



ULSTER
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

Newsletter

Summer 2024

Editor: Duncan Berryman

School of Natural & Built
Environment, Queen's University
Belfast, Belfast, BT7 1NN

newsletter.ulsterarcsoc@gmail.com

Find us online at: uas.society.qub.ac.uk | Find us on: Facebook and Twitter (@UlsterArcSoc) | Email us at: ulsterarcsoc@gmail.com



Some photos from UAS tour of Friar's Bush (shared by Pat O'Neill)



A Message from the President

It seems that summer is finally upon us, although it may not feel much like it. Nevertheless, the longer days give us all an opportunity to get out and about to enjoy the amazing heritage we have around us. There is lots going on around the Province and beyond, both with the UAS and elsewhere, notably European Heritage Days in August and September both home and abroad (see below). Whether you are heading off for holidays, having a staycation or planning a few days out here and there, there are endless possibilities. I hope you all get to enjoy some new places to explore, or enjoy revisiting favourite places. Why don't you share your travels hints with other members?

The Centre for Community Archaeology Project Northern Ireland (CAPNI) has hit the ground running with a number of community events including excavations taking place this summer already, and more to come. The search for Clare Castle in Ballycastle, Con O'Neill's castle at Castlereagh, and the possible rath at Shaftesbury Park in Carrickfergus have given large numbers of school children and an army of adult volunteers an opportunity to get their hands and knees dirty. It has been a great learning experience and some very interesting finds have been made. No doubt we will hear more about this in our Discovery 2024! Conference on 8th & 9th November. Many thanks to all the CAPNI organisers. Another crop of archaeology students have graduated from QUB, and I congratulate them and wish them well with their future careers. There seems to be no let-up in the enthusiasm for the subject and the archaeology department goes from strength to strength thanks to the dedicated staff. Best wishes to all those who are continuing their studies too.

If you have any thoughts on places you would like to visit with the UAS, activities you would like to take part in or suggestions for lecture topics, please get in touch. All suggestions will be considered. It's your society, so feel free to let us know! Whatever you get up to this summer, enjoy yourselves and spread the word about our fascinating past. See you soon.

Best Wishes

Anne MacDermott
President, Ulster Archaeological Society

Membership Subscriptions

Full and Retired subscriptions were due on the 1st January 2024. Please send a cheque, payable to the **Ulster Archaeological Society**, for £28 (Full) or £33 (Full non-UK) or £10 (Retired) or £13 (Retired nonUK) or £7.50 for new Student (UK & Non UK), to the Hon. Treasurer, Lee Gordon, 135 Old Holywood Road, Belfast BT4 2HQ.

You can use **PayPal** via <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/JoinUs/>

Or by **Bank Transfer** to Ulster Archaeological Society (Ulster Bank)

Sort Code. **98 01 30**

Account Number **15587062**

Please include your name in the reference so we know who is paying!

Lectures 2024

Lectures will be held in the lecture theatre, Elmwood building, Elmwood Avenue and online via Zoom.

Recordings of previous lectures can be found on our YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/c/TheUlsterArchaeologicalSociety>

30 th September	Historic Shipwrecks in Northern Ireland: Discovery, Investigation and Protection Dr Rory McNeary, Historic Environment Division
28 th October	Life at Home in Ireland's Viking-Age Worlds Dr Rebecca Boyd, IAC Archaeology
25 th November	Prehistoric Malta Dr Robert Barratt, Queen's University Belfast
16 th December	Cranmore House, Malone - the building and its people Barrie Hartwell
27 th January 2025	Treasure Island (arrrr!): archaeology & the Treasure Act Dr Greer Ramsey, Ulster Museum

UAS Fieldtrips & Events 2024

Saturday 10th August Day tour of churchyards in Co Fermanagh, courtesy of the National Churches Trust. Coach leaving Elmwood Ave 10.00 am, returning about 6.00 pm. £20 pp, please register with Hon Sec and complete booking form on link.

