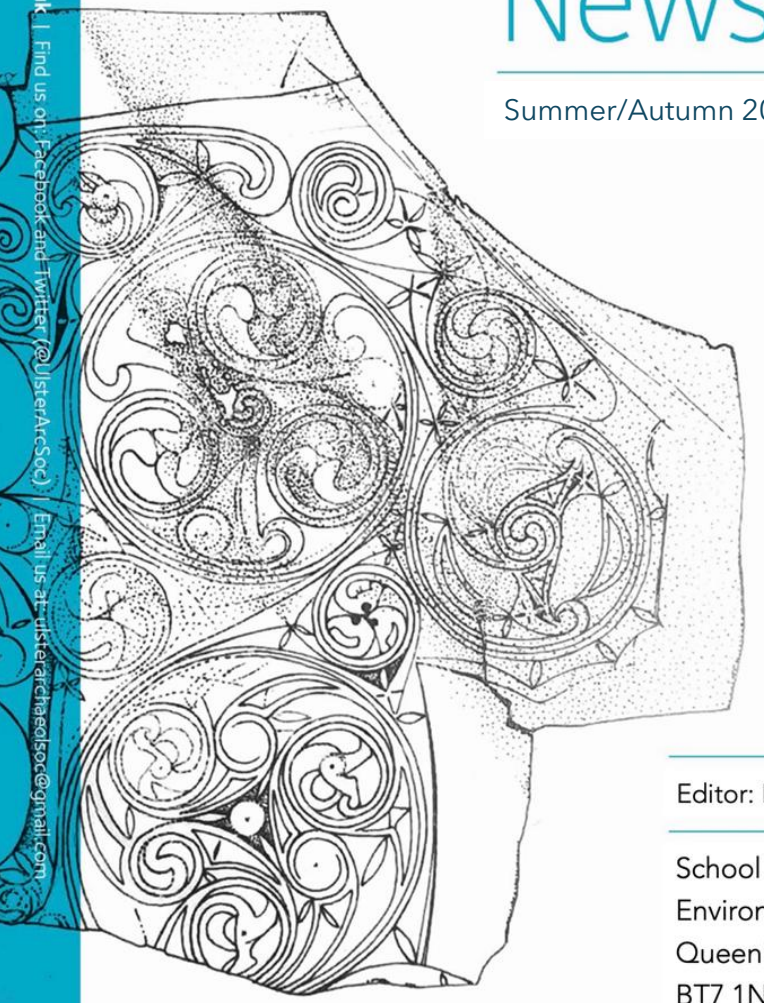
ULSTER
ARCHÆOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

Newsletter

Summer/Autumn 2025



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Images of Millin Bay fieldtrip by Pat Collins and Rena Maguire

Editor's note

It's been a long hot summer, and we hope that you have been enjoying it! There's been lots of great archaeology going on, but we are also looking forward to autumn events and new books to read as the 'evenings are fair drawing in'. This newsletter, having a foot in both seasons, brings you a roundup of what the society were up to, at least as far as the end of July, and what's coming up for the new season in archaeology. Meantime, it's a packed newsletter, enjoy! And keep sending me your furry, feathered or scaly archaeopets! Yours aye! Rena

Getting to know you: Dr Duncan Berryman

Hello! I'm currently one of the Society's Vice Presidents, and many of you may also know me from my long stint as Newsletter editor – a role I held for nearly 15 years. These days, I look after much of the Society's digital side, including the website and Zoom, and I help with organising our annual conference. My journey with the Society began during my undergraduate days at Queen's University Belfast (2005–2008), where I first joined UAS. I've always had a strong interest in Irish and medieval archaeology – my final year dissertation focused on Irish Tower Houses. In 2010, I returned to Queen's to undertake a PhD on the materials and construction of medieval farm buildings in England. Since then, I've been expanding my research to include Ireland and other parts of Britain. This interest in historic rural architecture led me to become involved with the Historic Farm Buildings Group (I'm now the Group's Secretary) and the Vernacular Architecture Group. In 2024, I had the pleasure of leading conferences for both groups in eastern Ulster. More recently, I've revived my long-standing interest in castles through my role as editor of the Castle Studies Group Journal. I also have a broad interest in European medieval buildings and have been fortunate to participate in many conference sessions and publications across Europe – it's been a real privilege to visit some incredible places and connect with so many passionate people.

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

Welcome to new members of the society!

Clare Caron, Old Leighlin

Karen McKinstry, Banbridge.

Karen Olphert, Saintfield.

Clarissa Dennison, Antrim.

James Kane, Benburb.

Jari McLeod, Richhill.

Elisabeth Wilson, Bangor.

Ramona McCloskey, Loughiel.

Mr & Mrs JMG Du Toit, Cape Town, SA.

Via Pat O'Neill, Honorary Secretary

A Midsummer Journey Through Time on the Ards Peninsula: a UAS adventure!

June 16th, 2025

An opportunity to visit Millin Bay under the guidance of an expert is not one to be missed—especially when that expert is Liam McQuillan, Senior Inspector of Monuments for Northern Ireland's Historic Environment Division. Liam generously gave up a summer evening to offer a curated tour of the lower Ards Peninsula, sharing his deep local knowledge and archaeological insight with a group of Ulster Archaeological Society members.

The evening began at Kearney, a small coastal village lovingly restored by the National Trust to reflect the charm of a traditional fishing community. Just over 5km east of Portaferry, Kearney boasts sweeping views across to Scotland, the Isle of Man, and the Mountains of Mourne—not to mention perhaps one of the fanciest public toilets in Northern Ireland. A surviving Victorian gas lamp on the roadside adds a touch of whimsy, evoking something out of Narnia. Yet beneath this postcard setting lie rich, earthy stories. Local memory recalls a 19th-century all-woman fishing crew, skippered by the redoubtable Mary Ann Doonan, who braved these waters to support their families—a reminder that life here was as gritty as it was picturesque.

