



# Monthly eNewsletter

December 2020

Hi everyone,

I realise it has been a few months since I have managed to produce a Newsletter. All the work of setting up the conference and moving house has meant I've been unable to get a Newsletter together. A print edition will also be sent out in the new year. This issue provides a summary of the Discovery 2020! conference, for those who weren't able to attend the event.

As I write this, I'm looking out over Strangford Lough and thinking about the sites I will be able to visit in the new year. I have some thoughts of new projects I want to undertake in 2021 and I will be sharing them with the UAS as they progress.

Best wishes,

Duncan

*Editor*

## Message from the President

This has been a truly extraordinary year for all of us. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has forced the suspension of all UAS face-to-face archaeological activities such as lectures, field trips, workshops, excavations and the field survey of monuments. These will not resume until it is safe once again to do so.

Despite this, the UAS Committee has been very busy in 2020 continuing to disseminate information about new archaeological projects, research and publications in Ulster and beyond. To help us achieve these goals, we have embraced the medium of digital technology. The UAS Committee has met regularly throughout the year via Zoom and Microsoft Teams and in March, we established the UAS eNewsletter to help keep members informed about what the Society is and will be doing in the future. In November, our very successful Discovery 2020! conference took place online and the new volume of the Ulster Journal of Archaeology (Volume 75) was published. And so the Society has achieved a lot in 2020 despite having to operate in very difficult circumstances. My thanks to all of the members of the UAS Committee for their commitment, passion and hard work to ensure that the Society continues to function so efficiently.

We are currently in the process of finalising the UAS lecture and workshop programme for 2021 and we should be in a position to distribute this to UAS members before the end of the year. We all miss the social aspect of meeting up with colleagues and friends at our activities. However, in the short term in 2021 our lectures and workshops will continue to be held remotely. We will be providing members with the information about how to participate in these. We are also intending to put more material up on YouTube that members can access. Please keep checking the UAS Facebook site and UAS website for details.

The good news that vaccines for the coronavirus are now becoming available means that we are hopeful that face-to-face UAS activities may be able to resume at some point later in 2021. We will be reviewing this situation regularly, in line with current health and safety and medical guidance. The success of the digital projects we

have carried out in 2020 means that in future we will be continuing to undertake these even when face-to-face UAS activities resume. This will be yet another UAS resource for members to engage with and enjoy.

On behalf of the UAS Committee, I would like to wish you all a very happy and safe Christmas and New Year. We look forward to seeing you again in 2021.

Ruairí

Ruairí Ó Baoill

President, Ulster Archaeological Society

December 2020

## Discovery 2020!



# DISCOVERY 2020!

## FOURTH ANNUAL REVIEW OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN ULSTER

ORGANISED BY THE ULSTER ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND THE  
CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY ARCHÆOLOGY AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

2020 has been a strange year, but the UAS wanted to retain some continuity and host our annual Discovery! conference. As large gatherings were not an option, we explored ways to deliver our conference online. After spending a few month gathering presenters and getting them to record their lectures, we were able to out everything live

on Saturday 7th November. Over the day, we had 16 papers, which were enjoyed by about 100 conference participants.

The conference opened on Saturday with a welcome from Prof Eileen Murphy (head of ArcPal), Ruairí Ó Baoill (president of UAS), and Dr Duncan Berryman (conference coordinator). This was followed by a fascinating keynote by Dr Monique van den Dries (University of Leiden) on the importance of archaeology to communities and the positive impact it has on people's wellbeing.

