may have been the lid of a butter churn. Metal artefacts included bodily adornments, like pins and rings, as well as an iron knife. Pendants made of perforated boar tusks and bones were also found on the platform surface. A large range of bone pins, awls, and a scraper (for cleaning hides) were also found.

The animal bone is a major part of the site's story. Skeletons found were fully articulated, partially articulated, and disarticulated. There were deer (fully articulated), cattle (skulls), dogs (fully articulated and skulls), and other animals. Finds of dog bones might be associated with the importance of the dog in late prehistoric Ireland. There are several examples of dog sacrifice from other bogs and the figure of Cú Chulainn is closely associated with the dog.

Humans were also represented at the site. Two full crania were recovered from the platforms. One cranium was buried within the platform, probably as a ritual deposit.

The idol figure was found in well drained peat to the west of the platforms. It is 3m tall and had nine notches on its upper body. It is in a poor condition, because of the dryness of the peat, and its head was probably larger than what survives. It seems to have been decommissioned by placing it face down in the bog. About 20 timber figures have been found in Ireland.

Some are explicitly human (eg Ralaghan), while others are more abstract (Corlea). Similar figures are found across northern Europe. Many of the Irish, and some European, examples have notches along one or both sides of the body. These figures are often associated with trackways and open-air cult sites. It is thought that these figures embodied spirits, deities, or ancestors. They were probably the focus of worship or devotion. Bogs were often seen as liminal spaces, these figures were often associated with bogs and possibly sacrificed. A replica of the figure was made to think about its creation, erection and aging.

The trackway in Area 2 probably travelled from the dry land to where there was a pool in prehistory. It was made out of brushwood over roundwood timbers and was not very substantial. It probably dates from the iron age and was built to deposit objects in the pool. In the centre of the trackway was a collection of skull fragments, both animal and human. There was also what appears to be the head of another timber idol. A monarch

stag skull was deposited with its antlers attached, suggesting a deposition around October. Fragments of a wooden cauldron, an iron projectile, part of an iron blade or sickle, a medieval ringpin, and an iron knife were all found on or in the trackway.

The dry land area contained a ringditch with cremated bone, an inhumation, a smithing site, and a corn-drying kiln. There was a possible rectangular structure over the ringditch and a burnt spread to the south.

Duncan Berryman

August Lecture

The Society's August lecture was given by Stephen Cameron from the Antrim County Archaeological Society. His lecture was 'Larne Lough: a Forgotten Seascape'.

The survey of Larne Lough began in 2020 and has sought to map sites that had previously been unrecognised. There had been no archaeological features identified

below the hightide mark. This talk focused on the inner lough, where about twelve sites have been identified.

The inner lough is mostly saltmarsh and appears to be a barren landscape. The lough is dominated by the spoil heap extending from the Magheramorne quarry.

Starting from the south of the inner lough, a circular feature was identified. This was small, but reminiscent of a crannog, although later identified as a ducking pond. Near this were two rows of wooden posts, about 1.5m apart and crossing the river. This may have been a bridge or some form of fishtrap. The townland to the west is Ballycarry, which is the site of an early church (Templecorran), and this may have been associated with the bridge or fishtrap.

North of the current bridge crossing the lough is a stone feature. About 300m long and 7m wide. This looks like a causeway crossing the lough and was described as such by the OS in 1900, but it does not line up with any field boundaries. There is also

a similar structure in Old Church Bay to the northeast. This structure is 132m long and 8m wide. There also appear to be structures at the northern end of the stones, including a platform with fairly straight edges and large angular boulders. It is suggested that this was a tidal mill and that the stone structure was a dam. This has parallels to the tidal mill excavated at Nendrum.

Surrounding this tidal mill are several ancient ecclesiastical foundations. Magheramorne was originally a larger settlement and may have been a Patrician foundation. The church at Islandmagee was mentioned in the Tripartite life of St Patrick. Ballykeel Old Church and another ancient church are in the same townland. There is documentary evidence for land within Magheramourne known as Comgall's Land, this may have been a reference to the abbey at Bangor and an association between these foundations.

North of Old Church Bay is a large V-shaped fishtrap that appears to work on the flood tide, rather than

the receding tide. There is also a structure on the shoreline beside this trap, possibly a kiln or smokehouse.

On the western shore, the railway line has created a large lagoon. Within this is a semicircular feature reminiscent of a Viking boat nost. There is evidence for Viking activity within the lough and it was known as Ulfricsfjord, the site of the sea battle where the Irish defeated the Jarl of Orkney.

