



ULSTER
ARCHÆOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

Newsletter

Winter 2024/25

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A Message from the President

A little belatedly, Happy New Year to all the UAS members. I hope you have all had a great festive season and are now looking forward to enjoying the upcoming lectures and events. A special welcome to all our new members and I hope you make the most of your membership. Although our lectures and Discovery Conference are open to everyone, our survey group, workshops, day and evening outings, study tours and other events are restricted to members only. The committee works hard to bring you a variety of events and subjects for lectures but we are always open to suggestions, so please feel free to contact us with any ideas you may have. Don't forget that most of our lectures are live-streamed so if you can't make it to Queen's, you can still listen in from home.

Although the winter weather is not always conducive to getting out and about, there are many sites worth visiting regardless of the weather, and a bracing walk is good for the soul. However, if keeping cosy indoors with a good book is more your style, there are endless options for sourcing information on archaeology. HERoNI now have a library, including some great archaeology books, and Libraries NI are great at obtaining books you might like to read but have no more bookshelf space at home. Guilty as charged!

If you feel like stretching the grey matter a bit, there are several online courses relating to archaeology, many of them free. I can recommend FutureLearn <https://www.futurelearn.com/search?q=archaeology> , or short papers/audio/videos by OpenLearn from the Open University <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/local/ocwglobalsearch/search.php?q=archaeology> or for a modest fee, DigVentures <https://digventures.com/courses/> Whatever you get up to, enjoy everything that the wonderful world of archaeology has to offer. I look forward to seeing you soon at a UAS event, so don't forget to make sure your subscription is up to date.

Anne MacDermott
President, Ulster Archaeological Society

Membership Subscriptions

Full and Retired subscriptions were due on the 1st January 2025.

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!

Paid up student members at 31st December 2024 do not have to renew until 1st October 2025.

If you are a U.K. taxpayer, you can increase the value of your contribution, at no extra charge to you, by signing a gift aid declaration. If you pay by PayPal you must tick the gift aid permission box even if you have previously signed a gift aid declaration to allow the society to claim the gift aid.

If you pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of gift aid claimed on all your subscriptions & donations in that tax year it is your responsibility to pay any difference.

N.B. Please notify the Hon. Treasurer, Lee Gordon, if you:

- Want to cancel this declaration
- Change your name or home address
- No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

Lectures 2025

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>

29 th January	Treasure Island (Arrrr): Archaeology and the Treasure Act Dr Greer Ramsey, NMNI
24 th February	AGM
31 st March	Personhood and the Bronze Age Prof. Joanna Bruck, UCD
28 th April	Later Medieval/Early Modern Pottery Production in Ulster Dr Niaomi Carver, QUB
26 th May	Tirnony Dolmen, Co L'derry Dr Cormac McSparron
29 th September	Conservation Martin Keery, Historic Environment Division
27 th October	Crisis and Culture - Heritage Responses to the Climate Emergency Dr Will Megarry, QUB
24 th November	The chronology of the Drumclay Crannog Dr Marie-Therese Barrett, QUB & IAC

Fieldtrips 2025

Evening Trips

- 19 May Sentry Hill
16 June Sites in South Ards Peninsula (Millin Bay etc.)

Day Trips

- March Moira Depot with Conservation Works Team
June/July Ballymena Braid Museum & Environs
August Armagh City

County Study Tour

- Mid May TBC

Workshops 2025

10th March

British Coinage from Iron Age, through Roman to the Early Medieval Period

Randal Scott

Further info for all of these will be circulated by the Hon. Secretary

Digital Newsletter

With rising postage and printing costs, the Society is seeking to reduce expenditure by asking if members would be interested in only receiving a digital copy of the Newsletter. If you would prefer to receive your Newsletter by email, please contact the Hon. Secretary - secretary@ulsterarchaeology.org

Annual General Meeting

The 83rd Annual General Meeting of the Ulster Archaeological Society will be held in the lecture theatre, Elmwood building, Elmwood Avenue and online via Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), the details are:

Date: Monday 7.30pm 24th February 2025

Meeting ID: 844 8704 3116

Passcode: UAS_AGM_25

Only paid-up members can vote during the AGM

Agenda

1. President's Address.
2. Minutes of 82nd AGM held on Monday 26th February 2024.
3. Honorary Secretary's Annual Report for 2024.
4. Honorary Treasurer's Annual Report for 2024.
5. Election of Officers.
6. Election of two Ordinary Committee Members (3-year term).
7. Provision of Auditing for 2025.
8. Business of which notice has been given.
9. Any other business.

Notices of motion and nominations for officers and committee positions should reach Mr Pat O'Neill, Hon. Secretary, Ulster Archaeological Society, (c/o Department of Archaeology, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, BT7 1NN or email secretary@ulsterarchaeology.org) by Monday 10th February 2025.

The President, three Vice Presidents, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Editor Ulster Journal of Archaeology, Hon. Editor UAS Newsletter and Hon. Auditor are elected annually. Two Ordinary Members of the General Committee retire annually and are not eligible for re-election for one year.

The AGM will be followed by a presentation of photographs from 2024 fieldtrips.

New members 2024

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

Maria (Betty) & Robert Armstrong, Bangor
Ross Bailey, Belfast
Natalie Bodle, Ballymena
Gosse Bootsma, Belfast
Roy Brown, Comber
Thomas Burns, Belfast
Patricia Cameron, Belfast
David Chambers, Newtownards
Julia Chwedorcauk, Magherafelt
James Christie, Larne
Moira Crossey, Groomsport
Susan Crowther, Belfast
Faith Cully, Groomsport
Robert Davison, Greyabbey
Susan Farrell, Rostrevor
Michael Fearon, Kilmore
Sharman Finlay, Portrush
Nicole Finlay, Newtownabbey
Michael Graham, Bangor
David Guthrie, Belfast
Leanne Heaney, Derry
Debra Hoyle, Dundonald
Aideen Ireland, Dublin
Heather Johnston, Bangor
Janette Jones, Banbridge
Dez Lynch, Kells
Wendy MacPhredran, Killinchy
Terry McCabe, Newcastle
Joan and Liam McCaughey, Lisburn
Mandy McMorris, L'derry

Daniel Morris, Worcester
Arlene Murphy, Lisburn
Genevieve O'Sullivan, Belfast
Valerie Owens, Dundonald
Timothy Plum, USA
Moira Pomeroy, Newtownabbey
Sarah Portch, Bangor
Philippa Prior, Jordanstown
Neil Rainey, Belfast
Naomi Richardson, Hollywood
Neil Strain, Hollywood
Fergal Tracey, Portstewart
Paul Woodman, Belfast

September Lecture

The Society's September Lecture was delivered by Dr. Rory McNear (DfC Historic Environment Division, Northern Ireland).

The title of the lecture was 'Historic Shipwrecks in Northern Ireland: Discovery, Investigation and Protection'.

Lecturer Bio: Dr Rory McNear (DfC Historic Environment Division, Northern Ireland) is a Senior Inspector of Historic Monuments at HED and works on secondment with DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division as their Marine Historic Environment Advisor. He is responsible for curatorial advice to support marine planning and

ensuring significant marine cultural heritage assets are managed and protected through licensing, designation, investigation and the promotion of appropriate policy and guidance. Rory holds a MSc in Maritime Archaeology from Ulster University and is a member of the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. He has previously worked for the Centre for Maritime Archaeology, Ulster University; The Discovery Programme; and, as a researcher and project diver for the Irish Government's Underwater Archaeological Unit, attached to the National Monuments Service. Rory is a past licensee of the Girona wreck, NI's only wreck protected under the PWA 1973; and was involved in the scheduling of HMS Drake in 2017, the first wreck to be scheduled in NI under the 'Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995'.