The conference papers were organised into thematic sessions to make it as much like a normal conference as possible. The theme of the first session was community archaeology. Dr Heather Montgomery opened the session with an excellent talk about the excavations she lead at Magilligan Military Training Centre, which provided an opportunity for local schools to learn about the history of the area. The excavations uncovered significant evidence of First World War training trenches, it was also the only community excavation carried out by the Centre for Community Archaeology in 2020 as it happened in March just before lockdown. This was followed by Dr Alastair Ruffell presenting work he did with Jonathan McNee and Liam Bradley on the discovery and excavation of two Second World War aircraft from County Monaghan, a Mk4 Spitfire and a P-38 Lightning. We then heard from Anthony Neville or the Resurrecting Monuments group in Baldoyle/Howth, he presented some of the group's work and reflected on the popularity of their book about the heritage of the area (the first printing selling out

very quickly). To close the session, Jonathan Barkley presented result from a community excavation at Arney Fort (County Fermanagh) and suggested that it may have been a Gaelic moated site rather than a fort.

Our second session focused on survey and excavation and started with Dr Paddy Gleeson. Paddy's paper presented the results of recent geophysical survey at Navan Fort and the wider landscape, much of which could change the way we view Emain Macha. This was followed by Dr Vicky Ginn presenting a summary of recent sites that have been excavated as a result of the planning process and by commercial companies.

Architecture and monuments was the theme of our third session, with a strong medieval element. Dr Michelle Comber discussed the existence of square ringforts and her identification of them as supply centres, quite distinct from the purposes of the traditional circular ringfort. Continuing with the medieval period, Dr Michael O'Mahony presented some of his doctoral research into the structure of tower houses in the British Isles, thinking about the groups of masons who constructed the towers. The final paper in this session was Dr Barry O'Reilly who introduced the Irish strategy for identifying and caring for vernacular architecture across Ireland; he illustrated this with many examples of rural and urban buildings and how such structures can be conserved.

The fourth session showcased some archaeological work that has been able to happen despite the Covid pandemic. Dr Colm Donnelly told us about how the Centre for Community Archaeology at Queen's has continued to work with its partners during lockdown through the creation of a digital toolkit. This has been an excellent project that allows communities to engage with their heritage while staying safe. This was followed by David Craig demonstrating how anyone can make use of online tools to investigate the landscape and to identify new archaeological features.

The final session of the day presented a range of research topics from across Ireland. This started with Dr Lara Cassidy presenting the results of her recent research into the genomics of Irish Neolithic society and the changes from the Mesolithic. In particular, Lara discussed results of individuals from Newgrange who were the

offspring of incest. Dr Connie Kelleher gave us a taste of her recent book on the pirates who used the Irish coast to control the Atlantic Ocean. Thomas McErlean has been working with the Historic Environment Division to produce Statements of Significance for several state care sites in western Ulster. Thomas discussed the purpose of these statements and presented some features of the sites he has been working on. The final paper of the day was provided by Dr David Tosh. The Ulster Museum has undertaken consultations about the display of human remains and David addressed such displays in the past and what might be the future. This was an interesting and thought-provoking paper asking some difficult questions about how and if we should display human remains alongside artefacts.

At the end of day, there was a virtual wine reception on Microsoft Teams. This allowed participants who were there on the day to see each other and have a chat over a glass of wine, a soft drink, or a cup of tea. To close the event, Ruairí Ó Baoill and Prof. Eileen Murphy said a few words and launched volume 75 of the Ulster Journal of Archaeology.

The whole event seemed to be a success and everyone who attended found something of interest. The pre-recorded videos for the papers certainly reduced the stress of organising the event on the day, but it lacked the interaction of a live event. Hopefully next year we will be able to be back in the lecture theatre for Discovery 2021!

If you weren't able to attend, you can still access the conference programme booklet (and all previous booklets) on the UAS website:

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/Conference/>

Duncan Berryman  
Conference Co-Ordinator

## Online Activities

### *Launch of Archaeology 2030 Strategy*

The Historic Environment Division will launch their strategy for archaeology in Northern Ireland to 2030 at 3pm Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December. The event is hosted on Zoom, you can access the launch [here](#).

### *Society of Antiquaries of Scotland - Rhind Lectures 2020*

The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland are holding their annual Rhind lectures online this year. The lectures are being given by Dr Alison Sheridan and the theme is Neolithic Scotland: the Big Picture and Detailed Narratives in 2020.

