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Archaeology at Ferryland 2017

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The 2017 field season was a busy one for the Ferryland Archaeology Project. Three different teams of archaeologists investigated various parts of the site ranging in date from the 1620s to the early decades of the 19th century. This report discusses the work of two project teams while the excavation led by Duncan Williams is reported separately in the PAO Review.

From June until August, a small team focused their efforts on two recently discovered 17th-century occupations outside the original four-acre settlement. One occupation is located just east of the current kitchen garden (previously designated Area D) and the second is approximately 30 metres to the southeast on a gently sloping hillside (Area J). Both were revealed during a program of test pitting on the Ferryland Downs in the summer of 2016. The occupation nearest the kitchen garden, in particular, was quite unexpected as intensive excavations in 1993, just 5 metres away, revealed no trace of intact cultural deposits or features. This certainly goes to show that at a place as intensively occupied as the Ferryland Pool, very few spaces were left unused over the course of 500 years – whether it be for gardens, fish flakes, pasture, dwellings or outbuildings – and many more discoveries have yet to be made.

Sections of a stone wall collapse and below it a layer of roof slates exposed in Area D in 2016 provided tantalizing clues for a well-preserved Calvert-era structure, the first of its kind discovered outside the original parameters of the settlement (Gaulton and Hawkins 2017). Our goal for 2017 was to expand excavations in an effort to determine the size of this building, what it was used for and how long it was occupied. Despite the limited number of field personnel, we were able to expose and map a 3 x 4 metre area of wall collapse and then remove the rocks to reveal the underlying layer of roofing slates (Figure 1). The slates were photographed in

situ and collected by excavation unit and stratigraphic position. Most slates were fragmentary but several dozen were still complete, ranging in size from small 5-inch roof tiles to larger 10-inch pieces once set toward the eaves of a roof. At the western end of the excavation we were fortunate to catch the inside face of a relict stone wall and footing. This feature was exposed along the 3-metre excavation area, ending in

Figure 1: Layer of roof slate fragments representing a roof collapse, Area D, looking west.





Figure 2: North and west wall segments from a 1620s structure located outside the original 4 acre settlement, Area D, looking northwest.

a short section of cobblestone pavement at the southernmost unit. Unfortunately, due to time constraints we were unable to open additional excavation units to determine the full extent of the associated cobblestone pavement.

In a similar stroke of good fortune, we discovered the face of a second stone wall segment while straightening the soil profile at the north end of the 3 x 4 metre excavation (Figure 2). The inside northwest corner of the 17th-century building was thus revealed and, at the northeast, a possible door-

remained on the structure's earthen floor. Curiously, at the same stratigraphic level there were scattered patches of fine golden sand – quite different than what is found on Ferryland beaches today – as well as charcoal and small pieces (blobs) of melted glass. Although it is much too early to make any sound interpretations, the presence of few domestic artifacts, combined with the building's unique location and dearth of evidence for a lengthy occupation may point to an industrial or multi-purpose function during the early Calvert period.

Figure 3: 2x4 metre test trench in Area J, looking northwest.



Thirty metres southeast of this early colonial structure is a recently-discovered late 17th- to early 18th-century midden deposit on a hill overlooking Ferryland harbour. Identified by Robyn Lacy in 2016 (Lacy 2017a), and now designated as Area J, our plan was to expand excavations in 2017 so as to learn more about the people who once occupied this location and whether there was any trace of a nearby structure. A 2 x 4 metre north-south trench was established on either side of Lacy's original test pit (Figure 3), allowing for a determination of

the extent of the midden as well as the nature of its deposition. The stratigraphy clearly shows the refuse originating from a levelled area further south and accumulating for several metres down the hill before tapering out. Further excavation to the south will be required if we are to reveal any associated structural remains, but the presence of fire-cracked rock, brick fragments and hundreds of nails and spikes in the midden are certainly suggestive of a nearby building.

