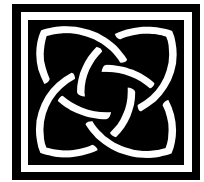


# Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



Volume 14 Issue 2 : Summer 2011

## Group News

### Scoop!

It's not often the Newsletter gets the chance to publish a scoop, but here is some news which may not yet have reached you. You may recall that last month's dig at Brackenber was meant to be uncovering a Roman Signal Station. Well, imagine the surprise when a Bronze Age burial urn popped up in the middle of the site! For further details you should now skip to the right and read Martin Railton's interim account.

### Hypothermia!

In fact excitement seems guaranteed at all our activities this summer. The walk to Nine Standards Rigg, earlier last month was definitely not one for the faint-hearted. It took place on a day which would not have been out of place in December. We'd teamed up with "Altogether Archaeology" so some 20 cars assembled in the drizzle beside the road above Nateby. I understand that most of the pilgrims made it to the top, but hypothermia and terminal exhaustion set in for others (myself included) well below the summit cairns. In the circumstances, a tactical withdrawal seemed the sensible thing to do. Anyway, it appears that the mist was so thick up there that the stone men were really quite difficult to count. There may have been nine, but nobody could be absolutely sure. Stephen apparently had to work quite hard to get everybody back down in good order - one individual had to be firmly retrieved after he took off in the direction of Dent - and it seems that there were further casualties on the descent. But by this time I was in the pub, so I leave Stephen to present his account of the walk - see overleaf.

### Druids!

Still to come, of course, is the evening walk to the Gamelands stone circle. This is scheduled for Mid-summer's day so excellent weather is surely guaranteed. What can go wrong? We shall see.

### Monks!

Finally, on the back page, you should find joining instructions for the Furness Abbey trip. I'm afraid that if you've not already got your ticket, you are probably too late as the bus got filled up pretty quickly. On the other hand, there might be a cancellation nearer the

*Continued on back page*

## Altogether Archaeology on Brackenber Moor

Thirty one volunteers from Appleby Archaeology Group and the North Pennines AONB Altogether Archaeology Project came together last month for nine days of excavation on Brackenber Moor. We came to investigate a possible Roman signal station but what we actually found appears to be very much older!

The earthwork in question sits behind the Appleby Golf Club House near Langton, in the loop of the Hilton Beck. It comprises a circular bank and ditch enclosing a central platform or mound. There are entrances on the north and south sides. It is very similar to a number of Roman signal station sites on Stainmore and is recorded as such in the County Historic Environment Record. However, it has also been noted that the form of the earthwork is also somewhat like a small henge monument.

To investigate the site we excavated three trenches. These were protected by fencing to ward off the stray golf balls which often flew across the site!

It appears that the area of the earthwork was first cleared



*Excavating the monument*

to form a central mound and then the ditch was cut and the material thrown up to form the bank. We excavated part of the southern entrance revealing the end of the ditch and a large boulder which, originally, had clearly stood at the entrance. It had since fallen into the ditch terminus. The east side of the bank was missing, so another trench was excavated revealing what appears to be medieval ridge and furrow cultivation. This had cut off

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the east side of the earthwork.

A number of possible post holes were identified, cutting into the central platform, just where one might have expected to find traces of the timber tower of a signal station. However, things quickly changed as in one of these we found pottery - not just fragments, but the complete rim of a Bronze Age collared urn! The bottom half of the vessel was missing but what remained was filled with charcoal and burnt bone fragments. It appeared that the vessel had initially been inverted and placed in a pit. At a later date, someone had then removed much of the top of the earthwork, cutting off the base of the urn at the same time. This may have been the work of a 19th century antiquarian looking for treasure.

As we investigated the trench, more cremated bone was found in several of the 'post holes' and we began to realise that the whole site showed signs of burning. We had found a Bronze Age cremation monument!

The deepest hole was near the entrance and the base was filled with large fragments of bone. After being used for the burial of cremated remains, the whole of the central



*Investigating cremated remains*

mound had been covered with stone, presumably to 'close' the burial site.

All of the excavated bone has been collected for further analysis. We also hope to date some of the charcoal from the site to confirm the date.

The earthwork lies at the east end of a long ridge which is dotted with Bronze Age mounds, though none are as impressive or complex as the presumed signal station site. The Druidical Judgment Seat (which we have previously evaluated and found to be late Bronze Age/Iron Age) lies at the west end of this ridge. Our research is therefore revealing a long-lived and complex prehistoric landscape. We hope to return to undertake further excavation and survey in the near future. There is still much to be discovered once the pottery and samples from the site have been analysed.

One final mystery remains. Our third trench investigated a curious elongated ditched feature next to the main

earthwork. This looks like some kind of house platform or other structure. We ran out of time and didn't get to investigate this fully but, given what we have already found at the site, this could also potentially be prehistoric. Further excavation is definitely needed!