Sun to Wed 8th – 11th September Co Westmeath Study Tour. Fully booked, but contact us if you would like to be placed on a reserve list.

Monday 14th October Prehistoric Pottery Workshop, 7 pm in Queen's University Belfast, with John Martin. Details to follow

Friday & Saturday 8th – 9th November Discover 2024! Conference. The programme is still under construction, but you can register to attend on our website - <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/Conference/>

Slovakia Study Tour Sep 2025

The UAS are proposing a study tour to Slovakia in September 2025, but this will depend on having sufficient numbers to make the costings viable. If you think you might be interested, please contact us and we will send you full details of the tour. In brief, this will include:

- flights from Dublin to Vienna or Bratislava

- accommodation in Bratislava (3 nights), Poprad (2 nights) Bratislava (2 nights)
- 7 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 3 dinners, 1 wine-tasting
- coach transport throughout
- services of a private guide throughout, and local archaeologists on 5 main sites

Highlights will include:

- walking tour of Bratislava, including archaeological museum
- a full day to Roman Carnuntum (Austria)
- Devin Castle, Trenčin Castle & Spis Castle
- Liptovská Mara-Havránok open-air archaeological museum
- Celtic hillforts
- medieval churches
- regional museums
- journey through stunning landscapes

Other Upcoming Events

17-25 Aug National Heritage Week in the Republic of Ireland, with the theme “Connections, Routes and Networks”. See <https://www.heritageweek.ie/>

Sat 7 Sep Carrickfergus Revisited Conference, Carrickfergus Town Hall. This conference aims to explore the archaeology and history of the settlements on the north-eastern shores of Belfast lough and the development of the medieval town, before and after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. Details will follow.

13-15 Sep Portaferry Heritage Fest <https://www.porticoards.com/node/338>

14 & 15 Sep European Heritage Open Days (EHOD). The theme for 2024 is “Routes, Connections and Networks – Links in our Heritage” In Northern Ireland European Heritage Open Days (EHOD) is run by the Department for Communities with the support of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Each year over 250 people open their doors and organise events for EHOD across Northern Ireland. There will be lots of tours, walks and talks, and some digital events from 9 Sep. See <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/european-heritage-open-days>

All September 2024 – Scottish Archaeology Month (SAM). The theme is “Routes, Networks and Connections”. SAM and Doors Open Days, coordinated by the Scottish Civic Trust, form Scotland’s contribution to European Heritage Days, lasting a whole month. Keep

an eye out for live and online events on: <https://www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/scottish-archaeology-month/>

Have a look at the European Heritage Days brochure:

https://www.europeanheritagedays.com/sites/default/files/2024-01/Heritage%20of%20Routes%20Networks%20and%20Connections%20-%20European%20Heritage%20Days%202024_0.pdf

12 Oct - 7th National Monuments Service annual archaeology conference, The Printworks, Dublin Castle 09.15 am – 5.30 pm (or online). “Traces -The Archaeology of Small Things”. €35 or €25 earlybird, €10 online. Book on Eventbrite.

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/7th-national-monuments-service-annual-archaeology-conference-tickets-903156394087#:~:text=7th%20National%20Monuments%20Service%20annual,at%209%3A15%20AM%20%7C%20Eventbrite>

New members 2024

The Society would like to welcome the following new members who joined us in 2024:

