

# Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



Volume 13 Issue 2 : Summer 2010

## Editorial

Well, summer got off to a very pleasant start last month with Phyl's tour of the Penrith Henges. If you weren't able to make this you missed a treat - but you can at least read Phyl's account below and maybe this will spark your interest in the next two walks of the summer programme. The first, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, is a guided tour of Mardale under the leadership of Jean Jackson, Chairman of the Shap History Society and will be largely car-based, so might suit someone who is not too mobile at the moment. The second is a follow-up to March's Grampus Heritage talk on the Bassenthwaite project and takes us rather further afield to the Roman Fort at Caermote and the Whittas Park cairn-field.

Now, a few announcements. First of all, and I tell you this with the greatest regret, Liz Hawkins, our excellent Membership Secretary wishes to stand down in September. The Committee hopes that someone from the membership will be prepared to step forward and take on this role. Please contact the chairman via richard\_e\_stevens@btinternet.com if you would like to volunteer.

Secondly, the Group benefitted recently from the donation of a set of CWAAS Proceedings. These are now available for loan. Details of what we have and how to get hold of a particular set are available on the group's website.

And finally, it has been agreed that this year's Geophysics will concentrate on the fields surrounding the church at Ninekirks. See page 4 for further details.

Enjoy your summer.

**Martin Joyce**

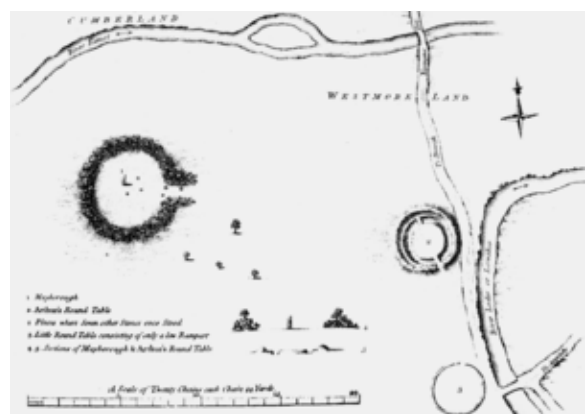
## The Penrith Henges

The first lovely spring evening of the year provided an ideal atmosphere for a stroll around Mayburgh Henge and King Arthur's Round Table.

Twelve members of the group explored the sites led by Phyl Rouston but without the help of Martin Joyce, who had unfortunately come to grief bagging Munroes in Speyside and is now very restricted in a full length leg plaster.

As we wandered over these magnificent but enigmatic prehistoric monuments more questions were posed than answered. A sense of awe was felt entering Mayburgh Henge through its one east facing entrance into an area surrounded by a 15 foot bank of cobbles and seeing in front a single standing stone which is 9 feet high. Records from the 18<sup>th</sup> century mention that there were four standing stones in the centre and a further four at the entrance but it appears that "*as they were hurtful to the ground (they) were destroyed and removed*" (Robert Hutchison 1773)

The cobbles probably came from nearby river beds and it may be that the site was chosen because of its prox-



*Map from 1769 showing relationship between Mayburgh, King Arthur's Round Table and a third site to the south*

*Continued on page 4*

## Contents

Page 2/3:	An evening in Isfahan—Iranian archaeology
Page 4:	Summer programme

## A night in Isfahan

A bleak February evening in Appleby was transformed by the presence of two mysterious and exotically scarved ladies who transported members to the fascinating and delightfully warmer lands of the former Persian Empire. Anne Bell and Margaret Albon, for it was they, were speaking about their holiday last year. Phyl's account follows:

In February Anne Bell and Margaret Albon entertained and informed fellow members of Appleby Archaeology when they spoke on their trip to Iran in 2009. They were accompanied by excellent guides, who were happy to answer questions about Iran today, and who told them about the country's history and culture as they travelled to the various sites on a bright green bus named "Only God".

Their beautifully illustrated presentation included an overview of their experiences but the emphasis was on the ancient history and archaeology of the Persian Empire or Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC). The empire was founded by Cyrus the Great, and at its height, spanned three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. The Achaemenid empire was invaded by Alexander III of Macedon, which led to its collapse in 330 BC.

