

Ploughing up Dornoch's past

A NEW and enlightening display in Historylinks Museum, in Dornoch, focuses on a collection of local finds from the area. The objects were retrieved during an archaeological fieldwalking survey organised by Historylinks Museum in collaboration with members of the Dornoch Heritage Society and primary six pupils from Dornoch Primary School.

The survey took place on a field belonging to Embo Mains Farm earlier in the year, and was an opportunity for the museum curators to enhance their knowledge about the earlier inhabitants of the town and vicinity, through objects from the past.

The field chosen for the survey lies just outside the town and has been annotated on a map dated 1783 by David Aitken as "Burgh Lands". It is likely that there was low level occupation or use of the site in prehistoric times. The level of human activity increased from the later medieval period onwards.

Project organiser, Jacquie Aitken, of the museum, positioned the two groups of walkers in a row at one end of the field and instructed them to walk slowly in a straight line looking carefully for



Dornoch Primary 6 children with Sally Wild (left) and teacher Barbara More.

finds on the surface of the ploughsoil. The finds were collected in labelled plastic

bags. At a later date they were cleaned and sorted in the classroom.

Sue Higgins, the project finds officer, produced a catalogue of all the finds.

The on-going research into the collection has revealed that human activ-

ity at the site can be traced back to prehistoric times, ie worked flint. The recov-

ery of several medieval pottery sherds may coincide with the development of Dornoch as a burgh market trading centre during the medieval period.

The high level of burnt material, including a small part of a possible crucible and pieces of metal slag recovered, may provide evidence that there was metal working activity in the area. Apart from small pieces of roofing slate, the site did not yield a significant quantity of building material. It is likely that dumping of rubbish onto the field may account for a proportion of the material recorded during the survey.

The pictures in the new display have been produced by the Dornoch schoolchildren under the expert guidance of artist Sally Wild. These pictures show how some of the objects would have looked when complete. The display also includes a selection of the finds, including pig bones, pieces of old pipe, a round lead shot and a selection of sponge ware and transfer printed pottery etc.

Historylinks Museum staff thank Jocky Mackintosh for granting permission for the survey to take place and teacher Barbara More for her continued support.