Rona Bell, Eglinton
Peter Boardman, Donaghadee
Eddie Brittain, Newtownards
Philip Cahill, Belfast
Andrew Calwell, Belfast
Ethan Cheuk, Crumlin
Annemarie Cleminson, Lisburn
Geraldine Cooper & family, Portaferry
Adele Davidson & family, Ballyclare
Jane Davis, Belfast
Caitlin Donnelly & family, Holywood
Brendan Donnelly, Dungannon
Stephen Gilmore, Dromore
Jocelyn Harpur & family, Portadown
Lesley Harvey, Craigavon
Martin Hickman, Lisbellaw
Keith Jamieson, Anahilt
Gemma Kearney, Katesbridge
Dr Hugh Kennedy, Portstewart
Kacper Kwiatek, Cork
Alison Lewis, Lisburn
Natalie Lough, Ardara
Brian Luney, Carrickfergus
Anne Magowan, Bangor
Margaret Marshall, Belfast
Nigel McClelland, Belfast
Maeve McClelland, Belfast
John McCormick & family, Australia
Chantelle McFadden, Ballyclare
Mary McGinty and family, Dungannon
Alan McKee, Belfast
Philip Moffett, Saintfield
Brian Monroe, Belfast
Marie Neill & family, Bangor
Sean Rainey & family, Limavady
Paul Spurdens, Newtownards
Lorraine Welsh, Belfast

Nichola Whan, Belfast
Matthew Woods, Belfast

January Lecture

This lecture by John O'Neill described his search for Belfast's forgotten graveyards. John described how his interest was sparked in a report by Canon John Grainger in UJA 1861 pp 115-116. In the article, discussing a discovered burial in High Street, Grainger quotes "...not an executed prisoner as the regular place for such internments was at Long Bank behind Ann Street." John then decided to use digital searching of archived records to find similar reports and to use them to locate previously unknown or forgotten burial sites.

Firstly, John used old maps and paintings to locate the "Long Bank." These included the "Linen Map" of 1696, Williamson's 1791 Map and paintings by A Nicholl and others. The Bank appears to have been constructed sometime in the 17th century and was a linear earthwork running from what is now Cornmarket /Ann Street in a south east direction past the bottom of May Street and on to the Lagan mud flats near the current location for Lanyon Station.

John briefly reviewed Belfast's well known and recorded burial grounds. Shankill, recorded in 1306 with the church in ruins by 1604; Chapel of the Ford, thought to be the forerunner of Saint Georges in High Street, rebuilt in 1662 and again in 1774 as Saint Georges; and Friars Bush, referenced

in 1570 and extended and consecrated in 1828.

John then reviewed his “archaeological burials”: mostly from the 1800’s when Belfast was expanding rapidly with much reconstruction going on.

The first “group” of four were located at Waring Street (two skulls, sword wounds), near old Belfast Castle, at Francis Street and another at Cuper Street. These were all along the bank of the Farset River and this was speculated as a possible linking factor, particularly so if these were victims of violence and/or unconsecrated burials.

Going back to the Linen Map, three burial sites are shown and marked by crosses. The Map is not accurate enough to allow an exact location to be established on modern maps but maybe the recorded burials would help to re-discover them? The first site is around Academy St/Great Patrick St but none of the burials came from that vicinity so its exact location remains unknown. The remaining sites, one labelled “Death Pit” and a third can be corroborated by burials recorded in 1897 and 1859, 1864, 1897 respectively. These can therefore be given more precise locations at Townsend Street (Death Pit) and Peters Hill for the third. Peters Hill was a more significant site with multiple burials being recorded laid out side by side and near old foundations. Burials continued to be found e.g. up to 1970s at Kent Street. There are also intriguing references to a Saint Peters Walk and an Abbey Street in old sources.

Next described was a reference to a coffin being found by a cockle gatherer in 1869 at Beattys Gut. This site would have been on the foreshore of Belfast Lough (now reclaimed land around Skegoneill) in the general vicinity of where the Mile Water River enters the Lough. Other burials were recorded here. Written references to this area include one in the News Letter 31 July 1869; “... place called Greens Barn was set aside for the internment of suicidal cases, who are interred at the high-water mark”. Another, in a book by Glen Patterson, mentions a “bleak spot above high-water mark where the town’s suicides and unbaptised foundlings were disposed of.”

The next site is not known in any maps. Between 1882 and 1905 a total of 23 burials, including children, were uncovered at a location very near the junction of North Street and Royal Avenue. It was previously near the north gate of the old city walls and where a bastion once stood. A Belfast Telegraph article of 15 July 1882 referred to the site as “... now famed as the Valley of Dry Bones”, a reference to Ezekiel 37 v. 1-10!

