

## **WELCOME TO THE NDAS SPRING NEWSLETTER**

### **An introduction from our Joint Chair, Alison Mills**

**A**fter Linda's Introduction in the last Newsletter, it is now my turn, as co-chair, to welcome you to this latest edition. You'll find here an update on the Pottery History project, which is taking up a lot of our time, and several other interesting updates.

I thought it would be useful to update you on the Braunton Great Field planning application for 9 social rent homes, which was mentioned in the last newsletter. Despite the committee's recognition of the importance of affordable housing, we felt on balance that we should



*Braunton Great Field (NDCC)*

support the County Archaeologist's objection to the proposal. NDAS therefore submitted an objection to the original scheme (application no 79268).

That application was withdrawn, as noted in the last newsletter, but a revised application was submitted in August (application 80681). This was refused on November 11<sup>th</sup> last year. Planning law dictates that as the Great Field is of national importance it must be treated as if it were a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and an "in principle" application does not have sufficient detail to determine the harm that would be done.

It is possible that there may be further applications. Our view is that while social housing is desperately needed there has not been sufficient investigation of the other 13 possible sites for this in Braunton that would not impact the Great Field. We will continue to monitor developments.

Finally I would like to thank Simon Carroll for all the work he has been doing to create a new, more up to date website for the society. By the time you read this it should be up and running, and will include all our publications and reports, together with our programme and news updates.

**ALISON MILLS, Joint Chair, NDAS**

## THE NDAS AGM 2026

The AGM was held on 17<sup>th</sup> March at The Castle Centre, followed by an excellent talk from Dr Lee Bray, Principal Archaeologist at Dartmoor National Park about the activities and current results of the Whitehorse Hill and Cut Hill cists. The meeting was rounded off with the traditional post meeting “bring and share” eateries.

Ruth Downie stepped down from her role as NDAS Secretary and we are most grateful to Ruth for her time, professionalism and efficiency which have helped make the Committee’s work so much easier and the Society running smoothly.

Simon Carroll has taken over as NDAS Webmaster, following the retirement of Andy Hedges and has created a new Society website at [www.ndarch.org](http://www.ndarch.org). Sarah McRae has taken up the Newsletter mantle from Terry Green, with her first publication being the Autumn 2025 issue.

The remaining members of the Committee all agreed to stand again and were voted in. The committee is made up of: Alison Mills and Linda Blanchard (Joint Chairs), Bob Shrigley (Treasurer & Membership); Other members: Chris Preece, Jonathan Lomas, John Bradbeer, Terry Green, Gwyneth Faye, Julie Phillipps, Nigel Dymond, Rosemary Dymond, Simon Carroll (Webmaster), Sarah McRae (Newsletter), Erica Williamson (representing ACE Archaeology) and Loki Dawson (representing Barnstaple Town Council).

In his Treasurer’s report Bob Shrigley gave notice that he will be standing down at the 2027 AGM, having held the post by then for some 17 years. Members were asked to contact Bob if they had any questions or queries about taking on the role.

There was also an appeal for help from members to fill a number of smaller roles some formerly undertaken by Ruth as Secretary and some by our late colleague, Pat Hudson. These roles include arranging talks and member visits, publicity and members correspondence. Any NDAS members interested in assisting the Society in taking up one of these roles should contact Sarah McRae.



*Cut Hill cist being examined (NB typical Dartmoor weather!) (Alec Collyer)*

After the AGM business concluded, Dr Lee Bray gave a highly interesting talk on the Dartmoor cists found at Whitehorse Hill and Cut Hill over the last couple of years. Both situated in remote areas of the moor, archaeology was made extremely difficult by appalling weather, terrible ground conditions and problems in getting equipment to the sites. However the rewards were many and objects such a grass basket, preserved wood and charcoal as well as other items still to be examined are furthering our understanding of the Bronze Age people who created the cists.

## BRUCE AIKEN

### Members of NDAS were saddened to hear of the death of Bruce Aiken.

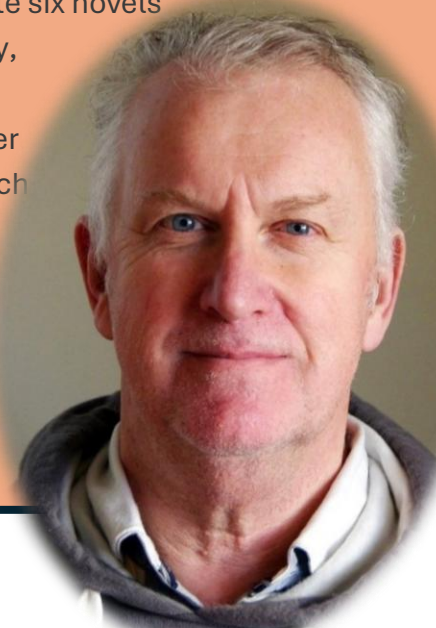
Bruce – recently of Lynton, previously of Parracombe – was a longstanding friend of NDAS of which his wife June is a member. At significant points in the Society’s history Bruce lent us his skills as a professional graphic designer to enable us to produce good- looking publications such as ‘Bronze Age to Bottle Seals’ and ‘The Heritage Handbook’.

From 2002 to 2009 we produced a printed newsletter twice a year for which the design and lay-out were taken in hand by Bruce, and right up until last year Bruce designed our distinctive membership cards. For his generosity in lending us his considerable skills, we remain grateful.

In addition, Bruce was a sportsman, an artist, a writer (he wrote six novels as well as poems) and a craftsman with a dry wit and a friendly, open manner He was very supportive of the local community in Parracombe where he lived for many years. He was treasurer of the Parracombe History and Archaeological Society for which he designed books, flyers and pamphlets in support of their research. He was an all round ‘good egg’ and will be sorely missed.

We wish his family well in this difficult time.

**Terry Green**



## POTTED HISTORY PROJECT

**Sonia Guerrini, Project Archaeologist gives us an update on the Potted History Project**

### Making an Archaeological Assemblage Speak.

**T**here are moments in archaeology when the banal, a cardboard box, a faded slide, a label in an old filing tray, becomes a hinge on which whole local histories turn. In the case of Barnstaple, that hinge has taken the shape of hundreds of boxes and the patient work of a community determined to turn an uncatalogued archive into something that scholars, schoolchildren and visitors can use and enjoy.

**POTTED  
HISTORY**

**BARNSTAPLE POST-EXCAVATION PROJECT**

The initiative, led by the Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon in collaboration with a large volunteer team, is restoring order to a suite of excavations from the 1970s and 1980s — an assemblage that includes both medieval and 17th-century kiln contexts and one of the most

extensive North Devon pottery collections stored in local care. The project begins where practical work always begins: with an audit. A comprehensive digital inventory is created followed by learning about selecting material with valuable scientific interest and which must be retained for further analysis.