The focus of the lecture was on historic shipwrecks that lie within our territorial waters as a facet of underwater archaeology. How these wrecks were discovered, how

they have been investigated and the steps taken to protect them through statutory designation.

The Northern Ireland marine area comprises an inshore and offshore region with an area of over 6,000 km², a coastline of over 650 km, one inhabited island, Rathlin, 44 ports and harbours, a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Giant's Causeway and a wealth of maritime heritage and environmental, tourist and recreational assets. There are very many wreck sites.

These include the Spanish Armada shipwreck, La Girona (designated for protection under the PWA 1973), the ships HMS Drake, SS Lochgarry and the Devereaux (scheduled under the HMAO Order 1995) and hundreds of other wrecks.

The importance of both recreational divers and trained archaeological divers in discovering, investigating, mapping and recording maritime wrecks was emphasised. However, the harm that can be done intentionally or accidentally by divers and by natural erosion has

to also be considered. Hence the need to monitor and protect the historic wreck resource as far as possible. Throughout our talk many fascinating examples with slides of the various vessels were presented to us. For example, the famous wreck, La Girona, the ship of the Spanish Armada. Discovered in the 1960s by Belgian Robert Sténuît. Initially Sténuît used archival historical documentation to help pinpoint the wreck site. After some unsuccessful dives he finally was successful in locating the wreck. Though this site has been extensively excavated and searched some artifacts may still possibly be located in the area. Hence the need to monitor and protect from the curious and from the treasure hunter. The site was designated in 1993 under the Protection of Wrecks Act. An area 600m in diameter has been designated as a restricted area. Those other shipwrecks were brought to our attention such as HMS Drake a WW1 armoured cruiser scheduled in 2017, actually the first wreck protected under this legislation. A WWII ship, SS Lochgarry, sank off Rathlin Island. Action was taken to prevent divers

removing munitions, amongst other things.

The Devereux, a well-preserved 19th century wooden wreck located just off Portrush. This was a 3-masted trading barque, that research shows was built in 1832 and wrecked in 1864. It was exposed during storm surges in 2022, allowing further research and the capture of imagery of the vessel. The wreck was subsequently reburied in the sand, which Rory said was a bit of a relief as it had become very popular with snorkellers and other water users. This combined with vulnerability to winter storm damage exposure was contributing to the rapid deterioration of the wreck. We were guided through various other wrecks with images to both present a visual record of the vessels, as well as a WWII Catalina aircraft in Lower Lough Erne. Ships with evidence of involvement in the Slave Trade have also been discovered. We were also told about the research and the various equipment and technology used to investigate and record them.

Origins of our shipwreck record come from MAP (Maritime Archaeology Project) initially based at the Institute of Irish Studies in Queens University Belfast. Sources used were largely documentary records from such as the Board of Trade and Admiralty wreck returns. Also, Lloyds List Index to Casualties 1741-1783 as well as Lloyds List after 1783. The archive compiled by Ian Wilson in Shipwrecks of the Ulster Coast (1989) is of beneficial and supplementary use.

Remote Sensing- Side Scan Sonar. This technique uses an acoustic signal to image the seabed. The imagery produced is 2D. The first surveys were undertaken in the 1990s with the help of government funding. The initial geophysical research programme imaged around some 80 19th-20th century wrecks. DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division continues to utilise this equipment.

Remote Sensing-Multibeam Echosounder. This newer technology allows for 3D mapping and improves upon positional accuracy of wrecks. This has been

utilized since 2008. Most research has been conducted on a dataset generated by the Joint Irish Bathymetric Survey (JIBs). The initial work has been extended along our coast. Much of the open data is available for download on the Admiralty's Seabed Mapping Service.

Aerial Photography. Used to assist the identification, recording and potential dating of wrecks. The Whiteabbey foreshore wrecks were used as an example of this.

Diver-Led Investigations. This can be challenging and must be undertaken under the Approved Codes of Practice. DAERA Marine has a Scientific Dive Team trained to HSE Commercial SCUBA level and operating under the HSE Archaeological Diving Approved Code of Practice.