John’s attention then turned to public attitudes to burial, particularly regarding the poorer members of society and as noted already. Exhumations were a public spectacle: e.g. “thousands of people yesterday witnessed the unearthing of each skull or limb” News Letter 19 May 1882 and “the remains attracted the attention of great crowds of passers-by

who seemed to enjoy the ghastly exhibition very much” Irish News 23 February 1894. Attitudes to the poor, suicides etc. could be summed up in Thomas Noel’s poem, *The Paupers Drive*. “Rattle his bones over the stones, he is only a pauper whom nobody owns.” However, as the older graveyards filled up and became unusable, newer civic burial grounds were developed during the latter half of the 19th century and with moves to make them more inclusive.

Finally, coming full circle, John identified two burials from 1951 from the Gloucester Road area which were likely to have been at the Long Bank, his starting point for this archaeological journey.

Many thanks to John for a fascinating glimpse into new layers of Belfast’s history and archaeology.

Randal Scott

May Lecture

The Society’s May lecture was given by Dr Patrick Gleeson of Queen’s University Belfast. His lecture was: *Remaking Emain Macha: Navan Fort, Cult and Rulership in Later Prehistoric Ireland*.

Dr Gleeson introduced his research, part of a project on Cult, Kingship, Rulership and in the period from the Late Bronze Age to the 7th/8th century AD. This is a collaborative project with

the Historic Environment Division (HED) and James O’Driscoll of the University of Aberdeen & University of Glasgow.

Although the character of other “Royal” landscapes in Ireland had been investigated in recent years, little had been done in the area around Navan Fort since the excavations of the 1960s to 1980s. The main elements of the landscape were well known, with the Late Bronze Age Haughey’s Fort and King’s Stables, seemingly separated by the linear Creevroe earthworks from the Iron Age sites of Navan Fort and Loughnashade, and the Early Christian see established a little to the east. This traditional view placed Navan at the centre of activity until the 1st century BC, declining in importance with the development of Armagh. With few other surviving monuments above ground, most of the knowledge of the landscape came from aerial photography and a range of chance finds.

From 2018, the project embarked on a vast series of non-invasive techniques to survey the wider landscape including remote sensing and a variety of geophysical surveying methods, covering over 150 hectares. At the same time, the archives of previous excavations were re-examined, and samples dated or re-dated. The survey results were spectacular, adding numerous sites of potential archaeological interest, transforming the previously known character of the landscape. In particular, the previously known Creeveroe earthwork appeared to form part of a huge enclosure

surrounding Haughey's Fort, measuring 2.2km north-south and 1.6km east-west. Further significant monuments were identified, notably a series of large enclosures measuring 250-400 m in diameter circling the area to the west, Armagh to the east and, Lisbanoe, with features in common with those seen at the royal site of Rathcroghan Co Roscommon, to the southeast. The project is looking at this wider context and how activity may have shifted around the landscape over time, hence the title Re-making Emain Macha. The people who built Navan Fort made their contribution to the landscape in the Iron Age, but there is still evidence for many other significant monuments made before and since.

Dr Gleeson first described the features uncovered during previous excavations, and the dating sequence attributed to them. Site A, excavated by Dudley Waterman in the 1960s, turned out to be a figure of eight shaped structure dated to about 400-100 BC, later cut by a ring barrow type structure with an internal ditch and external bank with a 16m diameter double palisaded structure within it, with an E/NE facing "porch", with two burials aligned on the entrance to it.