From there, the convoy wound past Quintin Castle. Originally built by John de Courcy in 1184, little remains of the medieval structure. The castle changed hands through the centuries, including a significant renovation in the 17th century by Sir James Montgomery. Later owners included the Calvert family, whose descendant Magdalen King-Hall authored The Wicked Lady, a racy novel later adapted into a 1950s film starring James Mason and Margaret Lockwood. The castle is now a privately run hotel which is

rumoured once contained a mosaic Ouija board floor which now remains tantalisingly out of reach for further exploration.

Next, we stopped at the serene beach of Knockinelder (Cnoc an Iolair—Hill of the Eagles). Though there was no time for a UAS dip (now wouldn't that be a sight to behold!), the spot's ancient roots were evident. It was once part of the petty kingdom of Ulechach Arda in the 8th century, but Liam admitted that the site's name is puzzling: no eagles have ever been recorded on the hill. Perhaps the name refers to a long-forgotten chieftain or even an epithet of St Cooey, the elusive saint linked to the area.

Then came the highlight: Millin Bay. This unique and enigmatic Neolithic burial monument (c. 3000–2500 BC) offers a rare and complex insight into prehistoric mortuary practice. First excavated in 1953 by Pat Collins and Dudley Waterman, the site includes the earliest phase of a north/south dry-stone wall, running through a stone cist containing the carefully sorted, defleshed remains of at least 15 individuals—mostly of young people. These were arranged within an oval structure of slabs supported by a shingle bank, surrounded by additional small cists, some containing cremated remains. The entire site was eventually capped with a long sand mound.

Many of the stones are decorated with distinctive pecked curvilinear and rectilinear motifs, strikingly different from those seen at Newgrange or Knockmany. The setting is deeply peaceful, with the sound of waves and seabirds joining the soft soughing of the wind in the grass. On a clear day, Scotland and the Isle of Man are visible on the silvery-blue horizon. Was this a final resting place for those from distant shores? We await more answers from ongoing osteological analysis being carried out by Liam in partnership with Dr Lisa White.

As twilight fell on a perfect midsummer's evening, we followed a pilgrim route to St

Cooey's Well, just over 3km southeast of Portaferry. Though no records confirm the existence of St Cooey, local lore claims he hailed from Knockinelder, became abbot of Movilla, and died in AD 731. The site, with its 7th-century church foundations, was restored in the 1970s by parishioners.

Today, the modern altar shelters ancient stones, and an annual pilgrimage takes place on the Sunday closest to the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. The Washing, Eye, and Drinking Wells nestled in this wooded glade are reputed to have healing powers. A narrow path winds through reeds to the shore, where hollows in the rock are said to mark where the saint once knelt in prayer.

Did I take the waters? Absolutely—and so did others. Will it shorten our time in archaeologists' purgatory? Perhaps not. But in such a soft and sacred place, it's a miracle in itself that its stories and folklore endure, unbowed by the noise of the 21st century.

The Ulster Archaeological Society extends heartfelt thanks to Liam McQuillan for a well-planned, deeply informative, and delightfully engaging tour of Ards—an area that continues to surprise and inspire.

Dr R Maguire

An archaeology of the coarse earthenware industry in Ulster during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dr Naomi Carver (Visiting Scholar QUB). 28th April 2025

During this lecture, Naomi first outlined the parameters of her research and described the type of pottery she examined. Second, she gave a short history of coarse pottery production in Ireland before moving on to talk about the kiln assemblage examined over the course of her research. Third, she summarised the data from ceramic assemblages around Ulster and finally gave some

observations and insights gained during her research.

Naomi first reviewed the definition, terminology and parameters of coarse earthenware pottery. Coarse earthenware is a soft-paste ceramic fired at a low temperature (around 1000°C). Glazed coarse earthenware is a utilitarian ware which was primarily used for the storage and preparation of food and drink, particularly dairy products. Some was also used as tableware and could be found to be very finely made. Coarse earthenware fabrics range in colour depending on the clay source and firing conditions, but in Ulster the fabrics are generally a reddish-orange. In the post-medieval period, coarse earthenware was glazed with lead-based glazes, which resulted in the glaze colour depending on the body of the pot as well as the addition of other metal oxides.

Archaeologists refer to glazed coarse earthenware by other terms such as 'blackware', 'brownware', 'glazed red earthenware' and 'glazed redware', while contemporary sources called it 'country pottery' or 'crocks'. For the purposes of her research, the name 'glazed coarse earthenware' was used as it served as an all-embracing term that could be applied regardless of fabric colour or glaze.

The geographical parameter of Naomi's research was the province of Ulster (the six counties of Northern Ireland plus the counties of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland). This linked into the primary research question of Naomi's research, which explored who was making this pottery during the time of the Ulster Plantation.

Pottery is an important artefact in archaeology because it can act as a distinct chronological marker. It is durable and found on most archaeological sites in large quantities. Pottery has been produced in Ireland since the early Neolithic period. Glazed pottery was first produced in Ireland under the influence of the Anglo-Normans in the late twelfth century. Kilns discovered at Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim and Downpatrick,

Co. Down present the earliest evidence for glazed pottery production in Ulster.

Medieval Ulster Coarse Pottery has been found on plantation-period sites where its presence provides a valuable insight into the interactions between the Gaelic Irish and the English and Scottish settlers at that time. Part of Naomi's PhD research focused on the relationship between Ulster coarse potters and those making the later glazed wares known locally as 'blackware' and 'brownware'.

