

# Guernsey Museum Archaeology Group Newsletter

March 2011

Hello all,

After a fairly quiet start to the New Year we have been almost overwhelmed by bodies in the past few weeks, as those of you who have been into the store will have seen. So most of this newsletter is devoted to our work at St Martin's Church and St Tugual's Chapel.

## St Martin's Church



Some time ago the Church applied for permission to build a small boiler house outside the west door. Because it seemed almost certain that the work would disturb some burials, we asked if we could dig the footings, and the architects (Lovell Ozanne) and the builders (R.G. Phillips) agreed to this. As anticipated, the upper layers revealed a large quantity of small pieces of human bone, no doubt dug up and churned around on many occasions as graves were excavated in the churchyard. Further down we encountered

three *in situ* burials. The first two are shown below.



The body below the range pole is a child, the one above an adult. Both have a fine array of iron nails around them, indicating that they were buried in coffins. The adult is barely below the foundations of the modern path – in fact the skull has been discoloured by the gravel siftings immediately above it. We were rather puzzled by the appearance of the long thin line

between the two bodies, since it didn't appear to correspond to either of their coffins, but after removing these two bodies all became clear: there were more underneath!



What I suspect happened was that when the child was buried, the grave was dug as far down as the coffin of the earlier burial, and then the child's coffin simply placed on top of the earlier one. Over several hundred years the coffins disintegrated and the bodies now appear almost as if they were stacked one on top of the other.

There is another burial in the unexcavated area above the range pole, but we're going to leave that one be. The three bodies we've removed are now being very slowly cleaned in the store. The bones are in very poor condition, and it was extremely painstaking work to get them out of the ground without their complete disintegration. Partly because of their condition I think they must be fairly ancient – perhaps 13th or 14th century, if not before – but we will get a couple of radiocarbon dates which should confirm this one way or the other.

The excavation also gave us a brief opportunity to dig back to the wall of the Church, which shed a little more light on the construction of the northern aisle. Behind the drainpipe here is one of the enormous grounders from the original north-west corner of the Church. Last but not least, one of the graves contained a single sherd of redeposited Samian pottery – the first record of a Roman find from St





Martin's Church, though of course the Gran'mère is often said to have been remodelled in the Gallo-Roman period.

### St Tugual's Chapel

As if the St Martin's skeletons weren't enough to keep us busy, we are now being deluged by bones from Herm. States Property Services are undertaking a major renovation programme on the Chapel, and as part of this work they planned to dig a soak-away and a drain in the garden immediately south of the building. Although there are only sketchy records of a cemetery in this area, it was no great surprise when the builders began to turn up bones almost as soon as they started digging. We moved in, completed the excavation of the soak-away, and we're now working on the drain which connects it to the Chapel.



The soak-away was well-placed to reveal the grave of an adult male, accompanied by a small child. In contrast to the St Martin's graves, there were no coffin nails here, indicating that the bodies were simply buried in shrouds. The grave appears to have been cut for the adult, and then the child placed on top of the adult, perhaps because it died very shortly afterwards.

At least five more bodies can be identified in the baulks of the soak-away, but even this number pales into comparison with the number in the trench we are now excavating for the drain. In the picture below Kit is stood in the soak-away working on one.



Slightly nearer the camera, the trench then clips the end of a grave, and then closer still there is a cut in the natural gravel and then four more bodies: you should be able to see an adult male pelvis and upper legs, and



then a stack of at least three bodies. The upper two of this trio were almost certainly buried together; the

smaller picture shows how the skull of the lower one was rather brutally sectioned, possibly when the grave was dug for the two bodies laid on top of it.



Because these skeletons need to be removed for the drain, we extended the trench to the left to get the rest of the bodies (we'll also extend to the right to get the upper part of the adult male). This was quite a difficult operation because of a very large fuchsia bush squarely in the way, but we excavated around it as carefully as possible to maximise its chances of survival, and James, one of the Herm gardeners, has replanted it on the side of the hill down to the harbour.