Site B had an interesting history. In the late Bronze Age, a ditched enclosure was made with a series of post pits on the inside edge, perhaps for timber uprights. In the early Iron Age, 400-100 BC, a series of four figure of eight structures was erected, each one was burned and replaced on more or less the same footprint except the fourth

one which was shifted slightly northwards. After this was burned, the 40m structure was erected on top. This huge structure had a massive central post made of oak, dated dendrochronologically to 95 BC. A series of concentric rings of timber posts surrounded this, presumably to support a roof, with a probable entrance to the west. Waterman considered that the building was never used as there was no floor layer with an accumulation of occupation debris. He thought that the building was filled with limestone boulders to a depth of 2.8m and then deliberately burnt to the ground. Why this was done has been a matter of speculation for decades, but it does seem to mark out this structure as somewhere special, ritual, perhaps even a sort of temple. Likewise, the use of the preceding figure of eight structures, found in other similar sites, suggests a ritual function. Additionally, some finds – particularly that of a Barbary ape skull in the building slot of one of these structures – point to a non-domestic and probably sacred use.

Site C, excavated by Chris Lynn, was found to be largely contemporary with the figure of eight structures. The ditch around Navan Fort was excavated by Jim Mallory, and also dated to 95 BC from a large timber found in the bottom of it. Finds further up the fill of the ditch were dated slightly later, so the ditch does appear to have been in existence since at least 95 BC. There were also finds from the early medieval period, 4th-6th century AD, higher up in the ditch fill – broadly during the time of St Patrick.

Some of these sequences and dates have to be questioned in the light of new discoveries and re-examination of the archive. At Site B, the 40m building was filled with limestone boulders, the reason for which is unclear. It has been suggested that they were taken from a nearby monument – perhaps a passage tomb – as some sort of link with the past. There are suggestions this cairn was not built in one single phase and the top of the cairn was being used for votive activity for some time. A weathered human clavicle was found on the cairn surface and recently dated to 4th-1st century BC. More problematic is a Romano British pin of 1st-3rd century AD date, found on the floor of the 40m structure. Richard Warner suggested that the pin could have been dropped down one of the voids made by the burnt posts, ending up on the floor. A fragment of Romano British glass was also found on the floor, identified from the archive. It now seems possible that the 40m structure was used for a while, and not destroyed immediately in 95 BC. The cairn appears to have still been open to the elements, at least in part into the mid 1st millennium AD.

Navan appears to have continued as a place for special activity long after the 40m structure was burned, and still active into the time of St Patrick when Armagh was founded, and up to at least the 7th or 8th century. The burials found aligned with the 16m structure within the ring barrow of Site A had been assumed to likely be Iron Age in date, but they have now been dated to

the post medieval period, probably from the 17th to 19th century.

These new dates throw up a lot of questions about the conventional dating sequence of Navan Fort, and the need for further research and excavation to clarify the sequence of activity, hence the massive geophysical survey project. Magnetic gradiometry results were confused by more recent agricultural activity which masked the underlying archaeological layers. The electrical resistance survey was much more successful, showing up a series of enclosures under and around Site B, and therefore datable to earlier than 95 BC. Another enclosure showed up around Site A and Site C, and a series of rectangular structures abutting the southern side of Site A, likely to be at least medieval or later, and L or U shaped enclosures, stratigraphically later than Site A.

Around the perimeter of the Navan, the resistivity showed up a series of concentric arcs representing palisade features, or large timber enclosures. In some areas, it was clear that these were cut by the ditch of Navan Fort, suggesting that the palisade enclosures pre-date 95 BC, according to Jim Mallory's excavations.

In summary, there appears to have been an earlier, monumental phase of activity represented by timber features, but also a later phase, potentially medieval and later. There also appears to be an entrance avenue approaching from the west side, to

what appears to be the original entrance to Navan Fort.

On further examination of these enclosure features, there appeared to be four phases of concentric palisades around the perimeter, which may be consistent with the four phases of figure of eight structures under Site B on the crest of the hill, and each palisade was built and then burned in the same manner as the figure of eight structures were built, burned and replaced. In addition, the hilltop was covered in circular features, possibly further barrows or ring ditches, though these still needed to be excavated to understand their function.