The Ulster coarse pottery tradition showed a continuity in pottery production between the Medieval and Early Modern periods. The production of glazed pottery, however, appears to have had a hiatus until at least the 15 th century. Transition ware vessels have a similar fabric to post-medieval pot forms but are closer in form and glaze to Medieval vessels. There is not yet definitive evidence for a Late Medieval date for the ware, which Naomi theorised was either due to the product of a single potter or production site (which may explain the uniformity in fabric, form, and relatively narrow distribution pattern) or that these pots may have been traded for the product they contained. No transitional ware kilns have yet been found, and the ware requires further evaluation and study by researchers. Very few Early Modern kiln sites are known in Ireland, but one was found at Killyneese townland, some 4km from Lough Neagh, in an area of good clay. Almost 3000 sherds of wheel-thrown post-medieval pottery and over 400 pieces of kiln furniture were recovered during the excavation. A Minimum Number of Vessels (MNV) count of at least 464 vessels was identified. Two kilns were also excavated at Killyneese. Kiln 1 contained 1,147 sherds of pottery, 58 pieces of kiln furniture and stones with dripped glaze. Kiln 2 contained 1,299 sherds of pottery, wasters and a large quantity of kiln furniture (316 pieces) as well as over 20 stones with dripped glaze. However, the excavation also found auxiliary features, commonly associated with kilns.

Over the course of the excavation, an assemblage of 2836 sherds of post-medieval pottery, representing at least 464 vessels. A vessel typology for the assemblage, using diagnostic sherds, as recommended for kiln assemblages, was devised based on the findings. The products fell into five broad categories: bowls, dishes, jars, drinking vessels and kiln furniture. Over half of the assemblage was comprised of hollow-wares. A quarter was a type of kiln furniture (called a saggar), followed by a smaller number of flatwares. Diagnostic sherds accounted for 20% (rims), 10% (bases) and 6% (base angles). There were a small number of handles and neck sherds. Surprisingly, almost half of the sherds in the assemblage were semi-abraded, which indicated that they had not been exposed to the elements for a prolonged period or significantly damaged by subsequent agricultural activity.

Most sherds in the assemblage were glazed either on the interior, exterior or both surfaces. A small percentage of the pots were decorated. The main type of decoration was incised, with 25 sherds showing attempts at Sgraffito-style decoration also found.

The ceramic reports for excavations in Ulster were examined by using Historic Environment Map Viewer and Excavations.ie as well requesting reports from commercial archaeological companies. Assemblages from 236 sites across Ulster were examined, resulting in the selection of 155 sites for further analysis. Unfortunately, many assemblages selected did not fit the criteria, and the range of data available varied widely.

The assemblage analysis demonstrated that glazed coarse earthenware occurs with a wide range of other pottery types. Glazed coarse earthenware occurred most frequently alongside seventeenth century North Devon wares. Significantly, glazed coarse earthenware was found in seventeenth century contexts alongside

Medieval Ulster Coarse Pottery. The analysis also showed that glazed coarse earthenware occurred in contexts dating from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. It was not possible to narrow the date range for glazed coarse earthenware, except to say that it definitely does occur in early seventeenth century contexts.

From the data collected, it was possible to investigate several regional trends, including proportions of glazed coarse earthenware per county. The site with the lowest amount was Castle Street, Derry City, where only a tenth of the assemblage was comprised of glazed coarse earthenware. At this site, almost the whole assemblage was comprised of imported tableware. The East Wall (Richmond Street Site Three) Derry City assemblage contained the largest proportion of glazed coarse earthenware, at 97%. The remainder of the assemblage was comprised of Bristol and Staffordshire wares. Glazed coarse earthenware made up 50% or more of assemblages from almost all counties (but sample numbers from Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan were small).

Naomi's research highlighted the local production of glazed coarse earthenware in Ulster, including the site at Killyneese. In Ulster, drinking vessels were being made using saggar technology, with the new methods probably introduced by English settlers during the Ulster Plantation. Finds of drinking cups in Ulster are normally identified as English imports, but Killyneese provides definitive evidence of their manufacture locally. Another significant aspect of the Killyneese production site was the manufacture of flatware with sgraffito-type decoration. Locally produced sgraffito wares have been recorded at sites in Armagh, Belfast, Carrickfergus, Coleraine and Derry City in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century contexts. Until the discovery of Killyneese, no production sites had been found.

Naomi's research also highlighted the need for

more ceramic reports from excavations to be published and that there needs to be greater standardisation between reports. Some of the difficulties encountered during her research included access to reports, inconsistencies with dates and descriptions of pottery types. In most cases, glazed coarse earthenware were given very generalised descriptions. In the future, more drawings and photographs of pottery assemblages would also aid other researchers in comparison and identification.

Dr Courtney Mundt

Excavations at Tirnony Portal Tomb, Maghera, Co Derry. Dr Cormac McSparron (Research Fellow, QUB). 26th May 2025.

The excavations by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, QUB, in 2010 and 2011 in advance of conservation revealed a surprisingly dynamic monument with evidence for Neolithic ritual. Destabilising tree roots exacerbated by a period of prolonged frost had caused fracturing of a portal stone and partial collapse. Tirnony is typical of portal tombs in having a capstone (c6 tonnes) supported by two upright portal stones at the front defining a 'doorway' into a single chamber at the rear enclosed by side stones. A gap in these stones may have acted as a side entrance. The Ordnance Survey Memoirs suggest that there was originally a covering cairn but this has been removed, probably for road building. A cairn would have facilitated raising the capstone by acting as a ramp up which it could be dragged.

The excavation of the interior (apart from a section left undisturbed at the rear) uncovered a previously disturbed stone floor although upper and lower deposits could be identified and pre-tomb pits dug into the subsoil. The soil under the east portal, which had

been removed for conservation, was reddened by heat (though no charcoal remained) suggesting an initial fire ritual before the tomb was raised.