Not surprisingly, as well as revealing more of the bodies in the drainage trench, this extension has turned up still more skeletons. The picture below was taken last week, but we have already added a couple more, so there are now at least eighteen skeletons either wholly or partially in the trench. At least half of them are juveniles.



We will not lift all of the bodies; those which do not need to be moved for the drain will be recorded *in situ* and then the trench backfilled. The stone structure in the top right corner is intriguing – possibly a grave, or perhaps a wall – and we should have the chance to excavate on the other side of it in the next week or two.





Tanya cleaning some of the jumble of bones which lie on top of the main group of skeletons. These bones were probably disturbed from earlier burials and then reburied in the backfill of the graves. Although the bodies may have been buried in something of a hurry, the fact that they are all in the correct Christian orientation – with the head to the west – indicates that their burial was still done with a fair amount of care.

It's getting harder and harder to work around the skeletons – Jenny is perched here on a small patch of bedrock between them. Many of the bodies are lying directly on top of the natural gravel or fractured bedrock. The soil make-up is rather puzzling on this site, and we suspect that a fair chunk of it – perhaps a metre or so – has been sliced off, perhaps in the 19th century, making the burials now appear much shallower than they originally were.



Work will continue on Herm for a while longer yet – the trench for the new drain needs to continue on the other side of the group of stones, and then there will be a long trench to be dug along the length of the Chapel's south wall. I'll let you know how we get on in the next newsletter. In the meantime, most of you probably saw the report in the Press about the work, and the video interviews with me and with Jonathan Watson from Herm are still available at <http://www.thisisguernsey.com/2011/03/19/video-herm-body-count-rises-to-two-dozen/>. See which one of us you think has a more convincing explanation!

### **Airport**

Following the recent spate of publicity about the fields west of the airport, and how much work we have or haven't done in them, PSD have agreed to fund some further excavation. This will involve stripping some much bigger areas with a proper JCB, rather than the toy one we were using last year ☺ It's not likely to be before Easter, not least because the ground

will probably be too wet until then. But once we get going there is likely to be digging going on more or less every day for several weeks, so there should be plenty of opportunity to get involved. I'll keep you posted.

### **Marilyn Day**

Those of you who dug on Lihou in the late 1990s and early 2000s will undoubtedly remember Marilyn, who worked on the finds for several seasons. I am sorry to say that she died from pneumonia on 29 December 2010, and her obituary has just appeared in the newsletter of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. I've reproduced it below.

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#### **Marilyn Day BA MA PlfA 1384 1951–2010**

Marilyn Day (Mazza) came to archaeology after a successful career in design. She graduated in Archaeology from Reading University in 1994, and took an MA in Field Archaeology. Marilyn developed an interest in finds whilst an undergraduate and took the lead regarding finds on one of Bill Waldren's legendary excavations near Valdermossa in Majorca. On completing her MA, she joined Thames Valley Archaeological Services as Finds Officer, before moving to Pewsey as a consultant archaeologist. One of her first projects as a member of Pewsey Vale Local History Society was a display about King Arthur. Of eight door-sized panels, it was painted as medieval manuscripts, embracing Marilyn's skills and interests as an artist.

Marilyn instigated local society projects in and around Pewsey and also took part in high-profile surveys such as Stonehenge Riverside Project. She did several seasons on Lihou Island, off Guernsey, in liaison with the Museum of Guernsey, and

volunteered at the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes. Latterly, Marilyn was an enthusiastic founder member and supporter of Pewsey Vale U3A, where she ran an Archaeology group, sharing her enthusiasm and depth of knowledge.

A vivacious and inspirational lady, she will be much missed. Our thoughts go out to Derrick, Philip and Eleanore Day.

*Nicola Powell MlfA, with contributions by Joy Francis, Eleanore Day, Peter Mander and Mike Parker Pearson MlfA*



Marilyn Day, working on finds at Stonehenge

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That's all for now,

Regards  
Phil

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