An early stop was at the museum in Tehran where they saw pottery, which predates the Persian Empire, some dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium. These artefacts included a container, possibly for corn, and life size statues of cattle and sheep, all indicative of an agrarian society which emerged in the Middle East between 10000 and 6000 BC and later moved west into Europe.

Written records appear early and one example referred to, the Cyrus Cylinder, is in the British Museum. This clay cylinder is inscribed, in

Babylonian cuneiform script, with an account by Cyrus, King of Persia (559-530 BC) of his conquest of Babylon in 539 BC. This cylinder has been described as the "first charter of human rights" but it reflects a long tradition in Mesopotamia where, from as early as the third millennium BC, kings began their reigns with declarations of reforms.

In the early 1930s the site at Persepolis was excavated. Prior to the excavation only the tops of columns were visible. The building remains unearthed were of grey limestone which had been well preserved by burial in the sand.

The site, which is extensive and dates from around 515 BC, forms a platform on a plain with mountains as a backdrop. Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of the Persian Empire during the Achaemenid dynasty. It is thought that Cyrus the Great chose the site but that Darius the Great, his successor, built the terrace, palaces, military buildings, treasury and reception halls. The city was one of several capitals and would have been visited at different times,



Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan

probably in the Spring at the Persian New Year. Impressive friezes can be seen on stairways to the Apanda, the principal audience hall of Darius. One depicts soldiers from different parts of the empire bearing tribute and another shows women with elaborate head dresses. To emphasise the power of the empire Xerxes (486-465 BC), the successor to Darius, had his name carved in cuneiform script, over an entrance gate, in three languages, Elamite, Babylonian and Old Persian.

Pasargadae is the site of an earlier capital of the empire and is 40-50 kilometres to the north of

Persepolis. The most important monument at the site is the impressive tomb of Cyrus the Great, which has six broad steps leading to the sepulchre. Closer to Persepolis at a site called Naqsh-e

Rustam there are four tombs, belonging to Achaemenid kings, carved out of the rock face. They are all at a height above the ground. One of the tombs is identified by an inscription as the tomb of Darius I (522-486 BC). The other three tombs are believed to be those of Xerxes I and two of his successors. Seven huge reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam depict monarchs of a later period (309-226 BC). It is possible that this was also a site where ritual exposure of the dead took place as part of the beliefs of Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrianism gained momentum during the Achaemenid period and had immense prestige in ancient times, with some of its doctrines being adopted by other religions. It was overtaken by Islam from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Isfahan, now the third city of Iran, is famous for its Islamic architecture with beautiful boulevards and bridges, one of which, built of mud brick in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is still in use today.

The city flourished from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and was at its peak in the 16<sup>th</sup>, prompting the saying "Isfahan is half of the world". There are many magnificent palaces and mosques and photographs shown to the meeting illustrated the skill of the craftsman who constructed and decorated them. One particular place mentioned was Naghsh-e Jahan Square. The square is surrounded by long walls on all four sides. The Imam Mosque is on the south side, the Mosque of Sheikh Lotfollah on the east, the Ali Qapu Palace on the west and the Great Bazaar comes into the square from the north. The area of the square is such that in medieval times the entire population could assemble there. Today it is a popular spot where the Isfahanis settle down on carpets and bring out their picnics and samovars.

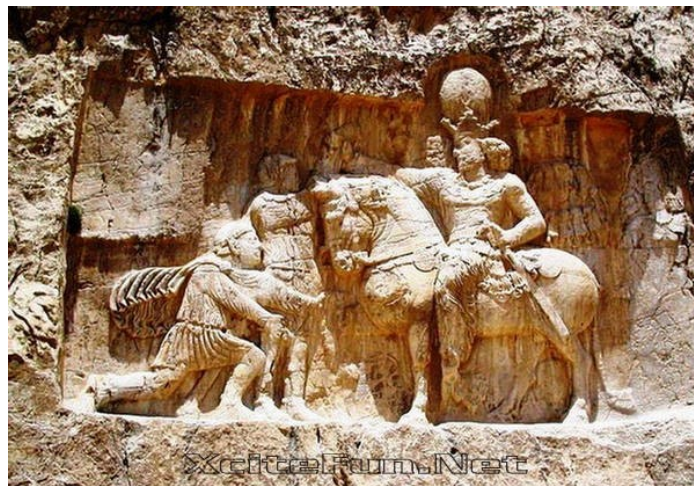
Two examples of early Iranian architecture

and engineering which are still in use are their wind towers and qanats. The technology for both was developed over 4000 years ago. Wind towers are constructed as part of a building and provide natural air conditioning by channelling the wind and guiding the air into the building through a system of shafts and flaps at the top of the tower. The qanats are a water supply system. Water from the snow in the highlands is trapped in sedimentary rocks and the qanats are a system of aqueducts that bring this water to the surface and then take it for use to the cities and towns on the plains.