In 2022, some small scale targeted excavations were undertaken to ground-truth some of the anomalies shown up by the geophysical surveys. Five trenches were opened, of which four showed evidence of significant archaeology. In October 2022, a trench was opened to evaluate the enclosure feature which ran around and under Site B and to date it. The northern part of the figure of eight building E and the surrounding post and plank palisade feature were found, with a double row of postholes, some of which still preserved timbers. Some of these were recently dated to the 4th to 1st century BC (C14 dates), but also to the early Neolithic period and to 4th to 6th century AD, which caused some head scratching.

From this small excavation, and on the spacing of the post holes uncovered, the size of the figure of eight structure

Site B was extrapolated to a circuit of about 530 m, requiring about 800 posts, and the palisade feature with a circuit of about 780m requiring about 1200 posts. Considering that these structures were erected and burned down four times, the transformation of the landscape caused by deforestation was enormous.

At least one phase of the figure of eight structure under Site B was contemporary with a figure of eight structure at Site A/C, with the enclosing timber palisade enclosure surrounding Site A/C and Site B creating another, larger figure of eight stretching across the top of the hilltop of Navan Fort. This arrangement was unexpected, but it is paralleled at Tara and must surely have particular significance in the Iron Age landscape, perhaps representing the cosmos where one realm is that of humans and the other is the realm of the divine. The point at which the circles of the figure of eight intersect is the point where one of these beings could transform into the other, traversing the worlds of gods and men, or the living and the dead. This figure of eight cosmology was repeated over and over again over a number of centuries.

A narrow trench was dug at the edge of Navan Fort to investigate the four arcs of features shown on the resistivity survey, and hypothesised to be earlier than the surrounding ditch. The four enclosures were uncovered, but were different in character from what was expected. Only one middle enclosure showed as a palisade slot, with post holes cut into it; one was made of very

deep post holes up to 1.7m deep, cut into the bedrock; and the other two had closely set postholes cut to contain large, squared timber posts. These latter two enclosures may form one phase of activity, rather than two separate phases of enclosure, and as they cut the ditch are thought to pre-date it and may form a timber henge. The nearest parallel for this is the much smaller Lismullen henge near Tara which also has a double circle of closely set postholes with an avenue coming from the east, surrounding a smaller circle of timbers within it, similar to that found by Waterman under Site B which he dated to the Late Bronze Age.

A third trench was opened immediately to the east of Site A to investigate one of the L shaped anomalies adjacent to the ring barrow like earthwork feature. A large pit on the southern side of the trench with a post in it, perhaps belonging to a (as yet unknown) banked feature. Two postholes uncovered appear to form an avenue approaching the east. These features are yet to be dated.

The final trench was cut across the bank and ditch of Site A and the rectangular features abutting it on the south side. Within the ditch, the section showed a stony layer similar to that found during Waterman's excavation. Beneath this stony layer, Waterman had found a 9th century penannular brooch, representing some early medieval activity, and there were 4th to 7th century AD radiocarbon dates from the middle fill of the ditch. However the

sequence from the recent excavation was more complex than expected. In the stony layer a large number of fragments of Carrickfergus greyware were found, dating to around 1700, giving a date for the deposit of stony material into the ditch of Site A. In the topsoil of the ditch some material was found - out of context, but apparently relating to early medieval glass-working activity. Below the stony layer was a sequence of layers containing animal bone, wood and charcoal and below that a small belt buckle of 8th-9th century date with interlace decoration. The trench also uncovered part of one of the rectangular features abutting Site A and produced some mortared stone, suggesting a medieval or later date, yet to be confirmed. An antler pendant was found in the bottom of the ditch.

The radiocarbon dates threw a curved ball; the construction of Site A and the 16m diameter structure was 13th -15th century AD, and clearly not an Iron Age monument as had been assumed, or even early medieval. Rather, it may have been associated with the O'Neill's reattachment to Navan in the 14th century as recorded in the Annals of Ulster. In 1387, Niall Og O'Neill "built for the Learned Companies of Ireland, a house at Navan Fort".