The artifact assemblage recovered in Area J in 2017 is quite exceptional in terms of its quantity and variety. The same can be said for the large size of many fragments, suggesting that there was little or no post-depositional disturbance compared to other 17th-century deposits at Ferryland. One could argue that this increases the significance of both the area and its assemblage. Notable objects recovered in 2017 include large pieces of wine bottle glass, complete wine glass stems, dozens of West Country pipe bowls (ca. 1680-1720), a variety of English and French coarse earthenware vessels, decorated tin-glazed plate fragments and many pieces of yet unidentified marbled slipware (Figure 4). The latter was initially thought to be of North Italian origin but its relatively crude manufacture and lack of clear lead glaze on the underside suggest otherwise.

Clothing-related items including a brass buckle, button and several large faceted glass beads were also unearthed. Finally, a badly deteriorated copper half penny minted during the reign of James II (1685-1688) provides a terminus post quem for this occupation and a starting point from which to begin our in-

Figure 4: In situ ‘onion’ bottle and tin-glazed earthenware plate fragment, Area J.



terpretation. What we currently do not know, however, is whether the occupants residing on this hillside were resident prior to the attack on Ferryland in 1696 and thus displaced with the other settlers; or whether this was one of the families who returned from England in 1697 to rebuild their home and start anew.

During the first six weeks of the 2017 excavations, Robyn Lacy led another team of archaeologists in search for evidence of the early colonial burial ground. These investigations focused on several areas inside the original parameters of the four acre palisaded settlement, specifically in central locations on raised landforms, and in close proximity to where the Ferryland gravestone fragments were found in the 1990s. The central, elevated locations were chosen based on the results of Lacy’s (2017b) statistical analysis of 17th-century burial grounds.

The largest trench opened by Lacy’s team was directly south of the brewhouse and bakery. These excavations exposed a variety of 18th- and 17th-century strata including early deposits associated with the occupation and later dismantling of the brewhouse and bakery, however no further evidence for gravestone fragments or burial shafts. Subsequent trenches north, west and south of the brewhouse – in previously-excavated areas that had not been carefully checked for the presence of grave shafts in the subsoil – also proved negative. Based on these results, it appears that if one of these areas once contained the early burial ground, it was so heavily disturbed by the Kirke family’s reorganization efforts in the 1630s that all traces have been lost, save for the gravestone fragments uncovered in the 1990s.

A final test trench was placed in the massive bastion at the southeast corner of the original fortified settlement. Previous understanding of the construction of the bastion suggested that it was at least partially built of mounded earth, and thus may have been looser and thawed quicker than the surrounding hard-packed earth that makes up much of the Ferryland Downs; therefore, it may have been perceived as an adequate location to place a burial(s). Unfortunately, this was not the case as the bastion was revealed to have been largely built from loose gravel and rock sandwiched between layers of earth and sod (Figure 5). Nevertheless, this excavation provides us with a clearer picture of the composition of the southeast bastion as well as further evidence of the enormous

effort that went into the construction of George Calvert's early colony.

While no burials were identified during Lacy's 2016 or 2017 excavations, an understanding of where the colonists were not putting graves has come to light. Based on current evidence, it is reasonable to suggest that the earliest colonial burial ground at Ferryland was either eradicated during the Kirke era, may remain in some unexcavated location farther from the colony, or perhaps was disturbed by later agricultural activities or construction. Alternatively, it may have been situated on a landform to the northeast and has since eroded into the sea. Despite the dearth of evidence for *in situ* grave shafts, the previous discovery of three gravestone fragments representing two separate markers demonstrates the former presence of an organized 17th-century burial ground.

To conclude this report on a sombre note, I wish to acknowledge the loss of our long-time colleague and dear friend Marilyn Willcott, and her husband Stuart Montgomerie. Marilyn was a dedicated and extremely knowledgeable employee of the Ferryland Archaeology Project for 26 years. We miss her terribly.

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Figure 5: Test trench through the bastion at the southeast corner of the original fortified settlement (Area E). Note thick layer of gravel and rock used in the construction of the bastion.