Further north, in Ballyedward townland, there is a known moated site adjacent to the railway. This had a 5m wide ditch and a stone structure in the centre. To the east of this appears to be another boat nost with linear features extending into the lough.

To the north of the spoilheap are two islands, known as Swan Island. To the south of Swan Island Large is a possible crannog. It measures 35m across and might have timber remains. Also in this area were reports of two log boats and two bronze, 16th-century cannons were lifted from the lough. On the

eastern side of the lough, in Ballydown townland, a chariot wheel was uncovered, said to have "Celtic" ornamentation, it was given to the British Museum.

More recent archaeology can be found closer to Larne port. This includes two quays, one of which was used to import lime. There are also several wrecks. One group are the barges that were used to transport the Mulberry pontoons into place for the construction of Larne harbour. These were clearly abandoned and left to decay in the lough.

Duncan Berryman

September Lecture

The Society's September lecture was given by Dr Laura Patrick, Queen's University Belfast. Her lecture was titled 'Exploring Ulster's hidden medieval landscapes'.

The political agendas in the development of the Irish state

post-1922 had an impact on research into the Gaelic medieval landscape. Prehistoric, Early Medieval, and Anglo-Norman archaeology was the focus, and the later medieval period was ignored. Early historiography was also biased depending on political views. Written sources have been vital to research throughout, but research has moved from descriptive to analytical. Today, GIS, landscape, and interdisciplinary research have broadened our understanding of Gaelic society.

'Gaelic' has been a problematic term, with questions over whether they identified as a single cultural group. Dr Patrick's work uses it to refer to people and areas removed from direct English control. Gaelic society was predominantly rural, with a pastoral economy. Social gatherings were linked to the agricultural calendar and happened at inauguration sites, such as Tullaghoge (Co. Tyrone). Gaelic captains and lords adopted English customs when it suited them, or else they would reinforce their 'Irishness'. The O'Neills wore Gaelic dress when attending

Queen Elizabeth's court but accounts describe them being dressed like the English while in London.

There has been significant research into the organisation of English estates, but we know very little about Gaelic estate structures. Maps can help us in understanding the landscape. Following the Nine Years War, the Crown commissioned a written land survey in 1608 but they needed maps to understand the boundaries of townlands. In 1609 Bodley and several other cartographers (including Raven) undertook the mapping of the Gaelic lands in Ulster. The maps they produced are surprisingly accurate. The maps are very useful because they detail the various estates and the townlands within them.

The estate of O'Neill in Tyrone was well covered by the Bodley maps and other documents, thus it proved a good case study. O'Neill directly controlled four townlands, including Dungannon and Benburb. Within the estate were eight families, each controlling

several townlands. Each family had a role to play in managing the landscape. O'Donnelly was the marshal and was responsible for providing soldiers. O'Quinn and O'Hagan were responsible for the administration, and O'Hagan managed Tullaghoge.

Dr Patrick mapped the townlands of the O'Neill estate, noting ownership, etymology, archaeological sites and geographical features. The map of ownership shows that the western flank of the estate was held by families who were O'Neill's soldiers or his kin. This created a defensive soft border from the Maguires to the west. The administrative families held land in the middle of the estate and close to O'Neill's capital at Dungannon. O'Neill's own lands created a corridor from Dungannon out of the estate and into the neighbouring barony. This may have been intended as a route of escape should his captains or kin turn against him. His seat at Dungannon was surrounded mostly by church lands, acting as a buffer against his captains.

While mapping the townlands, unrecorded enclosures became

evident in the landscape. Most of the recorded sites of the landscape date to prehistory or early medieval. The later medieval landscape is almost invisible in the archaeological record. The unrecorded features identified would massively increase the number of sites across this landscape, some of these may have been settlements.

This lack of late medieval settlement might mean that early medieval settlements, such as raths, continued in use through the later periods. Drumlins were also important, with key settlements on the summit and other settlements surrounding them. The houses were wattle-and-daub and there may have been more timber tower houses, these structures have left no trace on the surface today.

Duncan Berryman

Fieldtrip around Newtownards

The Society's first in-person event since COVID-19 was a walking tour to look at the historic buildings of Newtownards town centre. The tour was led by the Society's Dr Duncan Berryman and was attended by a large group of members, both old and new.

The tour started in the central market square (Conway Square). From here it is possible to see the prehistoric and early medieval settlement on Scrabo Hill. Conway Square became the centre of the town in the late 18th century, named after Alexander Stewart's daughter-in-law, Lady Sarah Frances Seymour-Conway. The town was reorientated, moving the focus away from the medieval and 17th-century centres. A cruciform street plan was laid out around the square. North Street entered the square through the central arch of the market house, today the town hall.