Protection of Wrecks. The principle statutory mechanisms are the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 and the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects Order 1995.

Rory emphasised that an important message to convey is that historic shipwrecks are an extremely rich source of knowledge about our past. They are of cultural importance as well as assets of social and economic value. They can also be of ecological importance. It is important that we continue to investigate, monitor and protect this historic wreck resource.

Further interest:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-conserving-the-marine-heritage-hed-statement.pdf>

https://youtu.be/yVHHiiSG_f0 La Girona and the Protection of Wrecks Act, by Rory McNeary- PWA50 Conference (youtube.com).

Leo van Es

October Lecture

The Society's October Lecture was given by Dr Rebecca Boyd.

Rebecca Boyd is an expert in Ireland's Viking-Age and early

Medieval archaeology. She recently was the author of 'Exploring Ireland's Viking-Age Towns: Houses and Homes (Routledge, 2023). She has worked in commercial and research archaeology for over 20 years.

Rebecca said that she has been interested in the Viking-world domestic household since first given a pair of leather shoes 20 years ago in Temple Bar, Dublin and tasked with cleaning the mould from off them with a toothbrush.

The focus of the lecture concentrated on seeing beyond the usual Viking-World stereotypes in order to consider the experiences of everyday life as experienced by average normal persons, rather than the experience of the exceptional raiding warrior. A focus rather on those who sustained the Viking-age warrior.

We were aided in this endeavour by taking an imaginative journey, narrated by the lecturer accompanied by excellent illustrations, through a Viking

settlement in the latter point of this era. This can be viewed and listened to on the UAS YouTube channel, where you also can take the journey.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jas4WzOdPWI&pp=ygUfcMViZW NjYSBib3lkIHVsc3RlciBhcmNoYVWV vbG9neQ%3D%3D

The perspective guiding the research is that houses are an expression of people's lives, of personality, of beliefs and a place for families.

There has been three centuries of Viking peoples occupation of towns in Ireland, in particular in Dublin, Cork and Waterford. Sixty years of excavation of these sites has yielded a very large amount of archaeological evidence that help us construct a picture of domestic life in this era. This is referred to as Hiberno-Norse material culture.

As well as looking at the locations and characteristics of the towns, a definition of the form of such a town was suggested i.e. it is a permanent human settlement, it is non-agricultural and it forms a social unit. It is distinct from the

countryside, located by a river and has a wall. This enclosing is an act of creating a boundary, a separation from the hinterland. Within there is a sense of a shared space and a safe space. The relationships of towns with rivers were also considered. The human-riverine connections and the interactions between the two. The material from the various sites is a fantastic resource in attempting to recreate what life was like in households in Ireland's early towns. Evidence from the examination of the archaeological material would indicate that a close knit community existed within these spaces.

From the excavations in Dublin at Wood Quay, in Fishamble Street and Temple Bar, we can discern the richness of their lives. The structures of the houses can be examined. One thing of note was that no large Long House has been discovered in any of the Irish Viking- era, or Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. Borg in Lofoton Island, Norway provides an example of a high-status chieftain's hall, measuring 83m long, 12m wide and 9m high.

The Hiberno-Scandinavian towns in Ireland were Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Wexford. Our historical sources mention these as “Viking towns” though modern historians and archaeologists would point out that it is not clear exactly where native Irish, Scandinavians and later Normans first began to interact and mingle in these spaces. There has long been a view that ‘the idea of a town, with a corporate personality distinct from that of the ruler, was quite foreign to the Gaelic mind until the Scandinavians set up their ‘cities’ in Dublin, Limerick, Waterford and elsewhere’ (Binchy 1962).