From those phases flows a disciplined post-excavation programme:

typological classification and chronological assessment of each sherd, the careful capture of provenance, and the digitisation of the site archive — plans, drawings, field notes and photographic slides — so that context and object live together in a

searchable record. These procedures are not bureaucratic niceties; they are the scaffolding that transforms boxes of fragments into a research-ready assemblage that can speak to questions of production, trade and daily life.



*Phase I Boxes Stored and ready to be examined (S Guerrini)*

What makes the work possible, and gives it a lasting public value, is the combination of professional oversight and volunteer labour. The project's pilot phase — funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund — is testing methods and workflows on the Library Area site (ND24) and has provided invaluable lessons for a proposed three-year programme to treat all 18 sites



*Volunteers about to sort through the boxes (S Guerrini)*

is impossible to abbreviate.

In late December the team moved roughly 800 boxes from museum stores to the project warehouse, where a similar amount was waiting already; for the first site alone we selected 178 boxes, each packed and heavy, between five and thirteen kilos apiece, the heft of them a continual reminder that archaeology is both mental and muscular work. The Library Area site has yielded more than a ton of material: pottery and kiln material, building material and a handful of clay pipes.

Close study reveals two distinct production signatures on the same site, a 13th-century kiln and a later 17th-century kiln, and with those kilns come the debris of manufacture: ridge tiles and roof tiles, reused slabs forming kiln floors, scorched fragments, and pots showing dripped glaze or scorch marks where production and accident met.

comprehensively. Over the past months a core team of thirty volunteers has learned to work to professional standards: an initial training session on stratigraphy and excavation recording, followed by instruction in selection strategies, distinguishing diagnostic from non-diagnostic material and understanding why a research-ready collection matters, and now concentrated sessions on fabric identification, vessel forms, types and kiln-related material. That training has a physical, tactile quality that

Visits from specialists have been momentary accelerants to learning. When David Dawson and Oliver Kent came to the warehouse, their eye for kiln props and waste reoriented how volunteers recorded these deposits: the difference between a kiln furniture fragment and domestic rubble, how to read a scarred tile or a dripped glaze as evidence of production technique, repair or reuse. These are small observations that widen into larger narratives about craft, economy and the built environment of the town.



*Volunteers sorting out fabric types (S Guerrini)*

The material itself is eloquent. Medieval coarse wares and fine sandy wares sit beside a diverse post-medieval spectrum, slipware and sgraffito; North Devon's own gravel-tempered fragments; tin-glazed and transfer-printed ceramics; imported Westerwald stoneware; even mocha ware. Functional types are well represented: bowls, porringers, pipkins and skillets, chafing dishes and plates, jugs and the fragmentary remains of large North Devon cisterns whose presence hints at everyday storage and domestic infrastructure. Each fragment is a piece of lived experience: a chipped rim that speaks of daily knocks, a hearth-darkened base that tells of long use, a temper or glaze that speaks of raw materials and technological choices.

Throughout, the project's methodology keeps one eye on the archive and the other on audiences. Digitisation places the site files into an accessible research environment; cataloguing produces



*Derry Bryant finds a spindle whorl among the pottery! (S Guerrini)*

a dataset that can be analysed statistically and compared with material from other towns. But the project is not content to produce only academic outputs. By converting this overlooked archive into displays, publications and educational resources, the work reconnects the people of North Devon with a tradition of pottery production that was not merely local: North Devon wares were widely traded and exported as far as Ireland and the early American colonies. That wider trajectory, from kiln floor to overseas markets, is the story the project is beginning to tell in fuller detail.

Perhaps the most satisfying measure of success so far is human rather than technical. Volunteers report measurable improvements in skill, a growing ability to identify fabrics and vessel forms at a glance, and a real pleasure in spotting an unusual sherd or a kiln prop that changes how a context is read. The work is slow and exacting, but it is also generative: every box opened, every slide scanned, and every catalogue entry written is a small restoration of the past to the present.

For a town whose material culture has long been in cupboards and attics, this is an excavation that keeps going long after the

trowel is put away, one that reanimates fragments into stories and gives Barnstaple’s pottery its proper voice.

Potted History is made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, the project is currently in a pilot phase focused on the analysis of the Library Area site (ND24), excavated in 1985–86; during this phase we are testing and refining methodologies, workflows, and resource frameworks in preparation for a proposed three-year programme covering all 18 sites.



## CASTILLY HENGE

### Sarah McRae reports on a visit to a unique and important archaeological site

Here’s a question for you archaeology buffs – how many henges are there in Britain? By henges I mean a circular earthwork with an outside bank and internal ditch (and not necessarily with stones in the centre). Well, it’s reckoned there are about 120 still with us – with of course Stonehenge being the most famous (and I don’t mean the architectural sculpture sitting on the Barnstaple roundabout! ) And now there’s a new henge to add to the list of Avebury, Maumbury Rings, Ring of Brodgar and Cornwall’s Stripple Stones – Castilly Henge near Lanivet, Bodmin.

Situated almost on top of the A 30 / Lanivet junction the site is surrounded by traffic on two sides and



farmland toward the west. It’s been known in past times as “Castle Hill” although it’s fairly certain there has never been such a building on the site.

The site has intrigued historians and archaeologists for a long time – what was the purpose of the earthwork? What went on there? How old is it really? What can it tell us about life in this area of Cornwall over the years?

An oval earthwork with a bank on the outside and a substantial ditch to the inner, this prehistoric site has suffered over the millennia.

*Castilly Henge looking North (Cornwall Heritage Trust)*

Although scheduled in 1928 it has been on the Heritage at Risk register for the last 10 years mainly due

to the threat posed by invasive vegetation, modern development of the nearby road infrastructure, local service network ( a water main is scheduled to be dug close by) all of which lie within metres of the site.

Despite some digs in the 1960s (more on that later) the earthwork is largely undiscovered and unrecorded. Believed to date from the late Neolithic (3000 to 2500 BCE) into the Early Bronze Age (about 2400 to 1500 BCE) the site is perched on a watershed, has views across to Bodmin and Brown Willy and there are several high status Bronze Age barrows in the vicinity. Dr Olaf Bayer, Senior Archaeological Investigator at Historic England has always been interested in the site, and in 2022 arranged for a series of non invasive geophys techniques including earth resistance, magnetometry and GPR (ground penetrating radar) to be used over the earthworks. Using all 3, (and with additional information from aerial surveys) the topographical results were spectacular with each survey showing anomalies in the centre which could be traces of a now-removed stone circle in the middle of the henge.