There were indications of the sequence of construction of the elements of the tomb, and of interruptions, of unquantified duration, in the tomb's development revealing a dynamic, multi-phase monument. A large pit contained Western Neolithic pottery, and in the primary tomb deposits were found Carrowkeel ware bowls, a pygmy cup and Grooved ware – in all of about 17 vessels, but as this represents only c25% of the actual pots they were deliberate deposited as fragments in the central area of the tomb. Could these fragments represent people? Struck quartz, possible hammer-stones and three fine flint tools (two planoconvex knives and a scraper) were all found at the sides. Additionally, a 7-9C AD blue glass bead was found which could relate to local folk magic and these have been found elsewhere in similar contexts.

Soil samples showed higher phosphate levels towards the rear of the tomb which may indicate unburnt, fleshed interments. 14C dating confirmed multiperiod use: Early Neolithic – 4000-3600BC; Chalcolithic – 2200 BC; Iron Age - 0 AD/BC; and late Medieval - 13/14 AD reuse. Excavation outside revealed a modern concrete drain, and several lazy beds cut through an 18th century trackway.

Portal tombs show distinct patterning, typically associated with river courses on the edge of good land and in inconspicuous places. These monuments seem to have been erected after the first clearances possibly as shrines to the fertility of the land, ensuring favour by the ancestors. The only other modern excavation of a portal tomb is Poulnabrone in Co Clare. This produced bones of a similar Early Neolithic date and represented people of the same broad genetic group - but not close relatives. Isotopic analysis showed

these people ate very little meat. Could this be the same with Tirnony?

The distribution of portal tombs is mostly restricted to the northern half of Ireland, similar to court tombs, which are later, but there is considerable overlap to at least 3600BC. Portal tombs therefore represent early monumentality serving small, local societies – the symbolic 'central house' containing the first lineages, whereas the court tombs contain subsequent diverse sub-lineages representing a rapidly rising sedentary population by 3700BC. This ties in with the proliferation of 14C dates and a reduction in the tree cover. The evolution of a more structured society is shown by the replacement of these monuments by the later passage tombs.

Our findings add to a growing body of evidence for a phase of Early Neolithic activity pre-dating the rectangular house horizon of around 3700 BC, and confirm, as already suggested by the dating of Poulnabrone, Co. Clare, that portal tombs appear at an early stage of the Irish Neolithic.

Prof Barrie Hartwell

Money makes the world go around! Coin Workshop, March 2025 with Randall Scott

The aim of the workshop was to look at the evolution of coinage circulating in Britain from the Iron Age to the early medieval period and how broad historical events influenced coinage production and use. We looked at three main periods.

- British Iron Age coinage from about 100 BC to AD 45 – pre-Roman period,
- Roman coinage, which circulated in Britain from AD 45 AD to about 430
- This was followed by a period of over 200 years with no circulating coinage until its reintroduction by

the Anglo-Saxons in the late 7th century.

Relevant coins were illustrated throughout the presentation and a few examples were available for viewing and handling.

Iron Age British coins were produced for about 150 years, pre the Roman period. They were influenced by neighbouring Gaulish coinage but developed their own distinctive "Celtic style."

These British coins were only produced in the "coin zone" i.e. southeast of a line between the Humber and Severn estuaries. Rulers of 15 or so tribes produced about 1000 different types of coin. They were of gold, silver of varying sizes and weight and some bronze. The gold and larger silver was probably controlled by the tribal ruler, representing the tribal wealth and used for larger transactions of goods or services. The smaller silver (down to 0.25g) and bronze may have been used for some everyday purposes.

Caesar conquered Gaul around 50 BC and Roman coinage was introduced. Coins of some British rulers were stylistically influenced by the neighbouring Roman coinage while others retained the "Celtic look." It was rivalry between two tribal rulers which gave the Romans an opportunity to invade Britain. One, Verica, appealed to emperor Claudius in AD 41 for help against a rival ruler. Claudius duly obliged and invaded in AD 43. Probably from this time, and certainly from Boudica's revolt in AD 60 , British coinage was disallowed with only Roman coinage permitted. This was the case for the next 400 years or so.

Roman coinage was based around a silver denarius, with copper/bronze fractional coins. We looked at several emperors who were influential in British affairs together with illustrations of their coins. Hadrian, for example, was notable for consolidating the Empire's boundaries including, in Britain, Hadrian's Wall.

During the 3rd century devaluation of the silver coinage occurred so that by the end of the century the denarius was essentially a copper coin with a little silver content. This reflected a period of internal instability with no less than 35 or so emperors vying for power. Invaders from the Rhine, Danube and North Sea took advantage at this time. Diocletion, emperor from 284 to 305, stabilized the Empire and, in addition the currency by introducing a new silver coin (argenteus) and a bronze fraction (follis). Constantine "the Great" continued with these policies introducing a new smaller silver coin, the siliqua, and bronze fractions. He also established Constantinople as the new capital city of the Eastern Roman Empire. However, after Constantine's death in AD 337 internal instabilities returned. The Roman army withdrew from Britain in AD 407 leaving the former province vulnerable to raiding from Picts, Scots, Saxons, and Franks.

England became an Anglo-Saxon country over the next 200 years, probably by a combination of invasion and cultural exchange. Coinage ceased to be produced or circulated at this time. As small Anglo-Saxon "kingdoms" were established, and trading and political links with the Continent developed, a new small silver coin, the *sceat,* was introduced. It came in a bewildering array of images representative of Anglo-Saxon art and continued from about 680 to 760. The smaller kingdoms consolidated into larger Anglo-Saxon kingdoms with names more familiar to us today – Northumbria, Mercia, Kent, Wessex etc. These kings introduced a new coinage, the silver penny, struck with the king's name and often an image. Alfred "the Great" of Wessex, 799to 871, is probably the best known of these kings. He held England against Danish invaders and his grandsons went on to become kings of all England. The silver penny became the basis of medieval coinage for the next 5 centuries or so, and a legacy for the future.

