

## BURIAL GROUND, NEWHALL POINT.

It is perhaps unfortunate that much of what has been said recently relating to local concern for this site was not brought forward before during earlier publication of the planning application or during public discussion of the Local Plan, where the area was clearly identified for infill housing. As it was, only tradition indicated the presence of a pre-Reformation chapel and graveyard in the general vicinity. In response to this information, the Planning department were asked that the application be covered by a condition allowing archaeological investigation to be undertaken prior to development. This they readily agreed to, and a period of three months was set aside for excavation.

Archaeological excavation was thought important as very few identifiable graveyards of this period are known in Ross-shire, and their relationship to the pre-Christian Pictish period is crucial for our understanding of the Pict's conversion to Christianity. In this instance, as the presence of a formal chapel/graveyard was uncertain - the finding of a single burial so close to the sea is not proof by any means - a short trial excavation was carried out in September which revealed the presence of a number of burials. Some of these were oriented E-W and were clearly Christian, while others closely intermingled were aligned N-S and seemed likely to be of pre-Christian date. Historic Monuments and Buildings (Scottish Development Department) agreed to fund further excavations to help clarify this and at the same time ensure that the site was as little as possible affected by the development. This second stage was carried out during November.

Despite suggestions to the contrary, the excavations were undertaken principally for research purposes, and all the skeletons removed will, after careful study, be reinterred according to the wishes of the Presbytery of Ross and the District Council. The trenches were designed to identify the extent of the graveyard and hopefully locate the church itself, so that a more detailed assessment of the site could be made. These aims were partially successful - the cemetery being seen to extend southwards and eastwards into the adjacent garden and arable field. The boundary within the development site was identified and all burials likely to be affected by house construction removed prior to study and reburial. A small area adjacent to the property boundaries - necessarily left to provide space for spoil heaps - may contain other burials, but negotiations with the owner of the site have had the fullest cooperation and the small remaining area will remain undisturbed in garden ground.

It is worth noting, however, that as this area has been ploughed and worked in the past, a certain amount of material will already have been disturbed and

occasional bones will be met with from time to time in the topsoil. This is inevitable and unavoidable, the damage having been done long since.

It must be stressed that, without the archaeological investigations which have taken place, the presence of a graveyard here would have gone unconfirmed and, perhaps, unnoticed. That they were carried out, and successfully, ensuring that the remains will be given a final resting-place in consecrated ground, is due entirely to the co-operation of the Regional Authority, the developer, and the Historic Buildings and Monuments Division of SDD.

No further burials will, to the very best of our knowledge, be disturbed, and the study and dating of the remains recovered during excavation may add appreciably to our knowledge of Ross-shire in general and Resolis parish in particular.

Robert B Gourlay

Archaeologist, Highland Regional Council

Honorary Archaeological Adviser to the Church of Scotland.

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