*OS 1 inch popular map 1910 – 1940 showing “Castle Hill” in the centre.(Ordnance Survey)*

**2025 Excavation**

Roll forward to 2025 and a major excavation and outreach project was organised and funded to explore the monument in more detail. The project received help and assistance from a number of organisations including Ian Barnes of Historic England’s excavation team which included Dr Olaf Bayer, Senior Archaeological Investigator and Nicola Hembrey, Historic England Archaeological Excavation Principal, as well as archaeologists from Cornwall Archaeological Unit and Cornwall Heritage Trust. The month long dig was made possible by a £42,990 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to Cornwall Archaeological Society and a £10,000 grant from Historic England. The project was also supported by a community engagement and outreach programme, involving more



*Castilly Henge excavations 2025 (Historic England Photo DP574580.)*

than 80 volunteers, visits from more than 300 local schoolchildren and connecting over 100 people to their heritage via community groups and social prescribing programmes. The main aim of the excavation was to confirm when the henge was built, how it was used, and how it has changed over time. A key question that needs to be answered is whether there is evidence of the remains of a now-removed stone circle at the centre of the henge and whether any of the hypothesis from the 1960s digs are relevant.

**Open for business!**

After nearly 4 weeks of archaeology, the henge was opened to the public to view the trenches and to discover for themselves what the project

had uncovered. Saturday October 11th dawned bright and fine as members from NDAS and ACE Archaeology made our various ways to Lanivet to pick up a free transport shuttle to the henge, as parking on the A30 junction just by the site was extremely limited.



*Dr Olaf Bayer Historic England’s Senior Archaeological Investigator and Nicola Hembrey, Historic England Archaeological Excavation Principal at the Castilly Henge excavation. (© Historic England. photo DP572335)*

of members of the local community - the young (including babies in pushchairs and slings), eager schoolchildren, teenagers, young families, older families, granny and grandpa, the family dog (s) – at one point there must have been about 400 people milling about in high expectation - the whole of Devon and Cornwall seemed to have turned out to see what was going on. We found that our “tour” would be at 1.30pm, giving us 2 ½ hours to entertain ourselves. Not long after, all the remaining afternoon tours were booked up, but still people were arriving at the site in a long endless stream. It was really quite a sight.



*Smoke Gets in Your Eyes - Bake Off, Bronze Age style! (S McRae)*

Even though we arrived at 10.30am, a good 30 minutes before the opening time, the pickup point in the community hall car park was already full to overflowing. Throughout the morning and into the afternoon the minibus was constantly on the move ferrying people to and from the site.

Finally arriving at the henge, we found the area outside the roped-off working area rammed with people – from keen amateur archaeologists and historians to a whole range



*Flint knapping demonstration*

There was plenty to occupy all the guests outside of the actual site. A gentleman from Cornwall and Devon Bushcraft demonstrated the art of flint knapping and had a fine selection of flint tools and artifacts that would have been used by our Neolithic ancestors. As the morning wore into the afternoon his ankles began to vanish into the heap of flint fragments and flakes that fell around his feet!

Two Rangers from Cornwall Heritage Trust were cooking using ingredients that Bronze Age families would have had available. The simple little hot cakes were delicious – and if you fancy being Jamie Oliver or Nigella Lawson, the recipe is in the newsletter – but you ought cook these little delicacies on an open fire with the wind blowing the smoke back in your face to obtain the true taste!

Cornwall Archaeology Society and Cornwall Heritage Trust had a number of interesting displays with further details about the henge and the take away information sheet was “sold out” within a very short time of opening Younger guests were kept busy with a number of practical art and creative activities.

### Preparing to tour

Finally we started our tour with a group of about 25 other eager visitors. This opened with a brief overview of the site, its history and “at risk” status. We also learned about the eminent Devon archaeologist Prof. Charles Thomas who used Castilly Henge as a training excavation in 1962 although the results were less than thorough. Given however that he didn’t have the availability of the technology of today, his thoughts



*An initial talk about the Henge (S McRae)*

were that the earthworks might have been re-used as a mediaeval “open air” theatre (a plen-an-gwari) and later as a civil war gun battery. Whether any of his conclusions were correct remains to be seen.

### The trenches

The first trench we viewed showed a series of red flagged stakes indicating the presence of the “anomalies” and the fact there was indeed soil difference in these spots – indicating the possibility of either a post hole or a stone hole.



*Trench 1 (S McRae)*



*Trench 1 (S McRae)*

In the second trench another post/stone hole had been cleaned and revealed a long thin “side ramp” into the pit. The team believe this to have been used to lever a stone into place before backfilling with more stone to keep the stone (or post) upright.



*Trench 2 - side ramp feature at the back (S McRae)*



*Trench 2 - side ramp feature excavated (S McRae)*

### **The ditch and bank**

Seeing the ditch and bank up close was quite an experience. The beautifully excavated ditch was approx. 20-25 foot deep and the bottom still hadn't yet been found. To think that this was originally dug out with very primitive tools almost defies belief. If



*Archaeologists and volunteers at work at Castilly Henge near Bodmin. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian©*

you've ever visited Clovelly Dykes and seen the cleared ditches, you'll get an idea of how impressive this was. This cut across ditch and bank expanded the Charles Thomas excavation and had to be large in order to access the undisturbed ground beneath his original dig.

Around the other side of the ditch we took a closer look at the bank, again beautifully excavated and the clear definition between the soil layers over 5,000 years. The "green line" which could be seen at the base of the



*Ditch and bank excavated (S McRae)*

bank was actually the original turf level from the time of the henge construction. The excavation team are hoping to take samples of this layer to find out what pollens and grains might be found within and determine the type of plants, landscape and environment that the henge was built in. It was also hoped that the soil could be dated using radiocarbon and also OSL techniques (optically stimulated luminescence) that will determine that last time that the soil was exposed to light.



*The excavated bank - note the thin "green line" at the bottom which was the original turf layer (S McRae)*

Results from these tests however won't be known for about a year to eighteen months. Watch this space!

### **Finds**

Sieving was also carried out on all the material excavated – there were large mounds of soil attesting to the thorough activity of volunteers. At the time of the open day, there had been relatively few finds. Despite extensive sieving, only 2 (Neolithic) flints, a tiny selection of post-medieval pottery, some slate counters and a handful of early to mid-20th century coins likely related to the 1960's excavation had been found.

### **Save the Henge!**

All in all, a most fascinating and interesting day and a privilege to see first hand what this important archaeology dig was discovering and a joy to see so many people, young and old engaged in their local history and heritage.