Randall Scott.

What's on where?

UAS Events

Benburb Itinerary, 30th August 2025
All enquires to secretary@ulsterarchaeology.org

Stop 1. Blackwatertown (*Port Mór).* Sites of Blackwater forts. Q.U.B. have organised a ground survey of sites this summer.
1a. Site of Clonfeacle old village and visit to existing church and old circular graveyard. This was central to the old 12th century monastery associated with St.Jarlath.
1b. The old gate lodge at the entrance to the Jackson/Eyre period house dating from their substantial linen mill operation in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Stop 2. The Wingfield Plantation Bawn on the site of Shán ÓNéill's 1560's "chief house" and utilised by Tarlac Luineach until 1594. The late 18th early 19th grade 2 cottage within the bawn.
2a. The adjacent site associated with the main castle also overlooking the river Blackwater (*an dabhal*) marked on the Wingfield estate map as "The Mount". Part of the space is presently a Servite graveyard and contains a small old house whose origin is unknown. It also contained until 2016 the base of a round tower, the ground outline of which is still visible.
Lunch at the Priory.

Stop 3. Visit to the most interesting plantation church, St Patrick's Clonfeacle and adjoining graveyard.

Stop 4. Visit to Maydown and the Ulster Canal site.
4b. Visit to Milltown and its old linen mill on the Ulster Canal.

Stop 5. Return to James Bruce's Manor House converted to Benburb Priory in 1948/9.
Visit the new modern library and display area.

Lectures

Conservation and Heritage. Martin Keery (Historic Environment Division NICS) 29th September 2025 (tbc).

Crisis and Culture: Heritage responses to climate emergencies. Dr Will Megarry (QUB). 27th October 2025.

RSAI Lectures.

All lectures take place online via Zoom or at Society House, 63 Merrion Square South and are €5 for non-members.

'Spectacle in the City: Wonderous Exhibitions and Shows in Georgian Ireland', Monday, 1 September: Dr Alison FitzGerald, Maynooth University

https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/rsai-september-talk-dr-alison-fitzgerald-maynooth-university-tickets-151732153254 9?aff=oddtdtcreator

End of an Era: Reflections on the Role of the Mortimer Earls of March in Ireland, 1247-1425', Thursday, 25 September: Dr Paul Dryburgh, UK National Archives (online only)

https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/rsai-september-lecture-dr-paul-dryburgh-uk-national-archives-tickets-151733483232 9?aff=oddtdtcreator

James Fogarty's Reports on the Antiquities and Traditions of South-West County Kilkenny'. Monday, 3 November: ', Mr Conleth Manning, RSAI Past President, National Monuments Service

https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/rsai-november-talk-mr-conleth-manning-rsai-past-president-nms-tickets-152046266776 9?aff=oddtdtcreator

Annual Frank Mitchell Memorial Lecture, 'An Investigation of Later Medieval Gaelic Ireland Through the Lens of the Ó Cellaig Lordship of Uí Maine' Thursday, 23 October, Dr Daniel Curley, Rathcroghan Visitor Centre

https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/rsai-annual-frank-mitchell-memorial-lecture-dr-daniel-curley-tickets-151740734922 9?aff=oddtdtcreator

You can also access via internet the talk given recently by Historic Environment Scotland on the 1899 Antiquarian Excursion to the North and Western Islands of Scotland,which has

links to Belfast and Ulster antiquarians:

https://youtu.be/j6q5F-78I8M?si=OQaqCxBg9nURbHfg

NI Focused events

The Battle of The Yellow Ford - Walking Tour

6 Sep 2025 and 20 Sep 2025

Dr. Jim O'Neill

Ranfurly House, Dungannon

£28.00

The battle of the Yellow Ford was fought on the 14th of August 1598. Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone engaged and defeated queen Elizabeth I's field army in Ireland. It remains the greatest victory of Irish arms over the English. But the quiet fields on which it was fought betray little of their violent past. On Saturday the 6th of September and Saturday, 20th September 2025, Dr James O'Neill will lead a walking tour through the key sites in the landscape where the bloody events of 1598 took place. He will take the group from hill to hill, describing the events as they unfolded, from the confident beginning of the English March north, the slow escalation of gunfire and the growing panic on the ensuing carnage as the English army collapsed under a hail of Irish gunfire. The tour will cover just over 2 miles as Dr O'Neill explains the course of the battle, the tactics used and the brutal reality of late 16th century warfare. The tour will begin at 10am at the Hill of The O'Neill and Ranfurly House. An additional pick-up point is available at St Colmcille's GFC. A comfort break, including light refreshments, is planned for approximately 12:30pm. The tour will return to St Colmcille's GFC at approximately 2.30pm ending at Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House at 3pm. Please dress for a countryside walk and be aware this demands some level of fitness!

