

High Lights

IN 94 BC Cathbad the Druid decided to immolate the warriors of his tribe. He built a grand wickerwork image in which to burn them but the warriors objected and insisted on a substitute. So they quarried away an old cairn, built a new cairn inside the structure and this cairn was immolated instead. The farmers then came and made offerings of soil and there the cairn remained until it was excavated between 1965 and 1971.

The site is Navan fort, the Emain Macha of the Irish epics; in the Celtic world it is the equivalent of the Mycenae of the Homeric epics. We can guess the druid's name, because he is named in the Irish epics; we know the precise date, because it is given by tree-ring dating. The account of the excavation formed a high light of *Current Archaeology* 22, but Chris Lynn who is writing up the excavation now has a more imaginative story to tell as well as a precise date. At the site itself a new visitor centre has now been opened.

This issue concentrates on recent archaeology in Northern Ireland. There is an account of Ballygally, a neolithic site which is producing so much pottery and so many exotic stone axes that it must have been something rather special.

We have news of a remarkable new treasure of the Ulster Museum, a houseshrine in the purest Celtic art style dredged out of the River Blackwater. We then turn to Belfast and the story of its first industrial revolution when superb Delft ware pottery was manufactured there early in the 18th century.

Finally we visit the Palaeoecology Laboratory at Queens University, Belfast. This is one of the foremost archaeological dating laboratories in the world and here Mike Baillie describes how they are using tephra, the volcanic dust produced in volcanic eruptions as a dating marker.

Moving away from Northern Ireland we take a look at Stonehenge. This is once again in the news with proposals to turn the road that runs past it into a dual carriage way: we take an objective look at the various options.

Then to Wessex where a late Roman hoard has been found on Blagan Hill: this appears to be the strong box of a late Roman official, which was buried and never recovered.

Finally for something completely different we look at a Medieval Coal Mine at Coleorton. Here coal was mined 100 ft underground but modern open cast mining has removed all the overburden so the Medieval coalmine was somewhat unexpectedly exposed to the open air.



CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGY
No. 134
Vol. XII No. 2
Published May /July 1993

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London NW3 2TX
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**CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGY
IS PUBLISHED
SIX TIMES A YEAR
FOR A SUBSCRIPTION OF
£12 FOR SIX ISSUES
Foreign postage £3 extra
US subscriptions \$30**

**SUBSCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE
SENT TO:
CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGY
9 NASSINGTON ROAD
LONDON NW3 2TX**

Back numbers £2.00 each
(1-6, 14, 60, 96 and 128 out of print)
Binders (new size) £7

Printed in Great Britain by
The Friary Press Ltd

11.7.93(11)