Cornwall Heritage Trust are now raising £50,000 to buy the site so that they can secure the future of the monument through active management and enable the public to visit it for free all year round. Donations so far have reached around £15,000. In early November 2025 it was announced that English Heritage had added the henge to the official Heritage at Risk Register – an important step in the preservation of the site.

If you would like to contribute to the future of the henge, full details can be found at: [www.cornwallheritagetrust.org/support-us/castilly-henge-appeal](http://www.cornwallheritagetrust.org/support-us/castilly-henge-appeal)

## **BRONZE AGE BAKE -OFF! AUTUMN FRUIT BREAD**

**1kg stone ground flour; 1 bowl or a handful of blackberries; 1tsp salt; 500g honey.**

**Mix all the ingredients together and add water to make a stiff paste/dough. Divide the dough into small round balls. Press flat onto a hot plate/griddle. Cook until patty is brown on both sides. Serve with a little butter. Enjoy!**



## IT'S A BIT OF A MYSTERY.....

### What's going on near Loxhore? Terry Green went to investigate...

**A** while ago Alison Mills was contacted by a gentleman called Peter Green enquiring whether anyone from NDAS could shed any light on a standing stone that he had come across. Alison brought up the question at the NDAS Committee meeting and subsequently I arranged to meet Peter Green and go to have a look.

The stone is at Loxhore Cott, a hamlet on the boundary between Loxhore and Shirwell parishes and just beyond the gate to Arlington Court at the Loxhore end (OS grid ref. roughly SS609384). It is in fact on Arlington land and 16 years ago was noted and logged by Nick Berry who was doing an



archaeological survey of the Arlington Court landscape. The stone is a sandstone orthostat 1.58 metres in height and 1.1 metres wide at its widest point and covered in mosses and lichens. It stands beside the River Yeo on the edge of an area of level ground amounting, at a guess, to between 2 and 3 acres. The field is accessed via Cott Bridge and thence from a wide track representing, apparently, an old road to Shirwell and Barnstaple.

There are currently two leading suggestions for its purpose and origin: either that it is a way marker at a fording point of the Yeo – which on the face of it is reasonable - or that it is a ‘scratching’ stone, put in place for sheep or cattle to scratch their behinds. The second suggestion seems grabbed out of the air and Peter Green, who is a vet, says that to his knowledge setting up scratching stones is not a Devon practice. On the other hand, where ancient standing stones are located in grazing land, animals readily make use of them.

*Peter Green by the Loxhore Stone (T Green)*

Around the Ilfracombe area and on the North Devon downland more generally as well as Exmoor, there are numerous standing stones which are almost all on open high ground and are frequently of quartz, originating from the Ilfracombe slates. The geological and topographic context of the Loxhore Cott stone is quite different – low ground on Devonian sandstones. Some of the Ilfracombe stones are interpreted as way markers and that may be so in this case, especially as the stone stands close to a fordable point of the River Yeo, but in the apparent absence of any other way markers in the area, this seems questionable. And in any case, a stone of this size and apparent weight would seem like overkill for a ford marker.

The low ground where the stone is situated appears to be flood plain, which would mean potentially fertile alluvial soil. A lidar image shows what appear to be parallel sinuous channels running off the Yeo and through the field which suggests a water meadow and in fact in the tithe apportionment the field is called Cott Meadow. Water meadows were a creation of the early modern period. The creation of a water meadow would make this piece of land relatively valuable, but doesn't seem to provide a reason to mark its edge with a large standing stone.

Is it a boundary stone? It stands on the boundary – the River Yeo - between Loxhore and Shirwell and in fact close by, on Cott Bridge there is a stone marking the parish boundary. But why such an emphatic statement at this point and not directly on the road cum track from Loxhore Town to Shirwell? Perhaps the existing route and bridge represents a diversion necessitated by the creation of the water meadow?

The only sure way to determine whether or not the stone is prehistoric would be to dig beneath it and subject the soil to OSL (optically stimulated luminescence). So, short of that, what do you suggest? Scratching stone? way marker? boundary stone? Or something else entirely? Ritual? Prehistoric, medieval or modern? I would say it predates the water meadow, which would make it pre-sixteenth century, and were it in a more prominent position, one would suggest prehistoric – it certainly has that ‘look’. The possibility remains that it has been relocated, but still one has to ask: Why here? Victorian romanticism? Unlikely in such an inaccessible spot. Any thoughts? Get in touch with Terry!



*The Loxhore Stone - What is it? (T Green)*

## **TIME AND TIDE: LIFE ON THE SOUTH WEST'S COASTS AND WATERWAYS**

### **John Bradbeer reports from the Joint symposium of the Devon and Cornwall Archaeological Societies, Tavistock, Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October**

**T**he joint symposium was held in the grand setting of Tavistock Town Hall and featured eight presentations from a variety of speakers. The emphasis was very much on the coast and estuaries of Cornwall and Devon and with a definite focus on the post medieval period.

The morning started with a presentation from Dr Geri Parlbly on the discovery of the ship painting in a



*Examining the actual painted ship (Tavistock Heritage Trust)*

building in Market Street Tavistock. Geri took us through the issues of identifying the ship, although this has proved to be elusive, although it is clearly later Tudor and flying the standard of the Tudor navy. In so doing we learnt much about Tavistock's merchants and the shipping interests and activities and Geri's tentative conclusion was that the ship was probably one owned by the Glanville family who, in the very last years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, might have been engaged in supply arms to the Sultan of Morocco to be used against the Spanish.



*The Painted Ship exhibition (Devon County Council)*

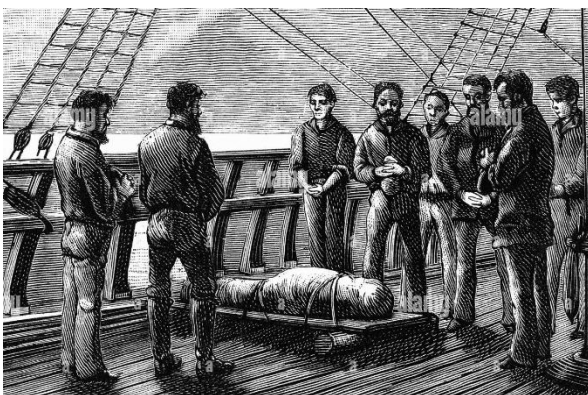
The second talk was by Martin Reed of the University of Plymouth and Plymouth Archaeological Society on the excavations of Commercial Wharf near the Barbican in Plymouth. It has featured briefly in the BBC series Digging for Britain and Martin was able to provide more context and detail to the finds, which included many sherds of fine Portuguese ware and rather more sherds of North Devon ware, both fine and gravel tempered ware. Hefin Meara talked about the work of Historic England in designating and protecting historic wreck and of the production of actual trails and virtual trails of a selection of wrecks.