Prebook at : https://dungannon.ticketsolve.com/ticketbooth/shows/873675614

Who Created the Irish Townland System

28 Aug 2025
Paul Tempan
Thursday 28th August, Carrickfergus Town Hall , 7-9pm
Tickets £5

Explore key evidence from history, language and archaeology. You decide - Is it a native Irish system? Or was it introduced by the Vikings? Or the Anglo-Normans? Led by language scholar Paul Tempan, this workshop will offer the opportunity to learn about what each culture contributed to medieval Ireland.
Delivered as part of the museum programme for the Carrickfergus before the castle exhibition.
https://thebraid.ticketsolve.com/ticketbooth/shows/1173664979

Spinning and Weaving

13 Sep 2025
with Tina Enlander
Saturday 13th September 10.30am – 1.30pm at Carrickfergus Museum

Enjoy a morning creating your own unique piece to take home using a warp and weft loom. Led by creative textile artist Tina Enlander, participants will also be able to have a go at drop spindle spinning and learn about medieval spinning and weaving techniques. Includes touch samples of natural fibres and material.
Ages 12+. No previous experience necessary. Cost: £5
Delivered as part of the museum programme for the Carrickfergus before the castle exhibition.
https://thebraid.ticketsolve.com/ticketbooth/shows/1173664980

Ogham Tales of the Trees - Ages 12+

Ogham: Tales of the Trees
Saturday 20th September 2025 at 11am
Location: Meet at Shaftesbury Park for introduction, then Carrickfergus Museum

Local storyteller Vicky McFarland will weave ancient Ogham wisdom, tree myth and folklore into a set of new stories, aimed at connecting us with the past and present

through a deeper understanding of our local, native trees. Taking the Ogham alphabet as a starting point, Vicky will delve into the archives and extract knowledge, understanding and stories that our medieval ancestors had at the heart of their culture. Using predominantly Irish and Ulster mythology as well as folklore and fairytales that have survived, Vicky will create a set of new stories to share with audiences that will both speak to today and offer a connection with the past. Suitable for ages: 12+. Cost: £7. https://thebraid.ticketsolve.com/ticketbooth/shows/1173664981

"Cutting Edge Technology: Stone Tools in Prehistory" A visit to Larne Museum and Arts Centre

There is soon to be much discussion about the earliest human presence in Ireland—even if only seasonal—as new archaeological discoveries come to light. It was therefore timely that Larne Museum and Arts Centre curated a small but perfectly formed exhibition showcasing its Mesolithic treasures.

Larne has yielded some of the most significant Mesolithic artefacts in Ireland. In fact, a whole category of robust stone tools was once dubbed "Larnian," a term that speaks to the area's archaeological importance. These tools, and the chronology they suggest, remain subjects of scholarly debate.

I had never appreciated just how narrow the stretch of water is between Ferris Point and the Port of Larne. As the train moved along, flanked by green hedgerows on one side and blue sea on the other, my thoughts turned to the dramatic post-glacial landscape—its raised beaches and marshy hollows – what did those early people see?

Curran Point, now home to the bustling Port of Larne, was one of the sites included in the 1930s Harvard Archaeological Expedition,

led by Hugh Hencken. Between 1934 and 1936, Hallam Movius directed excavations at several Mesolithic sites across the Northeast, including Glenarm and Cushendun. These pioneering efforts laid the groundwork for modern archaeological methods—introducing palynology, paleoenvironmental studies, and rigorous typological analysis—well before the 1973 discovery of the Mesolithic site at Mount Sandel.

The lithic collection now on display at Larne Museum reflects a deep local pride in the area's contribution to Irish archaeology. The exhibition demonstrates a thoughtful awareness of the region's importance in tracing the development of Mesolithic technology across Ireland and Britain. But the pressing questions remain: where did this technology originate, and crucially—when?

The exhibition itself is clear, accessible, and engaging. I especially appreciated the inclusion of beloved local sites like Glynn and Glenarm—evoking memories of undergraduate field trips to Madman's Window and scouring the beach for flakes. The panels offer straightforward yet informative explanations of the north coast's geology, including how countless tiny marine organisms from ancient seas were compacted into the sharp white flint used by early toolmakers. The launch event brought the display to life, featuring a demonstration by Wild Walk Bushcraft—Glenarm locals themselves—who showcased flint knapping techniques. This hands-on experience transformed the exhibit from a static display into something far more interactive and immersive.

It's hoped that the exhibition will return later in the year for those unable to attend in May and June 2025. Larne and its surrounding area remain essential to understanding the movement of early peoples—and the spread of their technology—across the island.

R Maguire

Words on the Wave National Museum of Ireland, Kildare Street, Dublin

This exhibition has been the talk of the town – well, several towns, and perhaps even a few cities. And justifiably so. Featuring a remarkable collection of artefacts that have returned to Ireland—albeit briefly—after nearly a thousand years, this is the NMI's very own 'hot monk summer'.

Tucked away on the first floor of the museum, the exhibition space is quietly set back from the main galleries. There's an intimacy to the setting, evoking the cloisters and the peaceful seclusion of monastic life.

Visitors are first greeted by panels detailing a collaborative educational project in which selected schools in Ireland and Switzerland created their own vellum. This initiative draws a beautiful and meditative connection between past and present, linking the literacy skills of the early medieval world to those of today, while also raising thoughtful questions: What is heritage? What do we preserve, forget, or leave behind? Students in both countries found they had more in common than expected.

The entrance to the main gallery is marked by informative panels reminiscent of those in the British Museum, though here presented with a softer touch. These introduce the early medieval world of the Irish clergy—an era of increasing political complexity, courts, and power struggles. In this world, Irish monks were not isolated but deeply connected to the wider European context, with ideas, art, and artefacts flowing both ways in a vibrant cultural exchange.

Among the many treasures, the Lough Kinale book-shrine—now restored and on display—is truly breathtaking. Its detailed metalwork, particularly the Iron Age-inspired studs, speaks volumes about continuity

and adaptation of meaning across time. It invites contemplation of how symbols endure, transform, and retain traces of their origins.

