



Monthly eNewsletter

April 2020

Hi everyone,

I hope everyone is surviving in quarantine! It is now April and I've now been working from home for almost a month, yet it feels so much longer. I have been able to spend more time working on research than I would normally. Some of that work you can see in our first digital lecture - https://youtu.be/YDyU4S_USEI

While we cannot send out the hard copy newsletter I will be including our normal sections in these monthly updates and hopefully produce a 'best of' when this is over. This month we have a report on the January lecture by QUB's Dr Mélie Le Roy. I have also included a few more online resources that I have come across or been sent in the past few weeks.

Last month some of you may have seen the article in the Irish Times about the royal site of Rathcroghan in County Roscommon. The site is one of the four royal sites of Ireland alongside Ulster's Emain Macha (Navan Fort), and yet it is not widely known. An excellent visitor centre has been established in the nearby town of Tulsk, telling the story of the site and life during the Iron Age and Medieval periods. There are regular tours to the site and the Oweynagat (the cave entrance to the other world). The visitor centre also hosts an annual community archaeology conference, which I

know some of our members regularly attend and enjoy. To tell you more about the site and what your appetite to visit when this lockdown is over, the manager of the visitor centre has sent me some information about Rathcroghan, which I have included in this Newsletter.

I hope you enjoy this issue and do let me know if there is anything you would like to see in the next issue.

Best wishes,

Duncan

Editor

Membership Subscriptions

Please note that membership subscriptions are now overdue. We would encourage members to use our PayPal facility on the website - <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/JoinUs/>

Alternatively, cheques can be sent to:
Lee Gordon (UAS Treasurer)
135 Old Holywood Road,
Belfast
BT4 2HQ

Postal Address for UAS

During this lockdown, the Secretary is not able to access the Society's post box in the Department of Archaeology in Queen's University. Therefore, please direct all correspondence to:

Mr K Pullin
16 Knockbreda Park
Belfast
BT6 0HB

January Lecture



Drone image of Les Abrits 2
Dolmen, Ardèche, France
(credit: Agathe Chen)

The January lecture, 'Who was buried there? Funerary practices and selection in late Neolithic burial sites in Southern France' was given by Dr Mélie Le Roy, archaeology lecturer at Queen's University Belfast.

The South of France has a rich archaeological landscape with many collective burial sites. There are three types of collective burial sites in the region – caves, dolmens and hypogeum and dating

evidence shows that caves and dolmens in the same geographic area were being used for burial simultaneously. Many of the dolmens were emptied in the 19th century and reused as shepherd shelters, while remains in caves were often found accidentally. Additionally, many have been excavated by professional archaeologists and regional museums. The construction of these monuments obviously required much investment in time and resources and there has been lots of experimental archaeology conducted in France researching how these structures were built. However, there has been comparatively little research carried out on the osteological remains which could reveal rich information on who was buried at these sites. Modern anthropological studies in areas where collective burial is still practised, such as Indonesia, and Madagascar, indicates that the relationship between individuals buried within these burials is complex and not confined to immediate family groups. Dr Le Roy's research focuses on understanding how these burial monuments were used and learning about the individuals buried within.

Dr Le Roy selected 22 previously excavated Late Neolithic – Early Bronze Age collective burial sites (11 dolmens and 11 caves) and re-analysed the excavated remains and site archives. The osteological remains were studied to determine the estimated age of the individuals and their general health. This analysis showed some

differences between those individuals buried in the caves and those buried in the dolmens. Regarding age of death, the cave burial sites had an over-representation of individuals older than 5 years old, while within the dolmens there was an under-representation of individuals less than 5 years old. There was also unequal health status between those individuals within caves and those within dolmens. Those individuals within the caves were in good health generally prior to death, although there were some individuals with disabling pathologies. Those individuals buried in dolmens had poor general health but disabling pathologies were rare. Further study of other sites within the region is required to confirm these initial results.

