

Glenaladale Estate Archaeological Project 2020

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From left to right: Staff Archaeologist Erin Montgomery, Provincial Archaeologist Dr. Helen Kristmanson and volunteer extraordinaire Claude Arsenault.

It's hard to believe our third field season at Glenaladale has come and gone. This year, we were blessed with an early spring which allowed for a start date of April 29th followed by a long, hot summer and pleasant fall. We closed the site for this season on October 19th. Thankfully, our small crew had no trouble maintaining social distancing in the new era of COVID-19 and no doubt we all benefited from the Tracadie Bay breeze.

A big thank you to all of the volunteers who assisted with our fieldwork this year: Darwin Woods, Bernadette Power, Anna MacAdam, Gabriel Mercier, and David MacPherson. Of course we can't forget Claude Arsenault - a veteran archaeological volunteer whose contribution to all aspects of fieldwork and artifact processing is invaluable. In addition to helping out at the site, Claude worked with Bernadette, Anna, Ella MacLeod, and Aidan Campbell to get a jump start on washing and cataloguing our artifacts. Thanks everyone, what a fine job you did!



Anna, Bernadette, and Aidan cataloguing artifacts.

Our fieldwork at Glenaladale began in 2018 when we surveyed the treed area on the property near Tracadie Bay. During this survey, through the hawthorn and brambles, we were able to identify several depressions. Depressions are good indicators of past human activity, often as the remnants of excavated cellars and other features left behind long after the house has been abandoned and collapsed. We focused our efforts on two small depressions adjacent to each other and located approximately 75 meters from the shore. In the northern most depression we excavated a trench measuring 1 x 6 meters. The material recovered from this depression dated between the 1930s and the 1950s and is most likely related to a cottage that was situated nearby in the 1950s. These twin holes could also be associated with rum running in the Prohibition era (1920-1933) and may have been used as “hides” when the Nellie J. Banks' ship delivered casks of rum to the McKinnon's waterfront property, although this isn't the favoured hypothesis.



Photograph of the trench excavated at Glenaladale in 2018. Volunteers Claude Arsenault and Pamela Anderson.

We then moved on to the largest depression identified on the property which has similar dimensions to the current Glenaladale house (45 ft x 45 ft)! We conducted five shovel tests at various locations within this depression and to our delight, uncovered artifacts dating to the 19th century, including pottery, glass, hand-forged nails, bricks, and metal.



Photograph of the artifacts uncovered from the shovel tests at Glenaladale in 2018.

One of the most interesting and valuable aspects of the Glenaladale history are the letters between Captain John MacDonald and his sister, Nelly. These, and a host of other correspondence with family and friends, were written during the time in which Nelly oversaw the estate in John's absence. In his letters, Captain John gave Nelly brotherly guidance in all aspects of the business of running the estate and involving her in political intrigue as he fought to protect his land. He also dispensed brotherly advice regarding personal matters, including some stern words about Nelly's choice of suitor.

Anticipating his eventual return to the estate Captain John penned a lengthy letter of 17 pages in which he instructed Nelly to build him a mansion bigger than her own house which he disparaged as "too small & might disgust." Thanks to this letter with its detailed instructions and shopping lists we get glimpses of what the house may have looked like. We know for instance that John instructed Nelly to face the house toward the water and to ensure that the floorboards were tightly fitted together so as to prevent dust falling through to the servants working in the basement which would serve as the servants' kitchen, working space and perhaps living quarters. He specified that a corridor would run from the front to the back of the basement, that the floors be boarded, and that the chimney should be constructed with the largest blocks of sandstone to the height of the flames and thereafter smaller stones, a detail that has been borne out archaeologically. Captain John, while deciding whether he wanted Nelly to build his house at Glenaladale or Charlottetown, mentioned that she might model it after Philips Callbeck's house but we have not been able to find any clues as to what that

house may have looked like. Based on John's letter, it is safe to envisage a wood framed house of 2 stories or more and in Georgian style, blessed with large windows and a spacious walk-in basement. Archaeology tells us that the cellar likely had a comfortably high ceiling and a chimney at each side of the house allowing for fireplaces in each room upstairs.

From historical records, we know Captain John's mansion caught fire in 1865, due to a chimney spark on the roof. A small article in *The Examiner*¹ on Monday, April 17, 1865, reported the following”:

ACCIDENT BY FIRE – The residence of John Archibald McDonald, Esqr.; Glenaladale, Township No. Thirty-five, was destroyed by fire on Friday, the 14th, at the hour of three o'clock in the afternoon, by a spark falling from the chimney on the roof. Many articles of furniture were saved from the ruins by the kind assistance of the neighbours who flocked to the spot. [p.2]

We first came across evidence for the fire in the shovel tests; here and everywhere we found evidence for fire - the smell still faintly lingered. The fire was evident through a blackened layer of soil along with melted glass and ceramics and charred and degraded brick, mortar, and plaster. This, combined with the large size of the depression, suggested we had found the remains of Captain John's mansion!