The final talk of the morning was by Cathy Parkes of the Cornwall Archaeological Unit on the porths (launching places), gig sheds and gigs of the Isle of Scilly. As a student of maritime history, I was aware of the pilot gigs of Scilly but knew nothing about the sheds where the boats were kept nor of the great efforts made to provide boulder free access to the sea for launching at so many sites.

The afternoon session commenced with a fascinating talk by Dr Richard Mikuski also from the Cornwall Archaeological Unit on the subject of the burial of shipwrecked mariners. He was able to provide some classic osteoarchaeological analysis of some of the skeletons, although the retrieval of complete skeletons is unusual as most burials come to light as individual bones are washed out of dune or cliff top sites by erosion following significant storms. I was unaware of the existence of the so-called Grylls Act of 1808 which required that the burial of all bodies washed ashore be undertaken in consecrated ground and seems effectively to have put an end to the older custom of burying such bodies close to where they had been found.



*Just some of the finds from the Commercial Wharf dig ( Plymouth Archaeology Society)*



*Burial at sea (Almay)*

Another fascinating talk was that by Gary Lewis, the Senior Heritage Officer of the Tamara Project which has been running under the egis of the Tamar National Landscape (the old Tamar Valley AONB). The focus here has been on recording and protecting heritage at risk and involving local communities both in management and the interpretation of such sites. Gary emphasised that today the Tamar Valley is a relatively remote and inaccessible place but in the mid nineteenth century is was a hive of activities and united by the river Tamar.

The final talk of the day was by Dr Phil Newman on the Stover Canal and its place in a multi-modal transport system constructed around the turn of the

nineteenth century by the Templer family of Stover to facilitate movement, first of granite from Hay Tor, and then ball clay from the Bovey Basin eventually to Teignmouth for export. Phil explained how the granite tramway from Hay Tor met the canal proper at Ventiford Basin, where the remains of three barges were uncovered during restoration work. After the canal, the barges then made their way down the Teign to Teignmouth for final trans-shipment to vessels for onward movement. Work at Ventiford Basin showed that quarrying rubble and some rejected dressed granite blocks had been used and one large block with a pronounced chamfer, probably was cut for the contract that the Templers had to supply granite for the New London Bridge from 1824 to 1831.

Overall, this was a most enjoyable day, and I am sure that the 60 or so who attended were delighted by what they heard and were heartened by the co-operation between the two societies to lay such an event.



*Excavation of a barge at Ventiford Basin (Stover Canal Society)*

## **ST PETROCK'S WELL**

**Simon Carroll and NDAS friends have been back to carry out further investigations around this unusual well.**

**T**here is not much documentary evidence relating to St Petrock's Well, in the village of Newton St Petrock although it survived the Reformation and people from the surrounding area came to it to seek cures and healing. The well lies in a field 150 metres to the south-west of the church. There is no surviving direct route to the well from the church or churchyard and access is now gained via a farm gate on the lane leading from the village toward Woodford Bridge. The site is about 40 metres above the Torridge on the north bank of the river but some 350 metres from the river. A spring feeds the well, and a small stream runs south to meet the river Torridge.



*The Well as we first found it! (S Carroll)*

What first began as a small-scale dig in 2019, has given us many surprises along the way. Our initial preconceived ideas of the well, being a small stone-lined hole in the ground, have been literally blown out of the water.

From the first visit, we realised that this was not what we were expecting. Rather than a standard well, this appears to be more of a plunge pool. Uncovering and clearing back the vegetation, gave us a better overall view of the well, although the dig also raised many more questions.

The dig, back in 2019, was intended to restore the well and investigate the possibility of a stone platform above it. These objectives were reached, but without any finds which can help us date the

site accurately, we are still having to make educated guesses, rather than establishing hard facts. However, this is often the way with any archaeological excavation; can we ever really know what people thought, or how they used a site, many centuries ago?

The level of the possible stone platform was the same as the top of the surrounding stone wall of the well, suggesting that these were related.

However, dating is unknown. It makes sense that there was a solid surface to stand on, for onlookers, when baptisms were taking place. Standing inside the well, the platform would be around head height.

The pathway of stones, leading round the south side of the well, was just below today's surface level, descending to the entrance of the well.

The sherds of N Devon pottery, which were found littering the site (dated between 300-500yrs old), would be expected, as people would have filled bowls and jugs with the water. This well has

traditionally been seen as a baptism well, rather than a source of drinking water. The village has many wells and springs, so drinking water wouldn't have been limited. However, people tell us that the well has never dried up, even in long hot summers. So, could this have been a source, when other springs dried up. If this was a place which always provided water, it's not surprising that it had religious



*Beginning the excavations 2019 (S Carroll)*

connections, both Christian and possibly earlier. Also the water rises at around 13-14 degrees Celsius and is iron-rich. To the point that as it flows down-stream, it turns red as it oxidises, another feature that would have drawn people to it.



*Examples of the pottery sherds found (S Carroll)*

A lot of quartz was found at the well. A recently discovered enclosure, a mile to the east, also has a large number of coastal sea-rolled quartz stone, where the banks would have been. Possibly to make them stand out in the landscape. The large number of stones found in the well, on the platform and pressed into the clay sides, indicates that the quartz was deliberately used for a purpose. Maybe decoration, as it would enhance the 'sparkling'

effect of the water, or as Time Team's Francis Pryor puts it, if we are not sure what it's for, just call it 'ritual'! Most of the quartz, pressed into the sides, was found around the entrance – something which would have been most visible from the platform, above. Hundreds of tiny flecks were also found around the well base and sides, mixed with the silt. Could people have been smashing the stones, for some reason? This may explain the large quantity of slivers found in the well.

The entrance, at the western side, had a significant drop, into the well. We imagined that there would be steps into it. One set, at least, was uncovered. Consisting of a set of smaller stones, just 14cm wide, set into the clay.

The north side of the well seemed elongated, in comparison with the rest of the sides. Once the silt was scraped back, it was clear that it had been dug out, at some point in the past. A pile of soil and stone, a few metres back from the side was strimmed back and cleared. The characteristic blue clay, pottery and quartz was found within the pile, leading us to believe that this was from the well.