You can find more information on their website - <https://www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2020/>

Most of the lectures are being streamed on YouTube. But the final lecture (6pm 18<sup>th</sup> December) is being held on Zoom (you'll need to register to join) and will be available on YouTube after the event.

### *DigVentures*

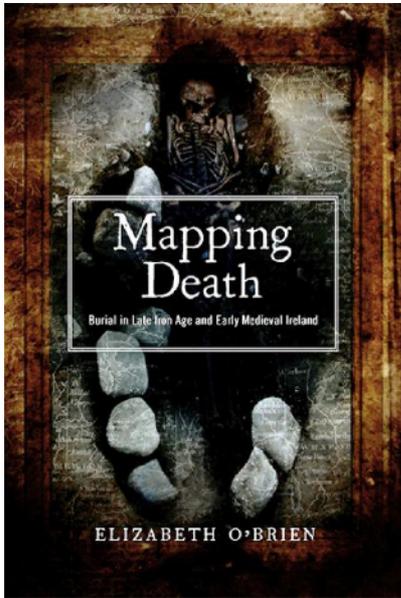
DigVentures are preparing for their 2021 excavation season, with projects in East Yorkshire and Lindisfarne. They are hoping to be back in the field and have policies in place to keep everyone safe. But even if you aren't venturing onto site, you can join their digital project all year round - <https://digventures.com/subscribe/>

### *Current Archaeology Awards 2021*

The Current Archaeology Awards are open for voting until 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021. There are some great projects and publications on the shortlists, so some categories are very hard to choose. Prof Paula Reimer is nominated for Archaeologist of the Year. Paula will be known to many members as the Director of the <sup>14</sup>Chrono Centre which specialises in carbon dating using an Accelerator Mass Spectrometer, she has also carried out pioneering work on the calibration of dates generated by carbon dating techniques (something vital to all archaeologists).

Vote online here - <https://www.archaeology.co.uk/vote>

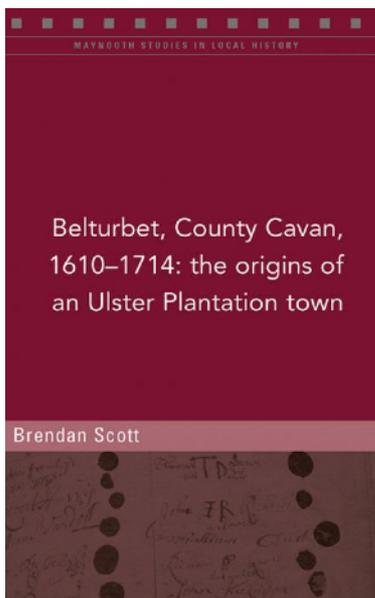
## New Books



### **Mapping Death: Burial in Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Ireland - Elizabeth O'Brien**

Four Courts Press, €55

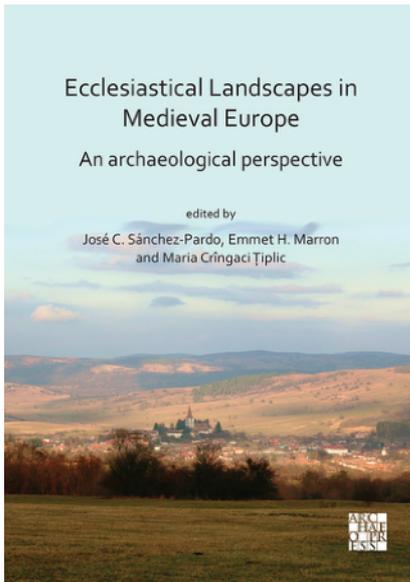
O'Brien's study provides a comprehensive overview of burial practices in Iron Age and Early Medieval Ireland. Each chapter is dedicated to a particular aspect, starting with cremation and progressing to inhumation. Other chapters consider the grave goods, graveyards, and Atypical burials. O'Brien has also been able to carry out isotope analysis on several burials to find whether they grew-up and lived locally to where they were buried. Unlike Cahill and Sikora's excellent catalogue, *Breaking Ground, Finding Graves*, this study provides a context and historical narrative for understanding the burials. O'Sullivan *et al.*'s *Early Medieval Ireland* did much to change how we saw and understood life in Early Medieval Ireland and this volume will do the same for death and burial. O'Brien brings together archaeological, historical, and literary sources to investigate the changing burial practices in Ireland. She is also very interested in the unusual, discussing deviant burials, exceptional female burials and grave goods; all these aspects are used to tell a story and deepen our understanding of the communities responsible for the burials. This is a vital book for the study of Early Medieval Ireland as it tells us so much about life and death at that time.