In 2019, we continued our work in Captain John's mansion, opening a 4 x 4 m unit. Once again the burn level was apparent in the soil profile as a thick lens of blackened soil and charred mortar and plaster along with artifacts dating to the 19th century, such as clay smoking pipe, ceramics, glass, square nails, brick, and metal. Most of the artifacts in and below the burn level showed evidence of heat alteration and charring; few appear to have escaped the blaze. We also exposed the base of a large chimney with stone walls emanating from it to the south and west. At the foot of the chimney, to the south and west, is a paved stone and brick floor.

¹ *The Examiner. A Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature and News. Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Monday. April 17, 1865. Vol. XV, New Series, No. 20*



Photograph of the stone wall and fireplace feature of Captain John's mansion, uncovered at Glenaladale.



Wall profile of Unit 2 of Captain John's mansion. The "burn" layer is visible as the blackened layer of soil.

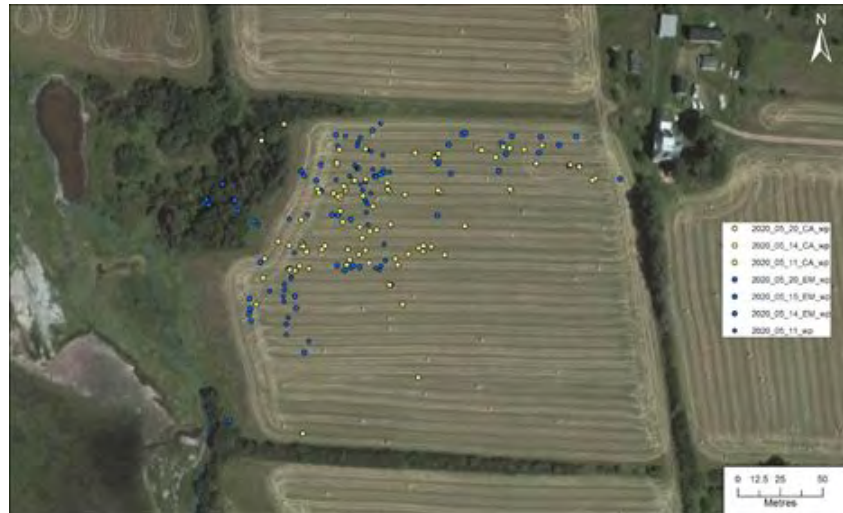


Photograph of the brick and stone floor in Unit 2 at Glenaladale.

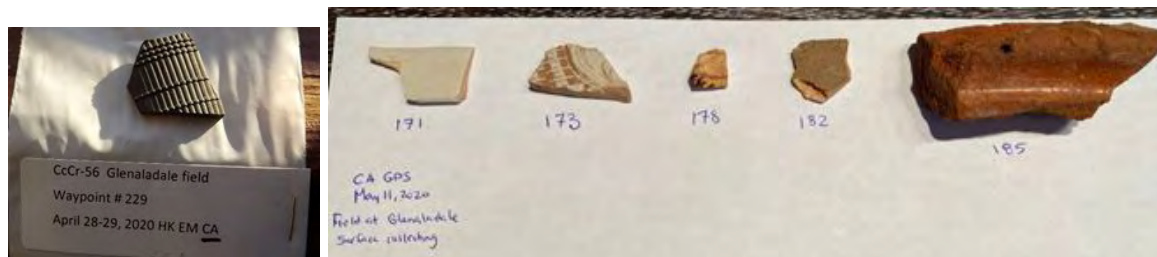


Artifacts recovered from Captain John's mansion at Glenaladale: a) refined earthenware, Walmer pattern, (b) refined earthenware, Scottish spongeware, c) clay smoking pipe bowl, d) escutcheon.

This past year, we started our season with a foot survey of the field between the mansion site and the current house using two GPSs to document the location of any surface artifacts. Over one-hundred artifacts were collected, dating from the 18th to 19th century. Most of the material was found in the corner of the field where Captain John's mansion is located. Aggi-Rose has suggested that there may have once been a house in the field; was this a transitional house between the 1865 fire and the 1883 mansion, or was it something else altogether? We will continue to look into this.



Yellow and blue dots indicate the location of artifacts collected in the field.



Artifacts surface collected in the field between Captain John's mansion and the current house.

Before heading back to Captain John's mansion, we spent some time excavating the other depressions we identified on the property in 2018. It is likely that these are the remains of the farm's infrastructure and we keep an eye out for evidence of other possible infrastructure such as a dairy, ice house, barns, chicken coops, stys, storage buildings, workshops, forges, or other buildings or activity areas in addition to privies, wells, gardens, and refuse middens or pits.

One of the smaller depressions was markedly different from the other units in the ease with which the soil was shovelled (until roots became an issue) and in its dark colour and organic content. Except for a few stray shards of 19th century ceramic (white glazed refined earthenware) and brick fragments there were no artifacts. However, at about two meters below the ground surface there appeared a stone-lined well, as we had hoped to find. We excavated part way into the well but have now closed this unit until we can return with a safe excavation plan in place. Thanks to Morley Foy for dropping by to talk about how to most safely approach this.