Beyond Navan Fort, remote sensing is shedding new light on the character of the wider landscape, and starting to answer questions relating to it becoming such a focus of activity. To the north are a cluster of large mounds and passage tombs, showing there was

already activity here in the early Neolithic period. The boggy areas probably encouraged people towards the higher ground, with a phase of activity during the late Bronze Age when Haugheys Fort was constructed, and a number of Bronze Age stray finds from the area seem to have been found on the boundary of the huge, recently identified Creeveroe Hillfort, or in the case of the Tamlaght horde, in a boggy area within the annex on the southwest side of it.

In December 2023, a small excavation took place on the western side of Creeveroe hillfort, over the double ditches, similar to those excavated by Mal Conway in the early 2000s. Dating is awaited, but expected to be Late Bronze Age. Haughey's Fort was also re-examined through remote sensing and geophysical survey, showing a numerous anomalies which are suspected of being archaeologically significant. Large numbers of circular features have been identified across the site and its outer enclosures, increasing in size towards the central part of the fort, perhaps indicating a sense of hierarchy. There also appears to be a routeway of some sort linking Haughey's Fort with the King's Stables ritual pool which is now known to also lie within the Creeveroe Hillfort. The apparent hierarchy, and some very large structures, suggests Haughey's Fort, within the Creeveroe Hillfort is an elite site, though this was already suggested by the presence of metal-working known from Jim Mallory's excavations. The King's Stables excavated by Chris Lynn in the 1970s

is now securely dated to the Late Bronze Age, contemporary with the main phase of occupation at Haughey's Fort. However, there was also evidence for 9th and 10th century Viking Age deposition activity. To the north of the King's Stables, a charcoal spread with a post was also dated to Viking Age activity. Various isotope analysis has been carried out on animal and human remains found in the King's Stables, and the results are awaited, but it seems clear that the ritual pool was created within the complex of the Creeveroe Hillfort. It is also possible that an extension of the Creeveroe earthwork, seen on Barrie Hartwell's aerial photos of the 1980s, veers eastwards, to the north of Navan Fort, perhaps even to enclose Loughnashade and Navan Fort itself.

When the find-spots of stray finds are plotted onto the landscape, it seems that some can now be given context, to monuments that have no surface features but still appear on the geophysical surveys. The survey base station set up in 2019 on the top of Creeve Hill, chosen as it had no known archaeological feature on it, was found to be within a previously unknown enclosure containing two structures, and with an eastern entrance structure aligned directly with the western entrance to Navan Fort, and with the avenue leading to Site B. This seems unlikely to be coincidental and suggests this newly discovered enclosure is highly significant, in the centre of the landscape between Haughey's Fort and Navan Fort. Could it be the mythical palace of Craobh Rua's Conchobar

mac Nessa? Excavation in the future may reveal its secrets.

Just to the south of Navan Fort, a number of burials have been found during agricultural activity since the mid 20th century or so. Geophysical survey has highlighted a series of possible ring barrows and enclosures, in what has recently been categorised as a cemetery settlement, usually attributed to the 5th to 7th century AD in date, though often reused much later. This is consistent with the early medieval activity discovered nearby when the Navan visitor centre was built. Outside the western perimeter of Navan Fort, a number of large monuments were identified on LiDAR and geophysical survey, most likely destroyed barrows or ring barrows. To the east of Navan Fort, now largely destroyed by quarrying, archives record a burial dated to the 5th or 6th century AD.

The investigations over the last few years have started to transform our understanding of the Navan landscape, from a fairly simple shift of focus from the Bronze Age, to the Iron Age to the early medieval period, to a much more complex picture, with a continuity of activity spanning a much longer period from around 1300 BC to at least 2000 AD, with some earlier activity in the Neolithic period. As yet there is no evidence for early Bronze Age activity, though it may yet be found.

It is now for certain that Navan Fort was not abandoned after 95 BC. Instead, as a long-established ritual landscape and as an important centre

of pre-Christian religion, St Patrick would have been attracted to Navan which became an anchor for conversion period society and the foundation of churches, such as that of St Patrick himself at nearby Armagh.

