

Centuries-old skeletons to be reburied

A FUNERAL with a difference is to take place in the Black Isle shortly — the re-burial of centuries-old human skeletons, which were unearthed during an archaeological dig in an ancient graveyard near Newhall Point last November.

The bones — the earliest are believed to date from the 11th Century — are now back in the Black Isle after undergoing intensive scientific tests in Edinburgh to try to establish their age and any other light they might shed on the former inhabitants of what is now the parish of Resolis.

But still missing are two skeletons which mysteriously disappeared during the night before they were due to be taken to Edinburgh.

It was a blow to the archaeologists as these two were among the best-preserved specimens found.

The rest of the bones were brought back by the leader of the team who worked on the dig, Mr David Reed, of the Artefacts Research Unit of the Ancient Monuments Section of the Scottish Development Department.

UNDERTAKING

Mr Reed called on the minister of Resolis and Urquhart, the Rev. John

McLeod, at his manse at Culbokie and handed over a number of cardboard boxes containing the remains.

This was in fulfilment of an undertaking given when the skeletons were removed to Edinburgh that they would be returned to the Black Isle when the examination had been completed.

But their arrival took Mr McLeod by surprise. For the dig took place before he arrived in the Black Isle and he had not heard about it.

"It just seemed to come out of the blue", he said. "But now that I know about it I will be glad to arrange a burial service and conduct it myself."

He said he hoped the service, to be held at a time and place yet to be decided, would be open to the public as he was aware the dig had attracted considerable interest.

800 YEARS OLD

Meanwhile, the bones will remain in Mr McLeod's care.

The minister said Mr Reed told him he would be sending a copy of a report on the test results. But it appeared none of the skeletons dated back to the pre-Christian era as had earlier been suggested — although some were about 800 years old.

About 20 graves containing remains were discovered during the dig which was carried out after a planning official, dealing with an application for a house site, noted that an old map showed there had once been a chapel in the area, which is still known as Chapelton.

The Ancient Monuments Department were then alerted and a three-month delay was imposed on implementing planning consent so the site could be investigated.

The proposal to build on the graveyard site led to a local controversy — but the planners pointed out no objections had been raised during public consultation when the area was identified for possible housing development under the Black Isle local plan.

A house has now been erected on the site.

Bones going back to their garden

A BLACK ISLE couple have given their blessing to a plan to rebury centuries-old skeletons in part of what is now their garden, where the bones were discovered last November during an archaeological investigation of an ancient graveyard.

As reported in "The Press and Journal" on October 22 the remains, some dating back to the 11th Century, have been returned to the Black Isle after undergoing scientific tests in Edinburgh to establish their age and any other light they could shed on the former inhabitants of what is now the parish of Resolis.

Mr Eric Dowsett and his wife, Lila, who have now moved into a house recently built at Newhall Point, Balblair, have offered space in their garden, which includes the old graveyard, for the reburial of the remains.

And parish minister the Rev. John McLeod has welcomed the gesture and announced that the reinterment will now take place on Saturday, November 8.

A service will be held and members of the public are invited to attend.

Mr Dowsett, who retired recently from his job with Highlands Fabricators at Nigg, said that he and his wife are quite happy that the reinterment should take place on their property.

They feel it is a matter to be treated with sympathy and respect and that it is right that the remains should be restored to their original burial place.

"There is no problem," said Mr Dowsett. "We intend to excavate to a respectable depth to provide a place for the remains."

Mr and Mrs Dowsett plan to plant trees or shrubs on the site. Later perhaps, the burial place could be marked in some way — possibly with a stone or plaque.

About 20 graves containing remains were discovered during the dig.

But there is still no trace of two of the best-preserved skeletons which mysteriously disappeared during the night before they were due to be taken to Edinburgh.

The rest of the bones were brought back to the Black Isle by Mr David Reed of the Artefacts Research Unit Ancient Monuments Section of the Scottish Development Department, leader of the team of young archaeologists who carried out the dig.

Mystery skeletons to be restored

THE last chapter in the strange story of the discovery of about 20 human skeletons on a proposed housing site in the Black Isle will be reached tomorrow, when the remains will be reburied where they were found, in what is now the garden of a recently-built house.

As reported in "The Press and Journal" on October 28, Mr and Mrs Eric Dowsett have given their blessing to the plan to replace the bones at the site of the ancient graveyard at Newhall Point, Balblair, where they were unearthed during an archaeological dig last November.

A service will be conducted by Church of Scotland Minister of Ross and Urquhart the Rev. John McLeod. Members of the public have been invited to attend.

It was to Mr McLeod that the bones were returned after undergoing scientific examination in Edinburgh by the leader of the archaeological team, Mr David Reed of the Scottish Office Artefacts Research Unit.

Yesterday Mr McLeod took the remains to Newhall Point to await reburial in a grave which Mr and Mrs Dowsett have already prepared in their garden.

Highland Region archaeologist Mr Robert Gourlay, who plans to attend the reburial service, said yesterday he hopes soon to receive a report on the carbon tests on the bones.

Still missing are two skeletons which mysteriously disappeared the night before they were due to be taken to Edinburgh.

Mr Gourlay said it now seemed that some of the bones may date back even earlier than the 11th Century that had been suggested.