

From: Tarbat Discovery Programme
Bulletin 3 (1997)

staffed by Fearn, was extended to serve the lay people and provided with a crypt, perhaps as a chapel of St Mary, so adding a global dimension to the influence of the more local saint Colman. This was Tarbat's medieval church, and the settlement it served is probably that being excavated in the Glebe Field to the west. The famous documented incident in which the Mackays of Sutherland took refuge from the Rosses in c1481 and were massacred by incineration, seems to have left visible marks of burning on this phase of the church.

Martin Carver
1 July 1998

PROGRAMME FOR 1998

The priority for excavation will be Sector 2, since the intention is to release the north end of Sector 2 for a car-park as quickly as possible. Sector 2 does however have a stratigraphic sequence of unusual quality, great complexity and at least half a metre deep. There is little doubt that the sequence fossilised on the site destined to become a car-park is the richest at Portmahomack and one of the best in northern Scotland, containing settlements which extend in date from later prehistory to the later middle ages, and water-logged deposits. The buildings and living surfaces are identifiable as patterns of stones, soilmarks and pebbles, but require immense care to define properly.

It is likely that the excavations in Sector 2 will continue for a year or two and we shall have to make temporary provision for car-parking elsewhere. Our visitors, if they have to walk a little further to the Display Centre will enjoy the compensation of seeing a large area excavation in full swing.

The other site to be opened will be at the east end of Sector 1 where the Field School will continue to excavate and record the features in the south field.

It is likely that the urgency and complexity of Sector 2 will absorb all our energies and leave little time or opportunity for work further afield. However, as a separate venture, research has begun into the origins of the site at Hilton of Cadboll (see below), which is already proving invaluable for the understanding of the site at Portmahomack.

The restoration of Tarbat Old Church itself by Fred Geddes (architect) and by the contractors, Hall and Tawse, is currently (July 1998) nearing completion. Following 18 months of intensive discussion on the content of the display, the designers (Higgins Gardner) are at the same time producing their first mock-ups for approval by the Trust. Building of the display is expected to begin during the summer of 1998, and the display should be ready for commissioning and trials in October, with fitting continuing until the spring of 1999. The Tarbat Display Centre is expected to be officially opened during 1999.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Preliminary notice of investigations at Hilton of Cadboll.

By Martin Carver, based on research by Justin Garner-Lahire and Graham Robins

At the invitation of Jane Durham, I undertook some research on the nature of the sister site to Portmahomack at Hilton of Cadboll, which lies on the east coast of the Tarbat peninsula a few miles to the south. Very sadly Jane Durham was killed in a car-accident early in 1997, and it has been decided to set up a memorial to her at the site of the chapel at Hilton of Cadboll itself (see below).

Research at Hilton has continued through the good offices and support of the Morangie Estate, Tain and Easter Ross Civic Trust and Highland Council. The objectives are to try to understand the settlement and community which was responsible for the erection of the famous Hilton of Cadboll stone, which is contemporary with the

great monument erected at the same at Portmahomack (TR20) and shares many of its motifs with Tarbat carvings. It has often been remarked that the great stone monuments erected at Nigg and Shandwick, represent together with those at Hilton and Tarbat a veritable "golden age" of artistic production, and that these places must have be comparable or even associated with each other (Fig 1; Carver, forthcoming).

Topographical and geophysical surveys were carried out in 1997 on the site of St Mary's Chapel which lies by the sea shore in modern Hilton of Cadboll. Documentary research suggests that the traces of a settlement found there belong to the medieval village of "Catboll-Fisher" a fishing village owned by Fearn Abbey in the 15th century. As the name implies, the "Hilton" of Cadboll was presumably sited on the higher ground. The famous monument stood by the chapel of St Mary in 1780, but it had been taken down to refashion as a recumbent grave slab in 1676. The position in which it stood before this, and in the 9th century when it was new, are not yet known. Future investigation (mainly survey work) is intended to encompass the area which lies between the 35m contour and the sea (Carver 1998).

Jane Durham

Jane Durham was a Commissioner of the Royal Commission of Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and an expert on the art and archaeology of the Highlands. She was a warm supporter of the Tarbat Discovery Programme and the work at Portmahomack, as well as being the initiator of the quite separate project at Hilton of Cadboll.

Her links with the Tarbat peninsula are themselves ancient since her family once owned the Cadboll Estate, and she was a tireless promoter of research and interest in the Hilton area. Failing the retrieval of the Hilton of Cadboll stone from the National Museum, never an easy prospect, she advocated the creation of a replica stone, and in the months before her tragic death had briefed me on what would be acceptable and suggested where to put it - at the west end of the chapel where it had stood in the 18th century. Estimates had been obtained and it was just necessary to reconnoitre the proposed site for the replica at St Mary's Chapel, an operation which would include a preliminary assessment of the site as a whole (see above).

After her death, the project continued through the good offices of Tain and Easter Ross and in particular through her brother, Councillor Jim Patterson. It was proposed that the obverse of the replica (the original of which carried the memorial to Alexander Duff and his three wives) should feature a potted history of the stone and its wanderings (so far as they are yet known), and a memorial to Jane Durham herself, daughter of Cadboll, and friend and inspiration to those who seek to know its long history.

Martin Carver