Whatever, the material, the largest variety of Viking- age domestic goods found anywhere, allows us to consider and to paint a very rich picture of the inhabitants of the individual houses and the communities in these towns. Evidence in quern stones, pots for cooking, in the plant and insect remains, rubbish pits, animal bones both discarded and worked, the combs, the toys, the tools and the evidence for the house constructions. Examination has

allowed us information regarding their external space and proximity and then the possible use of the space inside. Most of the dwellings were similar in structure, mostly rectangular in shape, in very close proximity to each other, though the utilisation of the space inside could differ. We can reflect on the availability and use of light in these dwellings by consideration of the archaeological finds in particular areas.

The individual houses and yards can differ in size, though not by a large amount. Wattle pathways were constructed in order to provide route ways through and between the dwellings.

All of this allows us some insight into this time and space and the human lives inherent.

The UAS would like to thank Dr Rebecca Boyd for a very enjoyable lecture.

Leo van Es

Westmeath Fieldtrip

The Midlands are rather less well known than other parts of Ireland, so the choice of Co Westmeath was an unknown quantity for some of the 34 members who arrived at the Bloomfield House Hotel, just outside Mullingar. Its location on Lough Ennell was fitting for the county known as 'The Lake County'. Checked in to comfortable rooms, the group assembled in the evening for dinner, both tasty and copious in quantity.

Our first stop was at Coolnahay Harbour on the Royal Canal. Built c. 1809, the harbour is close to the summit point of the canal which ran between Dublin and the River Shannon. Built of dressed limestone blocks, it is in near perfect condition, with a restored lock gate (No 26), lock keeper's cottage and bridge over the canal. Alongside, the towpath forms part of the Royal Canal Greenway, an attractive pedestrian and cycle track.

We continued to the Franciscan Friary Church in Multyfarnham.

Although significantly rebuilt and restored, the church maintains its medieval origins. Originally built at the start of the 14th century, it was extended in c.1450 with addition of the tower and Lady Chapel (or south transept). It was abandoned c.1651 and largely rebuilt from ruins c.1827 with the re-roofing of the nave and Lady Chapel. A major phase of restoration started in October 1973, according to its original design and in the light of the liturgical guidelines of the Church during Vatican II. This led to a decision in 1975 to completely rebuild the ancient choir area as the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

Within, the dark limestone is brought to life thanks to an array of stunning stained glass windows, mostly the work of David King. The light flooding through the windows spilled rainbows of colour across the dim interior. Alongside the modern altars, tabernacle, enamelled Stations of the Cross and ceramic plaques, the church retains numerous 17th century memorials, mostly relating to the past patrons of the monastery, the Delamers and the Nugents. Outside, the friars' graveyard

remains though the rest of the monastery has long since been built over. In the grounds, a Way of the Cross with life-sized statues was completed in 1942 around the River Gaine.

After a brief stop in Castlepollard to buy sandwiches, we arrived in one of Ireland's hidden gems, the village of Fore. Within a marshy valley, an early Christian settlement founded by St Féichín was converted by the Anglo-Normans into a chartered walled town with an important Benedictine priory. The village continues to be occupied today and is famous throughout the land as 'The Place of Seven Wonders'.

The Seven Wonders of Fore

- 1 Anchorite in a stone
- 2 Water which will not boil
- 3 Monastery built on a bog
- 4 Mill without a mill race
- 5 Water which flows uphill
- 6 Tree which will not burn
- 7 Stone lintel raised by St Féichín's prayers

The sites included two town gates, two holy wells, the 10th century St Feichin's Church, extended in the

13th century, the Anchorite's Cell (15th/16th century tower house with attached 19th century mausoleum) and the 13th century Benedictine priory. Fore is a lovely place to wander around and these sites and others in and around the village were thoroughly explored, with time for a picnic lunch or snack in the little café. Well done Jane for coping well with us all!

The afternoon continued with a visit to Taghmon, the name commemorating the late 6th/early 7th century St Munna. In the present parish of Taghmon are a number of archaeological monuments, most notably the 'trinity' of a motte and bailey, later tower house and church - an indicator of the Anglo-Norman influence in this county. The fortified church was built as a parish church in the 15th century, reputedly on the remains of the monastery established by St Munna. It has been significantly restored since, and although we could not gain access inside, noted some interesting architectural details on the exterior.

