

Archaeology Research Excavation Grant 2021

Final report

1. Title: Dr

First name: Stephen

Surname: Davis

2.

3. Grant programme: Archaeology Research Excavation Grant

4. Year awarded: 2021

5. Title of project: Hill Of Ward 2021 Post Excavation analysis

6. Summary of report (Min. allowed 100 words)

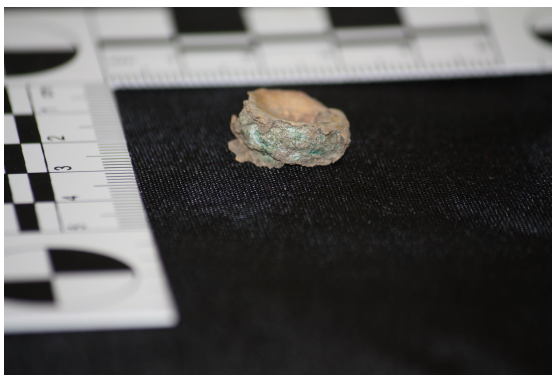
This report outlines progress made towards the final reporting for the Hill of Ward 2016 excavation season. Following excavation the project director left the field of archaeology and was unable to fulfil their post-excavation commitments. As such reporting has, until now, been incomplete with a number of specialist reports outstanding and a limited working stratigraphy. While there remain a few outstanding elements this award has enabled the reporting of the site to be largely completed including a stratigraphic report, plant macrofossil and charcoal reports and additional radiocarbon dating. Elements that remain outstanding are the animal bone report, examination of several sherds of medieval pottery and a brief report on a likely late Bronze Age hair ornament. These will be funded by the PI. Overall, the analyses completed this year complement the story of the Hill of Ward as primarily a site of early medieval construction (C5th AD) with a floruit in the C10th AD. The dates obtained fit perfectly within the existing chronological framework. Likewise, the environmental data place the site firmly within the realm of a typical early medieval agricultural landscape, with significant cereal cultivation (barley and oats) in a largely deforested hinterland. The structures excavated to the east of the site in 2016 appear most likely to represent a smithy, and the hoard of silver coins recovered from this trench (Trench 8) are of exceptional significance (this includes at least two coins of genuine rarity).

7. Date the report was submitted: Oct 28, 2021

8. Please provide two appropriate images



[Erik Bloodaxe sword penny, only the fourth ever found in Ireland and the 17th globally - part of the hoard from Trench 8, and minted in York between 952-954 AD.](#)



[Probably late Bronze Age hair ornament with silver/gilt that came from the early medieval ditch fill of Trench 7](#)

9. Please outline the objectives of the project

The project objectives were simple: to prepare a final report from the 2016 season of excavation from the Hill of Ward. At a more granular level this required 1) A working stratigraphic report from the site; 2) Compiling updated working registers for the site; 3) Taking new artefact photographs and commissioning drawings of important finds; 4) Commissioning environmental reports on the charcoal and plant macrofossils; 5) Obtaining new 14C dates from the three trenches excavated in 2016. These were to date the construction of the inner ditch and its possible recut, the construction of features in Trench 8 and the burning episode beneath the central mound. All other reports were collated and edited and a near final report has been completed.

10. Please describe the methodology used in conducting the research

The excavations at the Hill of Ward took place in June/July 2016; however, issues with the post-excavation management of the project meant that until now this process remained only partially complete. Under the auspices of this grant a researcher (Patrizia la Piscopia) was hired who compiled a first draft of a final report. With student assistance she also completed the process of image scanning and digitisation and some finds photography. Other post-excavation tasks were completed including compiling other specialist reports (lithics; stone axe; coins) and further specialist reports were commissioned for plant macrofossils and for charcoal. Additional 14C dates were obtained from the three trenches excavated in 2016, targeting a burned feature beneath the central mound, the primary and secondary cuts of Trench 7 and the primary fills of Trench 8. A great deal of post-excavation checking has taken place over the lifetime of the grant which means that the registers are, for the first time since the excavations too place, in working order.