### **Belturbet, County Cavan, 1610-1714: The Origins of an Ulster Plantation Town - Brendan Scott**

Four Courts Press, €9.95

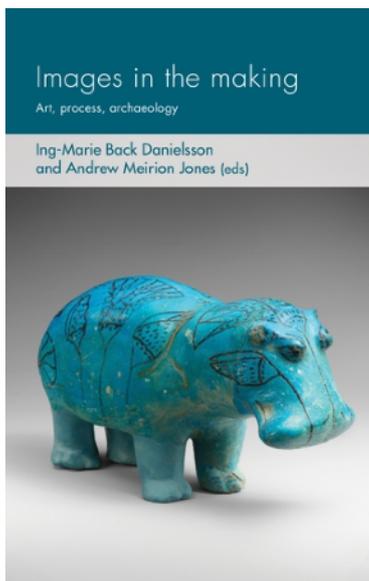
This is a small book but is highly informative about the 17<sup>th</sup>-century history of the town of Belturbet. We find out about the town's history from its plantation in 1608, the destruction of parts of it in the 1641 rising and its growth in the later 17<sup>th</sup>-century. We also learn something of the society of the town, with chapters on the religious practices and the physical remains of the buildings. The introduction notes that there has been little work on the plantation towns of Ulster and that Belturbet provides a prime example due to a large volume of documentary sources. This research brings the history of the town to life and makes extensive use of contemporary voices from the documents.



### **Ecclesiastical Landscapes in Medieval Europe - Marron Sánchez-Pardo & Țiplic Crîngaci (eds)**

Archaeopress, £40 (paperback) £16 (ebook)

This volume of papers takes us from Ireland and Galicia in the west to Transylvania and Bohemia in the east, and cover a wide range of topics. The Irish paper looks at kin-groups and their relationship with churches in early medieval Ireland. There are also two papers on the Isle of Man, reminding us of its close connection to Ireland. Also of interest is a paper on monastic gardens, their contents, and the symbolism of the plants and layout. The range of papers from Eastern Europe provides an interesting comparison to the normal western focus, revealing the similarities and differences in churches and monastic landscapes across Europe. This volume includes many interesting and thought-provoking papers that help to expand our understanding of the monastic landscape within Europe. The papers are well illustrated with colour figures and will be of use to anyone interested in all aspects of medieval monasteries.



### **Images in the making: Art, process, archaeology - Ing-Marie Back Danielsson & Andrew Meirion Jones (eds)**

Manchester University Press, £73

This is a wide-ranging volume, with papers covering images of Nile hippos in ancient Egypt to gold foil figures in Iron Age Scandinavia. The papers all discuss the creation and use of images and art. This volume does take a theoretical and art historical approach to images and artefacts. However, it is interesting to think about the more abstract meanings of objects like rock art and the enigmatic carved stone balls of Northeastern Scotland. The paper on these stone balls is most interesting, as it used experimental archaeology to understand how these objects were created and discusses the issues with only seeing objects as ritual or functional. Throughout this volume there are informative observations and discussions of how we should understand and think about art and images in the past.