The church is a simple nave and chancel building with a vaulted roof, with a rectangular tower at the west end with two vaulted floors and a third floor above. The lower courses of the outer walls of the church and tower are battered and rise to their full height with stepped battlements protecting a wall walk. The church is entered by a gothic doorway of limestone with a mutilated sandstone head of a bishop above, and another mutilated head remains on the west wall of the tower. The windows are of sandstone with moulded hoods, one of which has a worn sandstone sheela-na-gig or grotesque seated figure above it. The east window (a 19th century replacement) is a large pointed opening outlined by dressed limestone although the tracery and mullions are missing.

From the churchyard, we could see the fine motte and bailey on the hillside above, and the remnants of the castle directly across the road. Only an ivy covered 14th century tower house remains, reused as the corner tower of a 17th century castle bawn, of which very little remains.

We continued into the county town of Mullingar and stopped at Mullingar Harbour on the section of the Royal Canal which loops around the north side of the town. As at Coolnahay, the twin harbours and canal built in 1806 are very well preserved, but here we also found a dry dock, warehousing, stores and the sluice at the feeder canal from Lough Owel.

Continuing into the town, we visited the small museum in the Greville Arms Hotel. It opened to the public in 2012 and contains a variety of exhibits donated by local people and commemorating notable events. The Penitent Magdalene by Antonio Canova (1757-1822), is one of the most famous sculptures in the world and was carved out of pure Carrara marble 200 years ago for the British Prime Minister Robert Jenkinson, (1770-1820) and is on display in the foyer of the hotel.

Returning to the Bloomfield House Hotel for a bit of relaxation before facing another huge dinner, some of the group took advantage of the swimming pool, or a walk in the lakeside grounds. The following morning, the group split with some

visiting the gardens at Belvedere House whilst the rest set off for a guided walk at Uisneach. Belvedere Gardens and Park is a magnificent 160-acre lakeside estate with fully restored Georgian Villa, Victorian Walled Garden and naturalistic designed 18th century parkland, complete with curious and quirky follies – The Jealous Wall, The Octagonal Gazebo and The Gothic Arch. It was originally home to Robert Rochfort, later Earl of Belvedere, best known for his shocking treatment of his young wife Mary. On trumped up charges of adultery, the hypocritical Earl punished her by being locked up alone in the old family house of Gaulstown, except for her servants, for the remaining 31 years of Robert's life, whilst he lived a bachelor life at Belvedere, renovating it in the latest styles. After Robert's death in 1774, Belvedere passed through various branches of the wider family, eventually to Charles Kenneth Howard-Bury (1883-1963), distinguished soldier, explorer, botanist and Conservative politician who developed the gardens, planting exotic plants he found on his travels. Rex Beaumont

was long-time friend and companion to Howard-Bury, and inherited Belvedere on his death as the last private owner of the house. In financial difficulties, he sold off the contents of the house in 1980 and two years later, sold the house to Westmeath County Council. Together with the Irish Tourist Board, the council undertook a multi-million-pound restoration project. The House, Gardens and Park were opened to the public in 2000.

Meanwhile at Uisneach, and braving the rain, the rest of the group set out to explore this important pre-Christian 'cult' centre and major 'royal' site in the company of Justin Moffatt. We had a highly informative and entertaining walk around the fascinating landscape of late prehistoric and early historic Ireland, where the present and past, and archaeology and mythology collide. Rathnew is the largest, most important monument at Uisneach, a conjoined rath believed to be one of the palaces of the legendary King Tuathal Techtmar from the 1st century AD, as well as the O'Neill and Colman

clans in the later medieval era. Excavations in the 1920s by R A S Macalister and R L Praeger revealed a substantial dwelling with the remains of several houses and two souterrains, along with various other features associated with domestic occupation spanning several centuries. More recent re-evaluation of these excavations by Dr Roseanne Schot, and geophysical survey has amended the chronology of the site. See the following for details:

Schot, R. 2006. Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn: a prehistoric cult centre and 'royal site' in Co. Westmeath. *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* 15, 39-71.