The stone drainage channel became much clearer, as the water was taken out. The silt around the stones flowed away, leaving a flat stone pathway, leading out of the well. Here, we found the largest number of pottery fragments, along with a high number of quartz stones. The most intriguing find was that of the quartz ‘tiles’. With 3 of them, it could suggest that they may have lined the pavement.

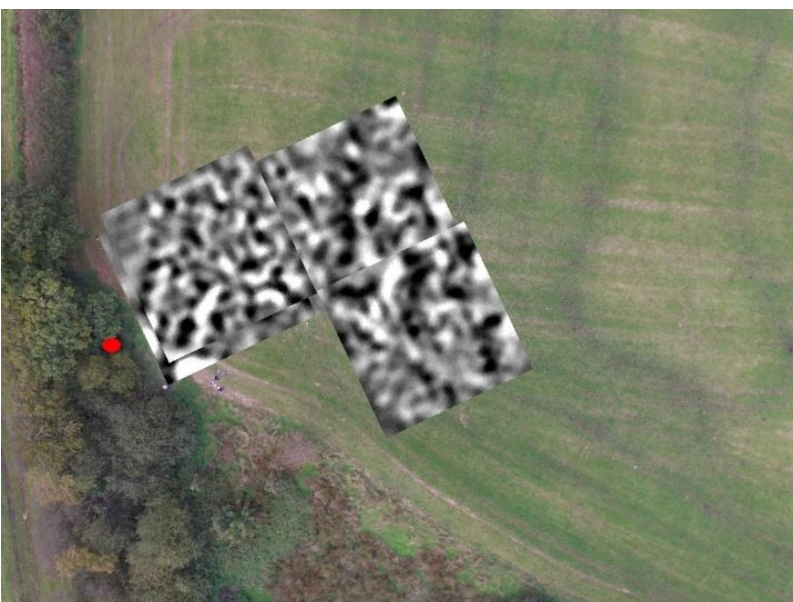
The dig met our objectives, but created many more questions, which we hope to answer. Future investigations may unearth more artefacts, which could help us date the well.

In 2024, a few volunteers helped to restore the Northern wall, using the material found above the well. This helped to stop the erosion above, mainly due to the increased footfall and interest in this site.



*By 2024, the well was looking tidier with the restoration of the N wall and channel. (S Carroll)*

Last Autumn, a few of us from NDAS tested out the geophysics equipment with reasonable results and several features of interest emerged. What appeared to be a probable footpath, leading from the church to the well and a large U-shaped feature.



This has brought about a number of theories, which I’m hoping to investigate this year. Above that, seemed to be a rectangular structure with possible post holes.

It’s thought that the oldest part of the village would have been near the church and it’s quite possible that a further survey may show the buildings’ footprints.

Ideally, carrying out a full geophysics survey on the whole field may show up more features, something I’m hoping to raise funds for.

*The 2025 Geophys result (S Carroll)*

## NOW SHOWING AT TWO DEVON MUSEUMS!

If you're out and about in Exeter or Newton Abbot, why not visit the local museum and see two new objects on display?

### A RARE TUDOR MAP IN EXETER

**A**n exceptionally rare Tudor map of Kingsbridge has been acquired by South West Heritage Trust, a charity commissioned by Devon County Council to be custodians of the county's archives and heritage.

The 1586 map of Kingsbridge will now be publicly accessible for researchers at the Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter, after more than four centuries in private hands.

The acquisition was made possible thanks to a generous grant of £17,691 from the Friends of the Nations' Libraries, and further funding support from the Friends of Devon Archives.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century map strengthens the county's historical record and enhances opportunities for deeper research into Devon's Tudor heritage.



*Part of the Kingsbridge map. (SW Archaeology Trust)*

The hand-drawn and painted map (41cm W × 48.5cm H) has remained in outstanding condition, retaining much of its vivid original colour. It contains detailed depictions of key features of Tudor Kingsbridge, including the parish church, a pillory, and the 'Cheape House'—a central building in the town's main street where the manor court was held until its demolition in 1796.

The document maps land belonging to Sir John Petre, the lord of the manor, and was likely commissioned by him. The Petre family were long-established figures in Devon's history; Sir John's father, Sir William Petre, served as Secretary of State under Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I.

This newly acquired map will complement the substantial Petre family archive held at the Devon Heritage Centre. Spanning the 12th to the 19th centuries, the collection includes extensive manorial records and title deeds documenting the Petres' Devon estates.

The Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter is open for researchers only .

### A BRONZE AGE BEAUTY IN NEWTON ABBOT!

**A**n urn which dates back more than 3,000 years to the Bronze Age has gone on display. The ceramic vessel is on loan from Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery and is in Newton Abbot Museum, Devon.



*Staff prepare the urn for display (Newton Abbot Museum)*

Experts said it had been found in a ditch on the northern edge of Newton Abbot and the clay could have been sourced from the River Lemon in Devon.

Museum curator Joanna Eccles said: "The people who buried this urn are the ancestors of today's Newtonians and it is fascinating to reflect on how different life was here 3,000 or even 3,500 years ago."

The urn weighs 2st 6lbs (15.5kg) and traces of bone were found inside which could have been used as a burial container.

Joanna added: "Because it remained in one piece for so long, it is believed it was placed into a hole cut into the ditch feature. We cannot be certain why this urn was placed here but complete vessels found within landscape features are known from other sites and are often significant."

Visitors can see it at the Newton Abbot Museum from Tuesdays to Saturdays and admission is free.

## **UNDER THE HAMMER**

**Two interesting lots came up for auction recently, both involving important and well known North Devon families.**

### **THE ROLLE RING**

**A**n early 18th century mourning ring, commemorating Isabella Charlotte Rolle (nee Walter), wife of John Rolle of Stevenstone House, St Giles in the Wood, Devon, came up for auction in late 2025 at a midlands auction house.

Isabella was baptised at St Paul Covent Garden on May 8th 1687, the daughter of Sir William Walter,



*Rolle Ring (Hansons Auctioneers)*

Devon families.

John Rolle was the son of John Rolle and Lady Christina Bruce, the daughter of Robert Bruce, 1st Earl of Ailesbury and 2nd Earl of Elgin (descended from King Edward III on his father **and** mother's side).

2nd Baronet of Sarsden, Oxfordshire, and Lady Mary Bruce (daughter of Robert Bruce, Earl of Ailesbury. Isabella's 4 x great grandfather was the famous Elizabethan courtier William Cecil, Lord Burleigh. She married John Rolle, her first cousin, in London in 1706 and in doing so she became related to one of the most influential and wealthy

John served as M.P for Saltash from 1703-05, and latterly M.P for Barnstaple, Exeter, and Devon. He and Isabella had 11 children, (4 sons and 7 daughters) although not all survived infancy. Isabella died on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1734 and was buried at St Giles Church, St Giles in the Wood, Devon in October 1734.