The manuscripts from St Gallen's Abbey in Switzerland are, as expected, radiant: vibrant in colour, intricate in detail, and deeply evocative of early medieval ecclesiastical life. Their beauty is made even more poignant when considered alongside the Abbey's long-held belief that reading and learning heal the soul—a particularly resonant idea in an age when studies show that children and young people are reading less than ever before (https://www.thebookseller.com/news/one-in-four-children-under-four-are-not-read-to-childrens-books-irelands-worrying-new-research)

There's a dazzling wealth of objects on display, but one tiny item brought a bittersweet smile: a gold Frankish *tremissis* found in Meath. I had last discussed it with the late, great Raghnall Ó Floinn, in the context of some research I was doing at the time. I hadn't realised just how small it was—yet this tiny coin tells a powerful story of long-distance trade and cultural connection with the far reaches of Europe.

This is a feast of an exhibition—rich, layered, and quietly profound. It will stay with you long after you leave. Don't miss the beautifully produced and wonderfully treat-yourself priced catalogue available in the gift shop; it features excellent essays and a comprehensive inventory of the displays.

R Maguire.

The Bookcase: Book Reviews Autumn 2025

The Reverend Andrew Bryson: the life and times of an Irish speaking Presbyterian minister. Edited by Godfrey Brown, Peadar MacGabhann and Janet Taylor. (Newtownards: Ulster Historical Foundation).

Archaeology, by necessity, draws on every available

resource to piece together our understanding of the human past. Among these, shifts in demographics and religious beliefs are crucial to interpreting broader societal change. In Northern Ireland, where the echoes of a turbulent history still shape the present and future, archival and biographical analyses reveal that the past is far more nuanced than often assumed.

This edited volume, though slim with just seven essays, delivers considerable academic weight while presenting its scholarship with a light, accessible touch. The contributors share two key traits: a deep engagement with the history of Presbyterianism in Ireland and fluency in Irish beyond the proverbial *cúpla focal*. The book underscores the often-overlooked connection between the Irish language and Presbyterianism—an association that contemporary scholarship is increasingly keen to explore.

A striking historical detail is that, in 1833, all Presbyterian trainee ministers were required to learn Irish. Sermons were frequently delivered in the language across Ulster, understood by both native Irish speakers and Scottish settlers alike. The religious upheavals and conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries led to significant movement between Ireland and Scotland—some fleeing persecution, others arriving through the Plantation of Ulster. These migrations did not always result in a complete cultural overhaul. Language, as archaeologists know well, remains a potent marker of identity.

Figures such as Andrew Bryson of Dundalk—an 18th-century minister, antiquarian, and proponent of New Light theology—kept detailed records of his intellectual and spiritual life in Irish. These documents, preserved at the Theological College at Queen's University Belfast, further illustrate the interwoven nature of faith, language, and Enlightenment thought.

This collection is ideally read alongside *Plantation Churches: Places of Worship in Early Seventeenth-century Ulster* by Roulston and

McNeill. Together, these works provide invaluable human context, enriching our understanding of the period and the spiritual lives of its people.

Plantation Churches: Places of Worship in Early Seventeenth-century Ulster William Roulston and Tom McNeill (Newtownards: Ulster Historical Foundation).

This book offers a necessary and timely correction to the predominantly secular narratives that have long dominated studies of the Ulster Plantation. While land grants, settlement patterns, and estate formation have traditionally taken the centre stage of plantation discussions such as Hill's 1970 exploration or the more recent 2022 exploration of the economy of the Ulster Plantation by Gerard Farrell, this book turns our attention to the spiritual architecture of the period, arguing that religious belief and parish life were no less foundational to the transformation of early modern Ulster. Roulston and McNeill carefully excavate both the documentary record and the surviving physical fabric of early seventeenth-century churches to illuminate how ecclesiastical policy, and practical decisions shaped not only the religious landscape but the wider cultural identity of Plantation society. The authors foreground the complexity of the colonial administration attempting to overlay a reformed ecclesiastical structure onto a medieval religious geography. Rather than demolishing the inherited church infrastructure, the authorities largely chose continuity while retaining existing parishes. Yet this choice brought fresh dilemmas: where should new churches be located, who would finance their construction, and which liturgical forms should govern their use? The book traces these debates with scholarly precision, revealing how disagreements among Protestant elites and shifting denominational priorities were negotiated in stone, mortar, spatial arrangement, and landscape. These newly constructed churches were

not simply places of worship but tools of religious assertion, designed to project authority, stability, and reformist zeal. These were also highly contested and adaptive spaces. The authors are particularly sensitive to the localised realities of Catholic worship during this period,

highlighting how marginalised communities continued to gather in informal and often precarious settings, maintaining distinct religious identities despite institutional exclusion. Roulston and McNeill succeed in showing that the church buildings of the early 1600s not only anchored communities at a moment of intense disruption but also laid down architectural and ecclesiological patterns that persisted well into the twentieth century. Their approach is interdisciplinary and rigorous, blending architectural analysis with a nuanced understanding of ecclesiastical politics. Plantation Churches is not merely a study of buildings—it is a study of how religious institutions, spatial decisions, and identity were forged together in the crucible of colonisation. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the intersections of faith, power, and place in early modern Ireland.

Dr. Jordana Maguire

Irish Fairy Forts: Portals to the Past. Jo Kerrigan and Ricard Mills (Dublin: O'Brien Press).

The first thing that strikes you about this little book is just how unfairly pretty it is – the photographs of raths and cathairs are genuinely evocative, reminding us of the sheer beauty of these landscapes. The image of the Uragh stone circle alone has earned it a place on my bucket list.

The text, however, is something of a curate's egg. While it does present factual information about raths, it places 'alternative' stories alongside them without always making it clear which is which. For the layperson, this can blur the line between folklore and fact. It's also a little disappointing to see the

old, unsubstantiated 'Celtic' invasion theories being trotted out – especially when the author clearly has the academic credentials to know better.