In 2017 and 2018, fieldwork was carried out at Les Abrits 2, a dolmen in Beaulieu in the Ardèche region of Southern France. The site had been previously investigated and remains of 57 adults and 29 immature individuals were excavated, these remains were commingled and no clear distribution. The re-excavation of the chamber revealed a hard, compact, sterile deposit on the floor. This was initially interpreted as a modern consolidation horizon, however, it was actually a purposefully prepared surface laid down prior to the construction of the chamber and analysis of the showed evidence that bodies have decayed on site. Preparation of the floor surface was also observed during excavation at the nearby Janna Cave, a cave collective burial site located close to Les Abrits 2. This indicates the care and effort made to prepare the body reception surfaces. It is hoped that another season of excavation will take place at Les Abrits later in 2020.

Grace McAllister

Online Activities

Ronnie Hanna is running a number of online courses on history. In April he is offering courses on President Lyndon Johnston and the history of the Labour Party 1906-2007. If you are interested in these, or to find out what he might offer in the future, please email him - ronnie.hanna@btinternet.com

The Council for British Archaeology have made many of their publications available online. These range from Star Carr and Doggerland to modern conflict archaeology, these provide a great resource for everyone. You can access all the resources here - <https://new.archaeologyuk.org/books-and-publications?>

The European Association of Archaeologists have uploaded videos of conference sessions to their YouTube. These papers are from all across Europe and cover all periods of history. Access them here - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDIWHHoH3kKEJJdFGjJ_KVg/videos?fbclid=IwAR1yI3EpxjMgJV75Z7Em3TIkkaUh_dmg4qccVth6Ufq_QaevrqJaZopbs

Explore parts of Europe

You can take a 3D tour of the Neolithic site of Göbeklitepe, Turkey https://mpembed.com/show/?m=WfyQ2FM4s4G&logo=https%3A%2F%2Fstatic.wixstatic.com%2Fmedia%2F377e40_3a813f71595544f79dd89c0fa4d7172a%7Emv2.jpg&help=2&wh=0&f=0&brand=0&play=1&fbclid=IwAR0yR3dFmBMi6FhhozUplG-Xkcy9s5AccihXSt4s5zexxRPCalsqlzjhkq8

The archaeological sites of Czech Republic have been put into an online atlas <http://www.archeologickyatlas.cz/en?fbclid=IwAR0jguEXFwFyUZl9FoNjF2ZTXxKoFyFvXFZCX9q0filfGYIysmeRGXyQlwk>

Take a tour of Roman art in European museums https://www.romeandart.eu/en/art-museums-virtual-rome.html?fbclid=IwAR0ozlw27ccMn1O5HSJ_2RkouuvNgXipJITe35W2QmNo3SgDMRB2TtOdqq8

Find out about the recent discovery of a viking ship in Norway
<https://archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot.com/2020/04/the-viking-ship-at-gjellestad-comes-to.html?fbclid=IwAR3webiDpLowLL-IPf1mdWSq4wSmKd1nFga6A7AyBp8iolQDFsuXi9IloQM#.Xo9g3NjanhA>

Explore the archaeology of Jersey
https://www.jerseyheritage.org/athome/virtual-talks-and-tours?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Heritage%20at%20Home%20Easter&utm_content=Heritage%20at%20Home%20Easter+CID_9f5b2cb2b7a2a541b0d35fafbef13a13&utm_source=JH%20Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Heritage%20at%20Home

Archeology to watch on TV and online

TED Talks on all sorts of subjects including archaeology
<https://www.ted.com/talks?sort=newest&topics%5B%5D=archaeology>

Online lectures from The Megalithic Portal (lots of information & can sign up to weekly newsletter)
<https://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=2146414304>

More4: The Great British Dig Started Thu 9 Apr 21.00
BBC4: Archaeology- A Secret History. Starting 22 Apr at 22.00
Channel 5: Viking Invasion. Starting tonight 10 Apr at 19.00
Channel 5: Stonehenge Started Fri 5 Apr at 19.00, Catchup on My5