The tour then progressed along High Street to the old Market Cross. This was constructed in

1636 and is the only surviving 17th-century market cross in Ulster. The cross marked the focus of the 17th-century town, it was here that proclamations from the Viceroy and town council announcements were read. An inn was located beside the cross. The building standing to the east of the cross (currently a pub) with a date stone claiming it was erected in 1735.

Continuing down Castle Street brought the group to Newtownards Priory and the focus of the medieval settlement. Movilla Abbey was the earliest foundation in the area and had an associated settlement. The town of Nove Villa de Blathewyc was founded between the creation of the Earldom of Ulster in 1205 and 1226. The Dominican Priory was established in 1244, with a grant from the Savage family. The Clandeboye O'Neills gained the lands of the Priory and constructed a tower house within the building. Later, the lands were passed to Montgomery. He settled in the town in 1606 and began rebuilding Newtownards. The O'Neill's tower house had fallen into disrepair, but Montgomery made it habitable

again. The Priory was converted into a church by autumn 1607. The claustral buildings were turned into a house for Montgomery.

To the south of the Priory is a very large bawn. It is believed to have been a garden for the Priory and Montgomery developed it into his private garden with fishponds. Today nothing remains other than two pillars of dressed stone and a probable gun loop in the north wall. The ground surface has changed many times with the construction of factories and warehouses. The corner bastions have been rebuilt in brick and are reminiscent of WW2 pill boxes. The bawn is surrounded by a canal on the east and south sides.

Heading north on South Street, the group returned to Conway Square before heading northwest to meet Regent Street. This area was planned as a fashionable residential area, but the only notable house was Regent's House. Built by Peter Johnson (brewer and maltster), it is the only Greek Revival house in County Down. The house was turned into a school in 1928, providing a single

site for the recently created Newtownards Academy. Later it was renamed Regent's House to reflect the building in which it was housed. In 1962, the school moved to its current site in the southwest of the town.

The tour briefly stopped at St Mark's, the town's Church of Ireland church. It was constructed in 1816, after the roof of the previous building (part of the old Priory) became unsafe.

The final stop of the tour was at Newtownards Hospital. The main building of the current hospital was originally the workhouse, constructed in 1842. By July 1847 (during the potato famine) there were 426 admissions to the workhouse. To the north of the workhouse is Bully's Acre, the burial ground of the workhouse; it was purchased from Lord Londonderry when the parish graveyard was full. In 1932 part of the workhouse (what had been the infirmary and fever block) was made into a hospital to treat the ill of the town.

Duncan Berryman

New Books

Highhays Kilkenny: A Medieval Pottery Production Centre in South-East Ireland – Emma Devine & Cólín Ó Drisceoil
Oxbow Books, £60

This book presents the results of excavations at Highhays at the edge of Kilkenny and the discovery of a pottery production centre. A significant portion of the book is a catalogue of the pottery finds, with many colour images; this will be very useful to anyone interested in the material culture of medieval Ireland. The pottery and other finds from the site can reveal much about the daily life of workers and the average person in medieval Ireland. The book is well illustrated throughout and provides an informative overview of medieval Kilkenny and discusses how this industrial centre was associated with the town.

Dublin Castle: From Fortress to Palace – Seán Duffy, John Montague, Kevin Mulligan & Michael O'Neill
Wordwell Books, £ 43.73

This is the first of a three-volume series dedicated to Dublin Castle and the archaeological excavations carried out there. Volume 1 presents a history of Dublin Castle, covering the period from the first Viking settlement in the ninth century to 1850. The castle was the centre of English (and later British) royal government in Ireland from the 1170s until it was handed over to the Provisional Government of Ireland in 1922. A large early thirteenth-century castle, built on the orders of King John, stood on the site until it was gradually replaced between the 1680s and the 1770s by the present quadrangle of palatial buildings. The only intact portion of the medieval castle to survive this rebuilding is the large, circular south-east corner tower, known today as the Record Tower. It is the first substantial history of the castle to be published and is intended to provide a comprehensive historical background to the results of archaeological excavations undertaken between 1961 and 1987.

Survey Group Excavation on Divis September 2022



The stone features uncovered in the main trench appear to have been flax retting channels.

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Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society visit to Nedrum in July 2022 to mark the centenary of the Society's last visit.

Photograph taken by Paul Larmour