That said, I thoroughly enjoyed the tales of the *Daione Sidhe* misbehaving within the raths. We've all heard accounts of disasters befalling those who disturb those ancient ditches – and having personally experienced the 'stray sod' walking home from an excavation, I can say it's not something you forget (definitely one for the pub!).

The folklore in the book is often beautifully handled. The stories from Lissahan, Co. Clare reminded me of the Red Men in the *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* – those relentless figures you can never outrun. However, about halfway through, the book veers into full-on faerie flight – bringing in ley lines and other speculative concepts. Some of the claims made here would cause even the most open-minded reader to wince. For example, suggesting that cairns are unlikely to be tombs is a peculiar position, particularly given the weight of archaeological evidence. Megalithic structures were clearly used for communal burial, ritual, and social purposes – expressions of complex societies with their own worldviews around life and death.

This would have been the perfect moment to explore early medieval 'secular cemeteries', where life and death coexisted within ringforts, many of which later became the final refuges of the undesirable dead, the *cillíní* under the expanding influence of the Church.

There are other problematic assertions throughout the text, where more robust referencing of current archaeological consensus would have served the book – and the reader – better. This undermines slightly what is otherwise a highly enjoyable exploration of raths and their place in the landscape, both physical and cultural. That these earthworks were once the homes and workplaces of ordinary people on this island – and that so many still remain – is remarkable in

itself. If the Good People still linger there, whispering glimpses of the lives once lived, that's magic enough for me.

This isn't an academic text – in fact, it's far too enjoyable at times to be, and that's no bad thing. But it would benefit from a little more grounding and a bit less of the patchouli-and-crystals aura. A clearer distinction between folklore, personal belief, and archaeological fact would let both the history and the stories shine more brightly – as they deserve to.

The Road to Mons Graupius. Alan Montgomery (Perth: Tippermuir Books).

This summer, we've witnessed the unfolding reality of a Roman/Hibernian entrepôt across social media and in the press, with the ongoing excavations at Drumanagh in North Dublin. Exciting finds—including a fully intact piece of Roman pottery and even imported figs—have brought renewed attention to this intriguing site. It's heartening to see a resurgence of interest in Roman and Romano-British archaeology, which can only enrich our understanding of our own archaeological record.

This timely little book is a perfect introduction for the Romano-curious (!), exuding warmth and good humour as much as solid scholarship. Montgomery takes the reader on a gentle and personal journey through sites of cultural interface, where Pict (or were they yet?) and Roman once confronted each other. Scotland shares with Ireland an equally ambiguous history of Roman contact, making this a thoughtful and useful comparative text for reflecting on our own interactions with those invasive Late Iron Age neighbours.

There's also the bonus of Montgomery's own beautifully drawn illustrations, which lend further charm to this engaging volume, which is a perfect autumn evening read

Available at:
https://tippermuirbooks.co.uk/

Words on the Wave: Ireland and St Gallen in Early Medieval Ireland. Edited by Matt Seaver, Diarmuid O'Riain and Maeve Sikora. (Dublin: National Museum of Ireland).

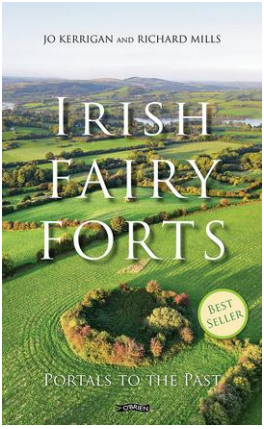
Just go and buy it as a practical treat for yourself, for goodness sakes! You know you'll regret it if you don't.

You can order at https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Irish-Antiquities-Division-Collections/Irish-Antiquities-Articles/Words-on-the-Wave-exhibition-catalogue-now-available

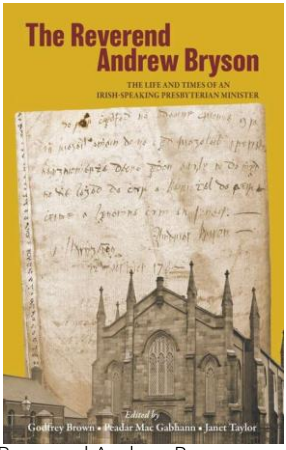
Ulster Archaeo-pets~

Riley Pomeroy is renowned for her enthusiastic digging qualities and examination of material culture, as shown here.

Thelma (foreground) and Louise (back) Tempan fieldwalking Aghascrebagh ogham stone, near Greencastle, Co. Tyrone.Nice work, pups!

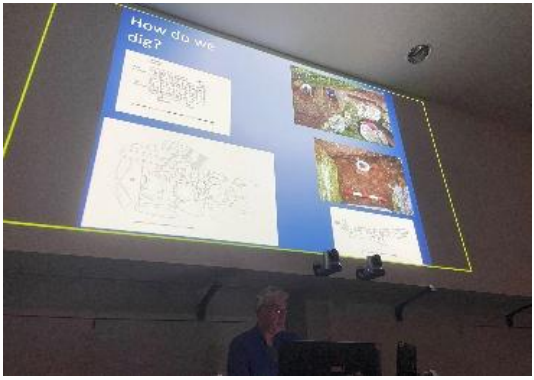


Irish Fairy Forts: Portals to the Past. Jo Kerrigan and Ricard Mills (Dublin: O'Brien Press).



The Reverend Andrew Bryson: the life and times of an Irish speaking Presbyterian minister. Edited by Godfrey Brown, Peadar MacGabhann and Janet Taylor

One Last Thing…



Cormac McSparron's talk on Tirnoney portal tomb

Naomi Carver's presentation on medieval pottery

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.

The Ulster Archaeological Society

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