On iPlayer:
BBC4 Digging for Britain - The Greatest Discoveries (4 episodes, just finished on TV)
BBC4 Digging for Britain - Series 8 (4 episodes from last year)
BBC4 Beyond the Walls: In Search of the Celts
BBC2 Civilisations (9 episodes)

On My5:
Digging up Britain's Past Series 1&2

Time Team
<https://timeteamdigital.com>
On YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/user/timeteamdigital>
On Channel 4 - <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/time-team/episode-guide>

Other interesting websites

The Archaeology Channel - Videos & Audios

<https://www.archaeologychannel.org/>

Archaeology news

<https://www.newsnow.co.uk/h/Science/Archaeology>

Archaeology of Heathrow Terminal 5

<https://framearch.co.uk/t5/>

Rathcroghan Visitor Centre – Presenting the Iron Age royal landscape of *Cruachan Aí*



Rathcroghan Visitor Centre, Co. Roscommon was established in 1999 as a community-run social enterprise, to act as the interpretive facility and resource hub for the UNESCO World Heritage Site-nominated Rathcroghan Archaeological Landscape.

<https://www.rathcroghan.ie>

The idea of a heritage centre devoted to the Rathcroghan Landscape arose from a series of successful remote sensing investigations which were conducted over the principal monuments of the landscape between 1994 and 1998 by the National University of Ireland, Galway, with funding from the Heritage Council.

The Rathcroghan Landscape comprises a collection of at least two hundred and forty archaeological sites, sixty of which are designated as National Monuments, located on the limestone-rich fertile plains of mid-Roscommon. The majority of the core of this landscape is contained in an area above the 120m OD contour line, providing extensive views over much of the province of Connacht. This landscape retains evidence of human settlement from at least as early as the early Neolithic Period (c.3,500BC), through to the later medieval period, with a period of particularly pronounced activity dateable to the late Iron Age.

The archaeological character of the landscape is multifaceted, with a substantial collection of Bronze and Iron Age funerary monuments, numerous ringfort settlement sites of early medieval or medieval date, standing stones, a cashel (stone fort), large-scale linear earthworks, and a matrix of later medieval field boundaries.

The focal points of this landscape are the large earthen mound of Rathcroghan Mound, and a natural limestone cavern known as Oweynagat, which possesses very strong associations with the mythological and folkloric narrative that also grips this landscape. Rathcroghan Mound was the most extensively investigated of the monuments as part of the aforementioned NUI, Galway



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rathcroghan#/media/File:Owenagat.jpg>

ArchaeoGeophysical Imaging Project. These surveys uncovered a deep complexity to the mound and its environs, which showed close parallels with the excavated and upstanding remains found at other of the Irish Iron Age royal sites, such as at the Hill of Tara, Co. Meath, Dún Ailinne, Co. Kildare, and particularly, Navan Fort (Emain Macha), Co. Armagh. This was a multi-period ritual monument, and it has been theorised that this served as the location for ceremonies and events linked with prehistoric sacral kingship.

Oweynagat, for its part, is deemed to be a portal or door into the Irish Otherworld, a place deliberately linked with the seasonal gathering of Samhain, modern Halloween, and a place of initiation or warrior testing. It survives today as a manmade souterrain-like passageway which then attaches onto a sinuous limestone cavern. Its modern humble appearance belies its place in Irish mythology, and both it, and the Rathcroghan landscape as a whole, are very well represented as a central place in the Ulster Cycle of Tales. These tales relate to the epic clashes between, particularly, the Ulaid and Connachta, and a cast of characters which included Queen Medb (Maeve), Ailill, Cú Chulainn, Conchobar Mac Nessa, Fráoch and so on. The many tána ('cattle' raids) of the Ulster Cycle all begin at Cruachan Aí (Rathcroghan), and the central tale of the cycle, the Táin Bó Cuailnge (Cattle Raid of Cooley), which surrounds Queen Medb's quest to take a monstrous bull, the famed Donn Cuailnge, for herself, begins and ends at the royal site for Connacht.