Photograph of the well feature at the Glenaladale estate.

This season we opened three additional units at Captain John's mansion. With a small crew, we did our best to cover a broad surface area but the unit in the southeastern corner of the depression received the least attention and excavations there have not yet reached the burn level. In the upper level of the unit we found the remains of an early to mid 20th century car and, below that, ceramics, glass, and other material representative of a late 19th century to early 20th century dump. The simplest explanation is that the later occupants of the extant house used this depression as a dump site, as was and still is common on farm properties.

One of our most exciting finds of the 2019 season was the paved brick and stone floor, which appeared to continue underneath the western wall of the excavation unit. So this year we opened a 2 x 2m unit along this wall to see if and how far this feature would extend. The brick extends from the stone wall approximately 60 centimeters in the south and west directions before transitioning to stone. More work will be needed to

determine the reasoning for the placement of brick and stone, and we plan on continuing this work next year.

This unit was quite different from the others, containing an abundance of square nails, three fixed pin hinges, two handles, and parts of a box lock that may have been the hardware from a trunk, but very few other artifacts. One possibility for the lack of artifacts may be that this was a doorway or entryway. An interesting detail about this feature is the coating of plaster on the north face of the stone wall which is likely remnant of one wall along the central corridor envisioned by Captain John.



Brick and stone floor at Captain John's mansion.

In the third unit opened this year, we hoped to determine the extent of the north-south oriented stone wall. This unit yielded over one thousand artifacts, including a lid finial (shaped like a lion or ram), a fragmentary egg cup, cutlery, a grater, molten glass, a stick pin, straight pins, and a brooch fastener, buttons, copper alloy textile, coins, perfume bottle fragments, cased glass, several ink bottles.

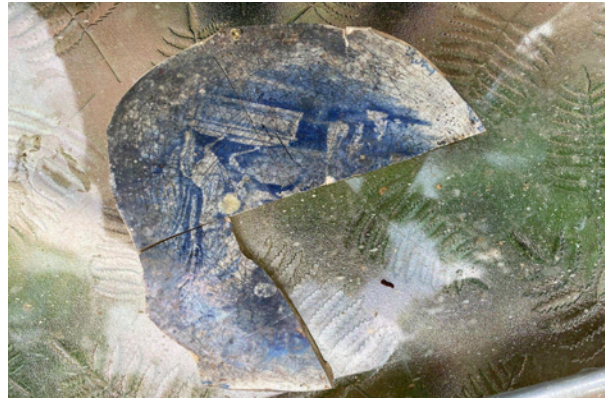
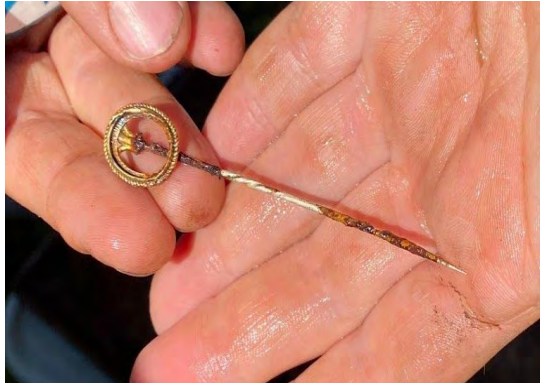
There were several different types of ceramics, including transferware, sprigware, Wedgewood, porcelain, spongeware, edgeware, mochaware, and ironstone. Most of the transferware had the same pattern, known as “Walmer”, which may relate to the Walmer Castle, a defensive structure built by Henry VIII in 1539-1540 to defend the

Downs of southeast Kent against foreign invasion. The preeminence of Walmer ware leads us to speculate whether this was the personal china of Matilda Brecken.

The combination of kitchen and dining items with items of personal adornment or other habit, suggests that we are viewing the jumbled remains of multiple floors collapsed in the fire. The placement of the kitchen utensils and china suggest the juxtaposition of a food preparation area beneath a dining room, over which may have been a woman's bedroom or personal space. Further excavation is required to confirm this.

Unit 5 appears to have been an area of localized heat with black soil and artifacts that appear to have been subjected to extreme heat. The presence of ceramics burned beyond recognition and whose surface has become bubbled and roughened, along with molten glass suggests that the fire reached temperatures of 2,600 and 2,800 degrees Fahrenheit. We do not know why the fire got this hot on an April afternoon or if the extreme heat was confined to this portion of the house. So far, the evidence points to a food preparation, storage and or consumption area and the presence of bottles containing wine or other spirits and or fatty animal products all of which are highly combustible.





Photographs of artifacts collected at Captain John's mansion.

Perhaps the most fascinating find this year was the fragmentary remains of a proportionate ruler, used in carpentry.



Example of proportionate ruler

<https://www.proantic.com/en/display.php?mode=obj&id=456127>

We are pleased with our progress this field season and look forward to working on the artifacts and data this winter as we prepare for Glenaladale 2021. Thanks again to Aggi-Rose Reddin, Mary Gallant and the Glenaladale Heritage Trust for the privilege of working at this extraordinary site.