Schot, R. 2011. From cult centre to royal centre: monuments, myths and other revelations at Uisneach. In R. Schot, C. Newman and E. Bhreathnach (eds), *Landscapes of cult and kingship*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 87-113

Heading on up the hillside, we passed the largely dried up Lough Lugh, identified as 'Loch Lugborta' where, according to early Irish tradition, the god Lugh was

drowned by the mythical trio, Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht, and Mac Greine, and subsequently buried in a cairn nearby, Carn Lugdach. Its associated mythology and comparison with similar bodies of water at other royal centres suggest that Lough Lugh served a ritual purpose in prehistory, such as at the King's Stables near Navan Fort. A little further on, the ruined megalithic monument known as St Patrick's Bed is situated on the highest point of the Hill of Uisneach (180m above sea-level) where there are extensive, panoramic views over the central plain of Ireland. Ordnance Survey's John O'Donovan reported that the monument was 'much more perfect before the sappers removed the stones from it to form a Trig. Station'. He first recorded the name, inspired perhaps by local tales of the saint's visits to Uisneach though it may also derive from the monument's use as a mass rock during penal times. Geophysical survey around St Patrick's Bed by Dr Schot in 2011 has revealed the footprint of two enclosures (probably originally defined by wooden palisades), the smaller of which underlies the cairn

while the larger encircles it. The latter would therefore be the oldest known monument on the hill.

Uisneach appears to have been specifically associated with Bealtaine, at the start of summer. It was customary for the High King to ritually 'marry' the sovereignty goddess (representing the land) at an inauguration ceremony known as the 'Banais Righe' (wedding feast of kingship). This ceremony may have been part of the 'Dail Mór Uisneach', a great assembly and fair held at the beginning of May when a great fire was lit on the top of the hill to mark the onset of summer. The Bealtaine Festival was revived on the Hill of Uisneach in 2009, combining aspects of 'Celtic' tradition and new-age spiritualism, all within the exuberant ambiance of a rock festival.

Continuing downhill, we came to the most iconic monument of Uisneach, Ail na Míreann (The Catstone), a huge limestone erratic boulder almost 6m tall and weighing over 30 tons, sitting within a circular earthen bank.

Legend has it that this erratic symbolises Ireland, united in its divisions, and that the stone also marks the centre of Ireland where the provinces came together. It represents a symbolic centrality, and was depicted in early lore as being within the 'fifth province', called Míde (Meath) meaning 'middle'. Míde, with its centre point being Uisneach, was the place where people from any of the four provinces could come to settle their disagreements as people of the same land, not of different provinces. The 'fifth province' could also refer to the world of the imagination or the mythical otherworld. Legend also states that it is underneath this stone that Éiru, after whom the country is named, was laid to rest.

Having over-run our time, thanks to the fascinating story-telling of Justin, the rest of the group joined us as we went a few miles down the road to our lunch stop at the SIP Coffee Garden in Ballymore. We were made very welcome by Nicky and her team who had us all well fed and on the road again in no time. Arriving in Athlone, our next visit was to Athlone Castle.

After an introductory talk, we set off into the galleries, learning about the history and strategic importance of Athlone from prehistoric times to the Sieges of Athlone in 1690 and 1691. Other exhibits also included objects highlighting different trades, crafts and lifestyles associated with the people of Athlone from the early 1800's up to the beginning of the 20th century. We had just time to cross the road to the Church of St Peter and St Paul built in 1936 to admire the wonderful collection of stained glass windows, mostly the work of Richard King, chief designer of the Harry Clarke Studio after Harry Clarke's death in 1931. Other windows in the church are from Earley & Co of Dublin and A E Child.