The mourning ring may have been made for John or possibly one of their children and was unearthed in a field by metal detectorist Warrick Rochester, in South Shields, Tyne and Wear earlier in 2025. How the ring came to be so far from the Rolle family estates in Devon is unknown, as the first and second generations of John and Isabella appeared to reside in the Devon area. The ring was successfully sold at auction, although details of the purchaser were not made public – perhaps it may return to Devon in the fullness of time.



*Rolle Ring (Hansons Auctioneers)*

## A PICTURE PAIR

Just before Christmas, a Midlands auction house offered for sale a pair of portraits featuring Sir William Fortescue and his wife Mary. The portraits are by a follower of Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646 – 1723) and were eventually sold to an unnamed buyer for £360.



*Lady Mary (Hansons Auctioneers)*

a busy practice as a barrister, he was elected MP for Newport (IoW) in 1727, became a Kings Council in 1730 as well as Attorney General to the Duchy of Cornwall. In 1741 he became Master of the Rolls and a Privy Councillor, posts he kept until his death in 1749.

The Fortescue family, like the Rolle family, are a well known dynasty from N Devon, and generations of Fortescue's owned the Buckland Filleigh estate and House.

Sir William (1687 – 1749) was educated at Barnstaple Grammer School where he met the future poet John Gay, who became a lifelong friend. In July 1719 he married his cousin Mary but sadly the marriage lasted just over a year when Mary died giving birth in August 1710.

Subsequently, William decided to follow a career in law and politics and rose quickly through the ranks. Despite keeping up



*Sir William (Hansons Auctioneers)*

Sir William was most likely to have been responsible for the landscaping at Buckland Filleigh House, including the serpentine lake. The house that William and Mary occupied survived until 1798 when it was consumed by fire and rebuilt in the early 1800's and is the house that can still be seen today.



*Buckland Filleigh House as it appeared in 1797 before the devastating fire of the following year.*

*(1797 watercolour of Buckland Filleigh House, Devon (south front), by Rev. John Swete (d.1821). Collection of Devon Record Office, ref: DRO, 564M/F11/81*

## TAKING A RISK

### Historic Barnstaple school site removed from risk register

**A** 17th century Barnstaple school which transformed into a restaurant is among a number of UK sites to have been removed from the Heritage At Risk (HAR) register. HAR includes buildings and structures including schools, homes, churches, castles; parks and gardens, wreck sites, battlefields, archaeological sites such as barrows, henges, fishponds, and conservation areas.



*Once an elementary school, The Old School Coffee House on Church Lane in Barnstaple is now affordable housing (Google)*

Formerly known as Horwood's School, the Grade II-listed building in central Barnstaple served as the borough's first elementary school after being founded for poor children in 1659. For the last few decades it had been a licensed eatery called The Old School Coffee House and was more recently renovated into affordable housing after lying vacant for years.

The former school is one of 129 sites saved and removed from the list, published by government

heritage agency Historic England. Its spokesperson said many of them have been rescued with the help and commitment of local people, communities, charities, owners and funders, including The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

However, 138 historic buildings and places have been added to the 2025 register amid concerns over their condition and future. In North Devon additions to the register include:

Fishpond in Lower Beer Wood, Castle Hill, Filleigh  
Cairn, 20 metres east of Tibbett's Lookout, Lundy  
Hillfort in Ten Oaks Wood, Rorborough

Interestingly, one local monument, the Bronze Age barrow complex at Wrangworthy is now removed from the register due to the implemented Monument Management scheme – of which NDAS members have been involved and highlighted in recent newsletters.

## DID YOU SEE ON TV...?

**Two rare archaeological finds recently made public may interest you.....**

### THE THETFORD CARNYX

**A**rchaeologists from Pre Construct Archaeology working on a site a few miles from Thetford, Norfolk uncovered two of the rarest finds imaginable – all in the same trench!

The find consisted of an extremely rare Iron Age war horn, a Carnyx. These impressive, tall and intimidating horns were blown to scare the enemy at the start of battle.

There is only one other carnyx known in Europe, and it's not as complete as the Norfolk find.



*The Carnyx after excavation (Norfolk Museums Service)*

Also found in the same deposit was a boar's head flag standard, the only one known in Europe and rarer than even the carnyx. The hoard also included several metal shield bosses. Dates from 50BC to 50AD

Catch the full story with Alice Roberts on the BBC "Digging

for Britain" Series 13 ep 2 and hear how a reconstructed carnyx sounds!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr7jvj8d39eo>



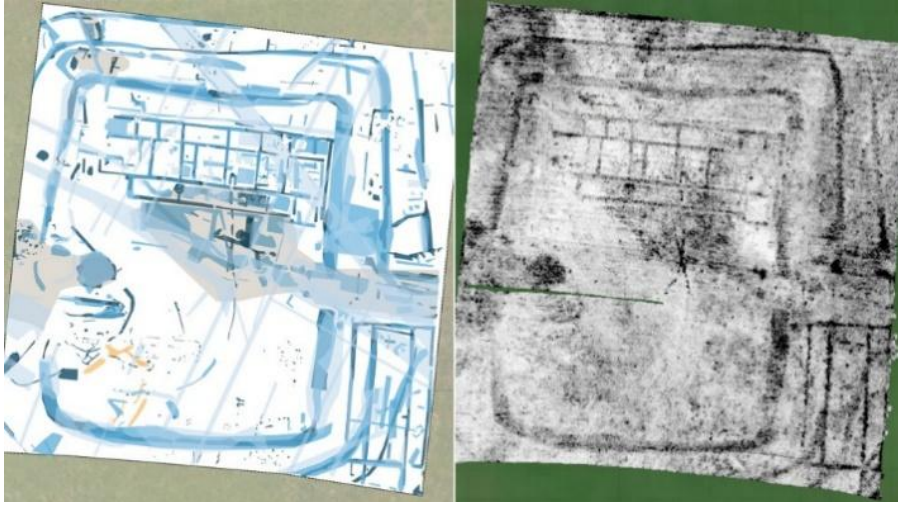
*The Boar's head flag standard being conserved (Norfolk Museums Service)*



*A reconstructed Carnyx (BBC/Rare TV)*

## THE PORT TALBOT ROMAN VILLA

**M**eanwhile, archaeologist Dr Alex Langlands (also a well known TV presenter) led a team from Swansea University, Neath Port Talbot Council and Margam Abbey Church investigating Margam Country Park in the S Wales town of Port Talbot . From the detailed geophysics



*Geophys result of the surveyed area (Photo Terradat Geophysics)*

undertaken, emerged a large Roman villa, completely unknown. The size of the villa complex makes this the largest found in Wales, and possibly similar to the stunning Lullingstone Villa in Kent.. Currently the site has not been excavated as there is more investigation, research and geophysics tests to be undertaken. As the parkland has never been cultivated or ploughed, and with the villa remains only 1m from the surface, it is expected to be

well preserved.