The system was invented in Iran thousands of years ago and adopted by other regions of the Middle East and around the Mediterranean. Today the system supplies seventy five percent of all the water used in Iran. One of the advantages of this is the number of lush gardens with trees and fountains, where Anne and Margaret were able to relax after visiting archaeological sites.

They ended their talk by speaking of the courtesy and kindness of the Iranians they had met and encouraging other members to go to visit the country

**Phyl Rouston**



*Relief carving from Naqsh-e Rostam*

*Continued from page 1*

imity to the confluence of the Rivers Eden and Eamont and it may have been on a trade route for the axes from Langdale. No excavation has taken place and dating of the site is difficult. Neolithic and Bronze Age axes have been found nearby which indicate a date between 3000 and 1000BC.

A short walk past the Millennium Stone took the group to King Arthur's Round Table, which takes its name from attempts to turn the site into a landscaped garden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the centre of the henge, part of which now lies under a nearby pub, a small cremation trench was identified in the 1930s.

In contrast to Mayburgh this henge has an external earth bank about 5 feet high with an internal ditch of 30 feet wide and it has two entrances. A third henge, destroyed in the 1930s, lay to the south. Three henges lying a short distance from one another, in sight of each other and forming a complex asks the question: Was this a ritual site?

The sun was by now low in the sky, the perfect light to view such monuments. Sadly the midges were also active indicating it was time to return to our cars and ponder on these magnificent prehistoric monuments.

**Phyl Rouston**

## Summer Programme

### **Mardale Valley guided tour and visit to Shap Heritage Centre** Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June

Please meet at the **Heritage Centre Shap at 2pm**. Parking Village Hall car park. 20 mins drive to start of tour stopping at 4-5 locations then return to Heritage Centre to view exhibition and for refreshments.

Please share cars if possible. This will be essential for the guided tour.  
Please let Phyl Rouston know if you are coming and if you require transport or can offer transport Tel 017683 53463.

### **Guided walk to Caermote Roman Fort and the Whittas Park Cairn field**

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July

Leader : Mark Graham of Grampus Heritage  
Contact Martin Railton for further details

Please meet at NY2036 at 2.00pm



## Ninekirks Survey Weekend : Festival of British Archaeology 2010

This year, to celebrate the Festival of British Archaeology, we will be investigating the possible early Christian monastic site at Ninekirks, Brougham, which can be seen as a circular crop mark on air photographs of the field adjacent to the church. The group made a visit last year led by Tony Greenwood, who wrote the excellent booklet on the history of the site. We will investigate the site further by undertaking an archaeological survey, comprising both a geophysical survey and fieldwalking. This will involve setting out a grid across the field with bamboo canes, and then walking across the surface of the field with specialist survey equipment, which can detect buried buildings, ditches and pits etc. We would also look for any surface finds including pottery, which is useful for dating purposes. The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and provides an exciting opportunity for the group to investigate an important Roman-Medieval site.

We will be undertaking the survey over two days on 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> July. We will meet at the car park 2km east of Brougham, which is adjacent to the A66 opposite Whinfell Park (Grid Ref NY 5575 2892) at 9.30am and walk to the site from there. Please bring a packed lunch, water bottle, sun block, sturdy boots and waterproofs.

If you plan to attend please contact Martin Railton to confirm (Email [m.railton@nparchaeology.co.uk](mailto:m.railton@nparchaeology.co.uk) or telephone 01434 382045, mobile 07500878336).



**SENDER:**

**Appleby Archaeology Group** : [www.applebyarchaeology.org.uk](http://www.applebyarchaeology.org.uk)  
**Newsletter Editor: Martin Joyce** : [mjoycemilburn@gmail.com](mailto:mjoycemilburn@gmail.com)