It is from this extensive source material of archaeology, history and mythology that the interpretive centre has drawn on in order to share the story of Rathcroghan. The centre operates on a year-round basis, providing a museum and interpretive exhibition, specialist bookshop and gift shop, mythologically-themed Táin Café, and our guided tour offering of the Rathcroghan landscape. The centre currently employs 11 staff members, who on top of the day-to-day running of all things to do with the centre, are actively engaged in a wide range of projects relating to Rathcroghan. These include some of the following:

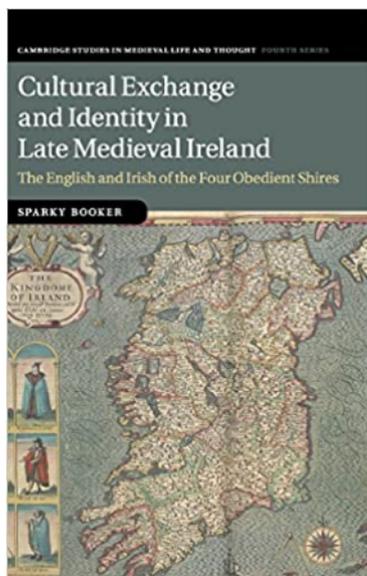
- The writing of Rathcroghan: The Guidebook (2018) [available through our online shop at www.rathcroghan.ie]
- Acquisition of funding and successful installation of a bespoke artefactual display connected to the material culture of mid-Roscommon, in association with the National Museum of Ireland (2018)
- New tour bus acquisition (2019)
- Children's museum workbook (2019)

On top of this, all of our tour guides are academic researchers in their own right, with numerous peer-reviewed publications on areas which interest them under their belts. The centre also offers an annual forum through which community groups, societies, individual researchers and academics can present and debate on aspects of research in their own locales. Known as the Rathcroghan Conference – Archaeology Above & Below, it is Ireland's only annual community archaeology conference, and has been operating under this theme since 2014. The conference schedule for the upcoming, hopefully rescheduled, 2020 conference is available at www.rathcroghanconference.com.

The most recent positive development at Rathcroghan has been the development of a five-year Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) funded agri-environmental project for Rathcroghan, entitled 'Sustainable Farming in the Rathcroghan Archaeological Landscape'. Known as 'Farming Rathcroghan' for short, this is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) project designed to trial measures that would lead to more sustainable livelihoods for the farming community of Rathcroghan, while focussing on the maintenance, preservation, and enhancement of this archaeological and cultural landscape. At time of writing, the project has recruited thirty project farmers, and 2020 will see the trialling of the first set of measures. It is hoped that the successful delivery of this project will have positive implications for future agricultural schemes, both in Ireland, and throughout Europe, linked to preservation of our archaeological heritage. More information on the Farming Rathcroghan project is available at <https://www.rathcroghan.ie/history/farming-at-rathcroghan/>

Rathcroghan Visitor Centre is open six days a week (Monday to Saturday), 9am to 4.30pm throughout the year. Sunday opening (12pm to 4pm) occurs from May to the end of August. Tour times are available through our website.

New Books



Cultural Exchange and Identity in Late Medieval Ireland - Sparky Brooker

Cambridge University Press, £25.99

New out in paperback. Sparky Brooker is a history lecturer at Queen's University Belfast. Irish inhabitants of the 'four obedient shires' - a term commonly used to describe the region at the heart of the English colony in the later Middle Ages - were significantly anglicised, taking on English names, dress, and even legal status. However, the processes of cultural exchange went both ways. This study examines the nature of interactions between English and Irish neighbours in the four shires, taking into account the complex tensions between assimilation and the preservation of distinct ethnic identities and exploring how the common colonial rhetoric of the Irish as an 'enemy' coexisted with the daily reality of alliance, intermarriage, and accommodation. Placing Ireland in a broad context, Sparky Brooker addresses the strategies the colonial community used to deal with the difficulties posed by extensive assimilation, and the lasting changes this made to understandings of what it meant to be 'English' or 'Irish' in the face of such challenges.