11. Please outline the findings of your research and/or milestones achieved

The grant has enabled the completion of a near final draft of the report from Hill of Ward 2016 season. While small amounts of work remain outstanding (a small number of iron finds, two sherds of medieval pottery and formal reports on burned residues and the Bronze Age hair ornament) these are in train. Environmental analysis (with the exception of geoarchaeological data and animal bone) are now complete and an adequate chronology has been obtained for the site. On receipt of the animal bone report (which I am assured is imminent) this report will be submitted to the NMI and NMS. Chronologically it is now clear that the monument of Tlachtga (notwithstanding the earlier Bronze Age monument discovered in previous seasons) has its beginnings in the C5th AD when it seems likely that the ground is cleared prior to construction. This is followed by the construction of the southern enclosure and shortly afterwards a large trivallate ringfort. We have little evidence of what happens between the C5th and C10th; however, in the C10th at least one of the ditches (and likely others) are recut and there is significant metalworking activity both within the site and to the east. This eastern complex included a blacksmith and may also host other metalworking activity as the hoard of coins was located here along with a degraded clay casting mould. The site was situated within a cleared agricultural landscape with a mixed economy of cereals (primarily oat and barley) and livestock (bone report forthcoming). Scrubby woodland was present in its hinterland, but little selection of timber resources took place except as regards the smithing where oak was the preferred fuel source. The central mound is constructed a little after this, perhaps in the early C11th, initially by creating a pile of turf and overlaying this with a clay mound, revetted first with limestone flags and then with shale debris. Stone tools are incorporated above and below this mound, presumably for ritual purposes. The final phase of the site in the C13th is likely a timber building that was destroyed by fire – this may

have been an Anglo-Norman stockade but we have not excavated sufficient to find out.

12. a) Please provide details of the dissemination of the outcomes from this project (inc. publications, presentations, outreach, media etc.) including details of any social media/web platforms used to publicise this project

Dissemination so far has been slow in part because of difficulties in publicising the hoard of coins. I had constructive discussion with NMI on this after the grant award, but it was suggested to me by both NMI and NMS that further publicity about the find should wait until final reporting has been completed. I have mentioned the work on Twitter and on the Excavations at Tlachtga Facebook page which had previously not been updated for some time. When the final excavation report is submitted I also intend to arrange a talk in Athboy to publicise the final findings. There were preliminary discussions about incorporating my work into the 'Púca' festival for this year but finances made this impossible for the organising group.

b) No. of Academic Papers/articles published:

0

c) No. of Lectures given/outreach events involved in:

0

d) Media Coverage (article in local newspaper, feature on University website etc.):

None to date but when the final report is submitted a newspaper article is planned

e) How will you continue to communicate the results of your project and what are your publication plans?

It is intended to write the three seasons of excavation up as a monograph. Agreement in principle exists with Oxbow Books to publish this with part funding by Meath Co. Council. Public presentation of the final report will follow, most likely within the Athboy area (assuming public presentation is feasible)

16. How did the grant enhance your professional development (e.g. in terms of specific opportunities, opportunities for enhancing skills, collaborations with others etc.)?

I employed an RA who has since been employed by the National Monument's Service, and created opportunities for several archaeological specialists. Personally, the completion of this final report has removed a significant barrier to future RIA funding applications and potential for other excavations that I have been unable to consider while this final report was outstanding.

17. What plans (if any) do you have to further your proposal/project?

When the animal bone report is complete I am considering isotopic work on some of these, especially from the Bronze Age phase of the monument to examine the source area for the livestock consumed at the site (similar to work recently published for Navan Fort. There are some small elements of post-excavation that remain outstanding (a few sherds of medieval pottery; some iron objects; the Bronze Age hair ornament) to be completed, some of which are already being arranged, but the majority of the remaining objectives are in publication.

While this project was funded by the Excavation Grants it was essentially a legacy grant project. The reporting of this is now almost complete with a few very small elements outstanding. I am assured that the animal bone report is imminent while there are a few sherds of medieval pottery, some iron/ironworking debris and a Bronze Age hair ornament to report on and then all is complete.

18. For Archaeology Legacy Projects only: Please outline current plans to lead to completion of a final excavation report as per licence/consent and original grant condition:

The following link will guide you to the Final Report on Archaeological Excavations at

Tlachtga, The Hill of Ward, Wardstown, Co. Meath:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1khcoAaB5LWzLsoPxZcvRb4og66xG_h_y/view

Additional Information:
