

# Guernsey Museum Archaeology Group Newsletter

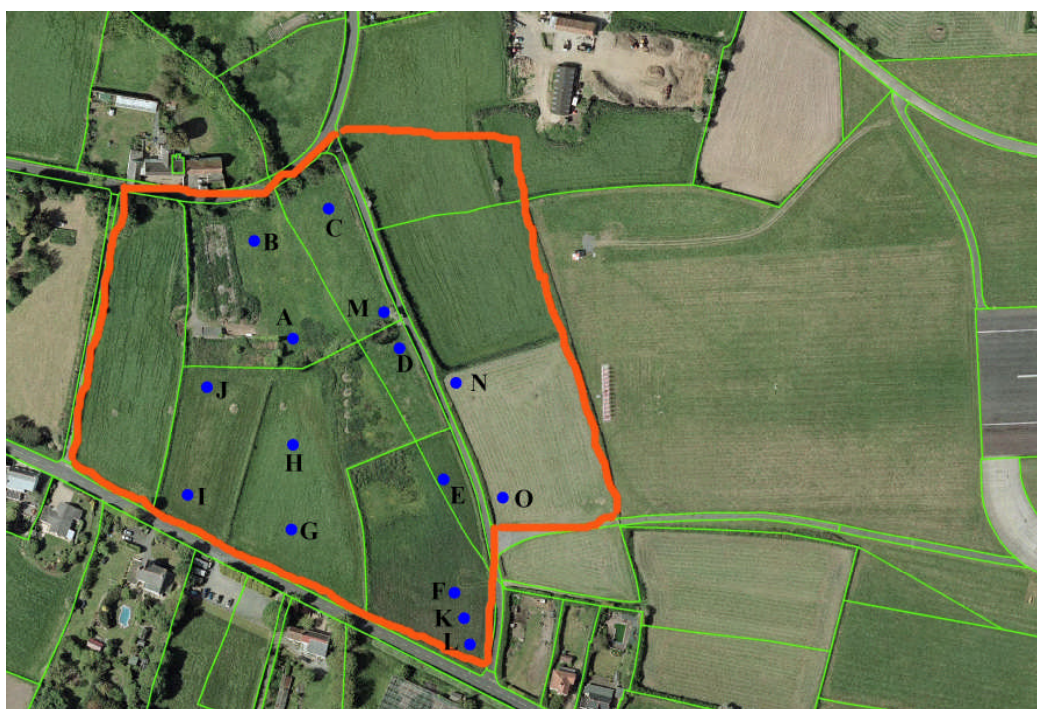
June 2009

Hello all,

It's been a while since the last newsletter, so here's a bumper issue to make up for it.

## Airport

The main focus of our work for the last couple of months has been the proposed airport runway extension. We have now dug fifteen test pits which cover most of the area which would be affected if the work gets the go-ahead.



All of them contained at least a few pot sherds and/or flints, but the most interesting trenches are those in the south-eastern field. Last time I wrote we had just started digging an interesting feature in trench F, which has turned into a large pit cut into the natural gravel, with evidence of intense burning – patches of the gravel have been reddened by the heat, and there was a thick deposit of charcoal and burnt material within the pit. At some point a few stones were chucked in and the pit partially silted up, and then another episode of intense burning took place. There were very few finds from the pit – enough flint to suggest a Bronze Age date, but no pottery (so not a pottery kiln) and no metal (so not for bronze-working either). At the moment my guess is that the pit might have been used as some sort of corn-drying oven, and I hope that analysis of the burnt material might confirm this. We should also be able to get a radiocarbon date from the charcoal, which will be very useful.

In trench K we seem to have landed squarely on top of a prehistoric track. There are two ruts, separated by a ridge, just as you would find on an unsurfaced road today. These ruts were

eventually silted up and in one of them a very thick layer of iron pan developed. Here are pictures of these two trenches:



pit in trench F

the thick black layer in the left side of the pit seems to represent the last episode of burning in here, cut into the silts which had already covered up an earlier episode of intense heating – visible in the reddened gravel natural beneath the stones:



cart track in trench K

the rut on the right developed a particularly thick layer of iron pan as it silted up, just visible at the bottom right of the section below the range pole. Other thinner layers of iron pan within the silt can also be seen in this section. The main road to the Longfrie, c. 1500 BC?!

In the corner of this same field is trench L, which has caused the biggest headache so far. At first I thought we had reached the natural gravel fairly near the surface, but it didn't seem



quite right so we carried on digging... and carried on... and we are now 2.4m, or eight feet below the surface. And we're still not at the bottom. There is some natural at the southern side, but this is cut away, perhaps by a ditch or a pit, and we will have to extend the trench to try and find the other side of the feature. Some major moving of earth has gone on here, possibly to create a bank and ditch, or perhaps for a large storage pit or even a well. There is a thick deposit of bluey-green clay which I think might indicate that the feature was waterlogged, but we will need to extend the trench before we can do any more work here.



trench L

the bright orange gravel down here is the real natural, but as you can see it is cut away... with no sign of it turning up again, so far. Note the distinctive bluey-green clay in the lower part of the section.

So, talking of expansion – it's time to move on to the next phase of the airport excavation, which I hope will allow more of you to take part. We will be hiring a mini-JCB and a dumper truck for a week from 3 July, with the intention of opening up some much larger trenches in this field. From Monday 6 July there should be digging as follows:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday: mornings (9 – 12.30)  
Thursday, Friday: all day (9 – 5, lunch 12.30 – 1.30)  
Saturday: morning (9 – 12.30)

This will involve a mixture of trowelling and heavier work, so I hope there will be something for everybody. I would expect this work to last through July, depending on what we find, and probably into August as well. Of course if you can only manage a few hours at a time that's

no problem, and likewise if you would like to come at other times it may be possible to arrange something – give me a call on 07781 102219 or send me an e-mail and we can discuss the options. As far as access to the site is concerned, you can park either by the ruined barn (near trench A on the map above, access off the Route de la Tourelle), or in the field near trench F etc (but don't drive in too far, you'll fall in a trench). Any questions, just ask.

### **What's on (1)**

The airport is not the only excavation going on this summer, far from it...

#### *Sark, 12 – 23 July*

In July, Barry Cunliffe and his team from Oxford will be back on Sark. They will not be digging in the field by the mill this year, but mostly doing more survey work, possibly concentrating on Little Sark. Some of you will remember Andy Payne, who did the surveying last time round: he will be back again and if he is in need of help I will put out a call for anybody interested who can spare the time.

#### *Alderney, 27 August – 1 September*

Jason will probably be leading another small excavation at the Nunnery in Alderney, over the Bank Holiday weekend. This is not yet set in stone, but anybody who is interested in coming, please contact Jason as soon as possible ([jason.monaghan@cultureleisure.gov.gg](mailto:jason.monaghan@cultureleisure.gov.gg)).

#### *L'Erée, 29 August – 18 September*

Duncan Garrow and Fraser Sturt will be back at L'Erée again in September. This time they will be digging a couple of narrow trenches extending out from last year's site, and also putting in some trenches in the neighbouring field. As last year they are keen to encourage help from us locals, so give them a thought before you all rush off to...

#### *Herm, 8 – 29 September*

Chris Scarre is back with a bigger team this year, with plans to investigate several areas on the common, including the possible menhir-type stone just south of Robert's Cross, the sand pit, and some promising geophysical anomalies. Again there should be plenty of potential for local involvement here.

#### *Delancey, 11 – 18 October (to be confirmed)*

Just when you thought it was all over... after a flurry of work earlier this year, Delancey got rather forgotten when the more pressing work at the airport began. However following a couple of visits to the island by Dr George Nash, prehistorian and rock art expert, I am pleased to say that George is keen to tackle the problem of the Delancey passage grave. Plans are still at a relatively early stage, but should include an initial small excavation in October. More details closer to the time.

### **What's on (2)**

While we're on the subject of what's on, you're invited to 'La Durande', 11 New Place, Vauvert, on Sunday 23 August, from late morning until all the food is finished... RSVP to me, please. Come and admire the garden, unless the slugs and snails have finally eaten everything in it. I'll send out a proper invitation in early August.

### **AFEAF**

AFEAF is the Association Française pour l'Etude de l'Age du Fer, and last month I spoke at their annual conference on the Iron Age, which was held in Caen. My main subject was the



burials at King's Road, and I hoped that I might be able to pick up some information about parallels to some of the objects from our graves: particularly the bronze bracelets, and the two very fine shale bracelets. Well, the decorated bronze bracelet remains as elusive as ever; there is some suggestion that it could be c.400 – 250 BC, and possibly a 'local' production – not necessarily local to

Guernsey, but perhaps local to the surrounding French mainland.



The best parallel for the plainer shale bracelet from King's Road (above right) comes from a cemetery at Ifs, near Caen, where a bracelet of very similar form – but without the little strokes of decoration around the edge – is dated to the sixth or fifth centuries BC. Like the bronzework, the implication seems to be that at least some of the King's Road graves date to well before the end of the Iron Age, but the objects are so rare that it's very difficult to find well-dated parallels.



From another site in Normandy comes this extremely rare example of a shale vessel, dated to the second century BC. The more ornately decorated bracelet from King's Road (above left) probably comes from a cut-down vessel, but not quite of the same size as this one, and again probably rather earlier in date.

Finally, one of the highlights of the AFEAF conference was learning more about the recent discovery of an Iron Age chariot burial at Orval, near Coutances, about fifty miles from Guernsey. This is the first burial of this type found in our region, and it's tempting to think that the people there might have been in contact with our own Iron Age population. The chariot burial is dated to the



third century BC, and it includes an iron sword in its scabbard, a huge (70cm long) spearhead, various horse harness fittings including some with coral decoration, a gold ring, a shield boss, and two cotter pins in iron and bronze with the fabulous design of Celtic heads that you can see here.



Who knows, perhaps we'll get something like this one of these days!

That's all for now. I hope to see you up at the airport site in July, if not before.

Phil

[philip.dejersey@cultureleisure.gov.gg](mailto:philip.dejersey@cultureleisure.gov.gg)

tel. 700477 or 07781 102219