Later use of the old cult centre was transformed into a royal centre by kings anchoring their authority and legitimacy to a place already endowed with sacral significance, and utilising the place – perhaps on Creeve Roe Hill - or by monumental activity and construction within Navan Fort and also in the wider landscape.

With the waxing and waning of the past societies who inhabited this fascinating landscape over the millennia, the series of monumental structures they have left behind is now giving us a glimpse into their lives, thanks to the thorough research and analysis of Dr Gleeson and his colleagues, for which we are extremely grateful, and we look forward to finding out what more will be revealed in the years ahead.

Anne MacDermott

New Books

Excavations at Talachtga 'Hill of Ward', Co. Meath, Ireland – S. Davis & C. Moore
Oxbow Books, £35

This book presents the findings of an extensive research project to understand this enigmatic and unusual quadrivallate enclosure. Initial remote sensing revealed a complex landscape that was followed up with three seasons of excavation. The main phases of occupation were in the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age (1100 – 400 BCE) and late Iron Age/early medieval (400 – 600 CE). The excavation results are able to indicate the environment and economy of the site throughout its occupation, with significant evidence of meat consumption.

About half the book is devoted to a catalogue of the finds and ecofacts from the excavation. The catalogue entries are very detailed and many are written by experts in the field. The descriptions and information within the catalogue will be valuable to many future researchers

Revisiting Grooved Ware: Understanding ceramic trajectories in Britain and Ireland, 3200 – 2400 Cal BC – M. Cooper, A. Whittle & A. Sheridan (eds)
Oxbow Books, £45

This volume brings together a range of papers from the 2022 Neolithic Studies Group conference which focus on the development of Grooved Ware pottery in Orkney, its diffusion across

Britain and Ireland and eventually its disappearance. Each chapter examines a different area of Britain and one chapter (by Eoin Grogan and Helen Roche) focuses on Ireland. The collection updates Cleal and MacSween's 1999 volume, presenting the latest research and understanding of Grooved Ware pottery and prehistoric society.

Monumental Times: Pasts, presents, and futures in the prehistoric construction projects of Northern and Western Europe
– R. Bradley
Oxbow Books, £39.95

Bradley takes a very theoretical look at the construction, use and abandonment of monumental structures across Europe. His work looks at relationships in form and materials between houses and tombs before considering other aspects of the use and reuse of megalithic structures. The final section discusses the reuse of monuments and connections between them and the landscape, the past, myth, and literature. Throughout this book, Bradley provides new and insightful ways of thinking about monuments and their position in society, both in the past and the present.

Oxbow are offering a 25% discount on these three books until the end of August. Just use the code UAS25 why buying from their website - www.pen-and-sword.co.uk

Invisible Ancestor: The Galloway Nag and its Legacy – Miriam Bibby.

Trivent Publishing, €64

Once upon a time there was a pony with roots deep in prehistory known as the Galloway, native to southwestern Scotland and possibly the animal depicted on early medieval Pictish stones. It was famous for its hardiness, endurance and speed, the quality which would make it cast a long shadow across history as like the Irish Hobby, it was a major – and forgotten-contributor to the breeding of the modern Thoroughbred. Miriam Bibby's lively and original research narrates the life, times and archaeological traces of an animal with strong Ulster connections, in a heady mix of politics, history and archaeology. Despite being technically an academic text, to Bibby's credit the book races along like a best-seller, leaving many tantalising questions to be explored as a sequel. Very much recommended.

Rena Maguire

Some photos from visit to CAPNI excavation at Castlereagh (shared by Pat O'Neill)



Some photos from Festival of Archaeology (shared by Pat O'Neill)



Front cover illustration (by Deirdre Crone): engraved bronze plate from the River Blackwater at Shanmullagh, Co. Armagh, one of an original four from a shrine or book cover; 8th century; Ulster Museum.

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