

MH&AS
Archaeology Training at Antuim and Kildavie (Cill da Bhidhe)
May 2009

May 1st, 9th and 17th

The MH&AS meeting for May combined with members of the NWMCWC to run a training day for people interested in learning about investigation and survey of the many ruins on the Island, evidence of populations in the past.

The event was organised by Bill Patterson and Michelle Cowe and teaching was greatly helped by Ishbel MacKinnon from Scotland's rural Past. Suzanne Patterson and Kevin Luscombe completed the team.

We gathered at Dervaig Church Hall on a morning of pouring rain. Bill introduced the day's programme of seeking local knowledge, archiving (more of this in the October meeting), and how to prepare for a site survey.

Ishbel talked using maps from 18th century to today, showing how to look at changes starting from present day and looking back through time to see how the landscape and its buildings changed. She explained how to look at a site in its setting within the whole landscape. Kevin finished the morning showing how to use a plane table and alidade to draw accurately whatever is being surveyed, using polyester film and H6 pencils - they can be used in pouring rain and will not smudge if rubbed accidentally.

After a picnic lunch, the rain cleared and the sun even managed to show itself at times. We moved to Antuim to work on the settlement to the south of the Salen road, by very kind permission of Hugh Boa despite this being the lambing season.

Ishbel and Suzanne took the group round the settlement as well as looking at the whole landscape. Michelle, Kevin and Bill set up three plane tables, to be used by three teams to measure one ruin each.

The general review showed the obvious ruins but also more which were only visible as vague humps under the turf. Some of which were probably turf buildings.

The shapes of the ruins suggested a mixture of houses, byres (sometimes combined as one), barns and a corn kiln. The three selected for surveying included the largest building which was still occupied in the early 20th century.

Each team completed its task by 4 pm including marking the position of its ruin in relation to the others.

Tea time back at the church hall allowed all to see the three plans overlapped to give a perfect map of the whole section of settlement.

Feedback from all was very positive and many were able to meet on the following weekend at Kildavie to use their new skills to survey that settlement in earnest.

9th and 17th May

We were joined by more new faces and over the two days surveyed most of the ruins. In addition, Kevin discovered a previously unidentified structure which may well be the corn kiln which the late Roy Douglass could not find in his work at the settlement. This will be the subject of further investigation and surveying (although in an awkward spot close to the river).

Two of the structures are oval in shape suggestive of an earlier period of development and several show additions to an earlier building. The largest structure is yet to be surveyed. Questions still need to be answered as to what this structure is, whether the site

was developed through time and how old are the oldest structures. The more we look, the more we want to know!

Kevin and Bill have been strimming the bracken which they may repeat if not killing the growth by spraying. They also cleared part of one ruin of its thick coating of undergrowth (as agreed with SRP) and will do more work on this.

On 19th May a fourth table position was added to cover even more of the site and the three drawings put together will give a very accurate picture of Kildavie.

We shall be doing more work here and further courses will be run, dependent upon demand.

Please let Bill know if you wish to take part in this and other surveys and whether you or anyone you know would like us to run a further course to learn the art and craft of archaeological surveying by emailing bill@mullpattersons.co.uk or telephoning 01688 400 322 or by mobile phone 0773 300 3787.

Coming soon!

1. Further Kildavie surveying and investigation
2. A report on Kevin, Suzanne and Bill's experiences surveying at Baliscate during the Time Team dig on 19th to 21st May.
3. The very much appreciated donation of another set of surveying equipment to the Woodland Company (for all to access) is being made by two local residents.