Returning to Athlone for our final evening, and yet more food, we reflected on the visit to Westmeath and the general consensus was that the county is a hidden gem. We were very well looked after at the Bloomfield House Hotel and by our driver Seamus of Slevin's coaches, met some lovely people along the way and enjoyed the unspoilt countryside. Thanks to

everyone for making it a very successful and enjoyable tour.

Anne MacDermott

Churches of Fermanagh and Tyrone Fieldtrip

On Saturday 10th August 2024, UAS members were treated to an engaging tour of four churches and their graveyards led by Nina McNeary, the Supporting Officer of the National Churches Trust Northern Ireland.

Aghavea Parish Church, located outside Maguiresbridge County Fermanagh, is associated with St. Lasair (a student of St. Molaise of Devenish) as well as the Maguire Gaelic lords. The current church on this site dates from 1800, but an archaeological excavation in 2000 for the new church hall and car park revealed that the church is within an ecclesiastical enclosure with archaeological evidence dating back to the Early Medieval Period. This church's graveyard has some of the best preserved examples of *memento mori* imagery on gravemarkers in

County Fermanagh, including skull and crossbones, and hourglasses. Killadeas Priory Church is located between Enniskillen and Kesh, County Fermanagh. Built in 1881 on top of an earlier, yellow-stoned church's ruins (which can be seen in the arch separating the nave from the choir and chancel), this church was recently restored back to its original glory. Its cemetery contains the Bishop Stone, a hole stone, a pillar, and some bullaun stones.

Ardess Parish Church, also known as St. Mary's Church of Magheraculmoney, is located outside of Kesh, County Fermanagh. With a church on the site since at least the fifteenth century, it has undergone enlargements and renovations over the last 300 years, and now includes a lovely stained glass window (insured for over £250,000!). The surrounding pre-Plantation graveyard has some of the earliest sculpted headstones in Northern Ireland, as well as a Famine burial area memorialised for those who died during the Great Famine (1845-1852).

St. Macartan's Clogher Cathedral is situated within the village of Clogher, County Tyrone. In c. 490 AD, St. Macartan founded a monastery and bishopric in Clogher under the orders of St. Patrick. The current cathedral, built in 1744, is the sixth church built on this site, which has an extensive archaeological heritage. The Friends of Clogher Cathedral have been helping to maintain the cathedral and its impressively large graveyard.

Overall, the UAS members enjoyed touring the churches in the fantastically dry weather, as well as the lunch at Killadeas and the coffee/tea and baked goods at Clogher. Our thanks goes to Nina McNeary and site tour guides John McClaughry and Jack Johnston for a truly 'unforgettable journey through the sacred heritage of Fermanagh and Tyrone'!

Courtney Mundt

New Books

British Pottery: The First 3000 Years – Alex Gibson
Oxbow Books, £40

This volume looks at the evolution of pottery in Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain, primarily focusing on style and the art of the pot. The introductory chapter provides an overview of techniques used in creating and decorating pots as well as discussing the clay used. The subsequent chapters take us through time and illustrate the types of pots in use and their decoration.

Throughout the book are copious illustrations providing detailed information about the pots and showing their decoration. This book helps to make us think about the appearance of the pots and how they were expressions of art and identity.

Oxbow are kindly offering 25% off this book with the code UAS25 until 28th February 2025.

Historic Building Mythbusting: Uncovering folklore, history & archaeology – James Wright
The History Press, £20

This book investigates much of the folklore surrounding historic buildings and questions some of the stories we often hear. The first chapter looks at secret passageways. Many castles or big houses are said to have a passage connecting it with the local church, but how many are true? Other chapters look at spiral stairs, masons' marks, and the reuse of ship timbers. The final chapter sets out to find the oldest pub in Britain.

All the content is derived from rigorous research and surveying of many buildings. But it is written in an accessible manner, making it easy for a non-specialist to enjoy and learn. This is essential reading for anyone interested in historic buildings.

Some photos from Discovery 2024! (by Courtney Mundt & Pat O'Neill)



Some photos from August fieldtrip (shared by Courtney Mundt)



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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