Looking at the geophysics, the villa is thought to be a "corridor" style with 2 wings and a veranda along the front. Approx 141 ft long, there appear to be 4 rooms to the front and 8 at the rear and the centre of a big agricultural estate. The exact location within Margam Park is however being kept secret.

Find out more at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgk8j1gkxelo>



*Margam Country Park (Photo Swansea University)*

## NDAS POST-CHRISTMAS PARTY

**Rosemary Dymond was among the guests....**

**T**he post-Christmas party, held midday on Saturday 3rd January, was a great success. Those members that came all agreed that it was a super event, with good company, and good food in abundance.

Firstly, came the pulling of crackers and donning of party hats, together with the usual jokes and playing with novelties contained therein. We were then treated to a sumptuous feast by the Barnstaple Hotel,



*Christmas cheer from NDAS!*

with main courses ranging from traditional Christmas fare of roast Devon turkey, to roast silverside of beef, or pan fried fillet of sea bass, or the vegetarian option of homemade chestnut, roast vegetable and bean loaf. Some of us feasted on the full three courses, while others opted for two courses. Whichever option folks had chosen, all agreed that food was abundant and excellent.

Mirth and merriment abound, together with fruitful discussion, saw all attendees having an enjoyable time and on leaving voices were heard already looking forward to the next Christmas party.

Therefore, come the autumn when notification is sent out for the Christmas event, PLEASE COME, you will not be disappointed! Thanks must go to our Treasurer Bob for once again organising such a successful event.

## **HAVE YOU SEEN OUR NEW WEBSITE?**

**Check out our all new, updated and revamped website!**

**Many thanks to Simon Carroll for his dedication and hard work on creating a new NDAS website. We hope you like it and can catch up on our past events and activities and keep up to date on our new ventures!**

**Go to**

**[www.ndarch.org](http://www.ndarch.org)**



# YOUR NDAS NEEDS YOU!

As our Joint Chair Alison Mills has mentioned at the AGM - can you help your fellow NDAS members and spare a few hours a month to keep our Society moving forward?

We are asking if any members could undertake some admin roles for us:

- Arrange our winter talks programme and/or summer visits & outings
- Publicity
- Corresponding with Members
- We also have a vacancy for a Treasurer from next year so it would be ideal for any interested members to contact Bob Shrigly direct for further information about the role.

## SNAP SHOT!

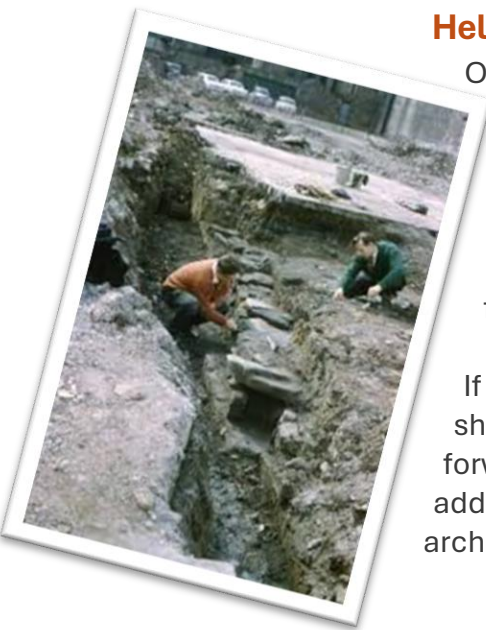
### NDAS Photographic Archive Appeal – a call for photographs from NDAS Members

**W**e are reaching out to all NDAS members who may have photographs documenting our excavations and activities. If you have any images from our projects or events throughout the past 50 years, we would greatly appreciate your contributions.

### Help Us Preserve Our History

Our aim is to establish a comprehensive photographic archive that captures the rich history of NDAS. Photographs from our early days would be particularly valuable, but images from any period are most welcome. Your contributions will help us celebrate and preserve the legacy of our society for future generations.

If you have any photographs to share, please get in touch. We look forward to hearing from you and adding your treasured memories to our archive.





Please be aware that submitted photos may be used in future exhibitions, displays, newsletters and other publicity and/or marketing material. Photos should be accompanied by your name, (or the name of the person who took the photo) the date and the location .



### Contact

To send pictures digitally, e mail Simon Carroll on [ndarch2025@outlook.com](mailto:ndarch2025@outlook.com)

If your photos are not in a digital format we can scan them and return them to you – please contact Simon on his e mail [sicarroll1@outlook.com](mailto:sicarroll1@outlook.com). for details.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE!

The Treasurer and Membership Secretary would like to remind you that annual subscriptions (£16 single membership, £24 joint, £8 students) became due on 1st April.



If you've not yet renewed your NDAS membership, please make your cheque (payable to NDAS) and send it to ;  
Bob Shrigley, 11 Moreton Court, Birdwood Crescent, Bideford EX3 3FP.  
If you wish to pay by bank transfer then please contact me by email [rvs1120@gmail.com](mailto:rvs1120@gmail.com) and I will send you our bank details.

## WINTER TALKS PROGRAMME

**O**ur final talk in our 2025/2026 talks season takes place on **Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> April** at The Castle Centre in Barnstaple with talks starting at 7.30pm.

**Dr Laura Evis** will be speaking about **forensic archaeology**. Dr Evis is a forensic bioarchaeologist who adapts and applies various archaeological and anthropological techniques to help answer questions and solve problems for medico-legal investigation. We look forward to seeing you!

## PLEASE KEEP IN TOUCH!



**We'd love to keep in touch with ALL our members!**  
Have you moved, changed your phone number (landline or mobile) or created a new e-mail address? Then please let us know so we can keep you updated with all our news and activities.

Contact BOB SHRIGLEY at [rvs1120@gmail.com](mailto:rvs1120@gmail.com)

## AND FINALLY...

**A** big “thank you” to the contributors of this newsletter: Terry Green, Rosemary Dymond, Alison Mills, Sonja Guerrini, Simon Carroll – we couldn’t do it without you!

**If you would like to contribute an article to our next edition (or any edition for that matter!) I’d love to hear from you – just e mail me at [sarah.mcrae2106@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.mcrae2106@gmail.com)**