Further information on the project will be presented at the AGM in January.

Martin Railton

### Visit to Nine Standards : 15 May 2011

On Sunday 15 May, a day of extremely unwelcoming weather, some twenty four stout souls variously drawn from Appleby Archaeology Group, the Archaeology Altogether Project and the newly-formed Shap Archaeology Group, together with several unaffiliated visitors, met at Tailbrigg with the intention of inspecting the Nine Standards cairns. The walk was designed as a sequel to Stephen Walker's talk at the AGM.

The ascent to the Nine Standards is marked by several smaller cairns, one of reputed Bronze Age, and is flanked by a Bronze Age dyke leading up to the crest of the Pennines. At Nine Standards, the trapezoidal enclosure evident on the low altitude oblique aerial photographs taken by Barry Stacey was examined, together with the cairns that lie diagonally across it. The cairns are built on the skyline as seen from the Upper Eden Valley to the west, not on the highest point of the ridge. The cairn bases show signs of disturbance and displacement, indicating that the cairns have been rebuilt many times over the centuries. The west side of the ridge presents a smooth scree of flagstones, while the numerous excavations that scar the very disturbed eastern slope are hidden from the valley below. The cairns stand on a mound of loose flagstones with a marked periphery - is this post-glacial solifluction debris, a long barrow, a hill-fort or some other type of enclosure? The various explanations offered for the observed phenomena reflected the very broad range of experience in those present, and while no firm conclusions were reached, the discussion provoked some much needed heat!

Stephen Walker

## Gypsum in Cumbria

A large audience at Appleby Archaeology Group's March meeting heard Ian Tyler of the Keswick Mining museum talk enthusiastically about the history of the gypsum mining industry in Cumbria.

At Kirby Thore, the plumes of steam emerging from the plasterboard factory announce the most recent phase of a local industry that dates back to mid Victorian time. The raw material for the plasterboard is, of course, gypsum, and this is still mined locally at the Birkshead mine on the outskirts of Long Marton. Here, gypsum is extracted on a vast scale using giant wheeled vehicles operating in "roadways" up to five metres high.

Gypsum occurs widely in Cumbria and its extraction has long provided welcome employment. Although records show that alabaster, a pure white form of gypsum, was mined at Knothill, just southeast of Cotehill village as early as 1685, it was not until 1825 that industrial-scale extraction commenced. The alabaster would have been crushed and mixed with water to form whitewash paint or, indeed, a crude plaster for interiors. As demand grew, however, so did the industry and by late Victorian times, a number of quarries were operating across Cumbria.

Gypsum was such a valuable commodity that it was known as "white gold". When Henry Boazman inherited Acorn Bank on the outskirts of Temple Sowerby in 1875 he was delighted to observe an outcrop of white gypsum exposed no more than 400 metres from his front door. A quarry was quickly established, with material being conveyed by rail from the equally convenient station at Newbiggin. Gypsum has a wide range of industrial applications and, in particular, is used in the manufacture of plate glass. Material from Acorn Bank went variously to Pilkington's at St Helens and to the Union Plate Glass company in Newcastle.

As work proceeded, the Acorn Bank operation grew too large to be operated effectively as a quarry and the excavations continued by means of mining. An inclined plane was dug to provide access to the underground workings and an engine and winding gear were installed to haul out the gypsum. Workings here, as elsewhere, extracted material over a large area from seams up to three metres high. Large pillars of gypsum were left untouched in order to support the roof.

During the Second World War, demand for gypsum grew to enormous proportions. Gypsum is commonly found in association with a close chemical cousin called anhydrite which takes the form of a dense, white rock. Early miners were

uninterested in anhydrite but, as Ian explained, it was eventually discovered that by means of sophisticated chemical magic, one ton of anhydrite could be converted into one ton of sulphuric acid and one ton of cement. Both of these materials were of course vital to wartime industries and consequently, in 1939, several large new mines were developed, principally at Cocklakes (again near Cotehill), Sandwith in West Cumbria and Long Meg near Little Salkeld. At the height of wartime operations, 12,000 tons of anhydrite were being shipped from Cumbria each week.

All of these mines have now ceased production but traces of the industry are still visible if you know where to look. By the side of the road from Acorn Bank to Newbiggin, for example, a corrugated iron structure with unusual bow-topped windows gives the impression of having functioned at one time as a chapel or, perhaps, a school. In fact it once housed the engine and winding gear for the Acorn Bank Boazman mine. Similarly the woods alongside the river Eden near Long Meg conceal many relics of the industry - long-forgotten sidings, signal boxes, workshops and explosive stores.

At Stamp Hill, near Kirby Thore, the fields still show traces of a rather more sinister event. One Sunday morning in 1972, fully 13 acres of ground sank to a depth of fifteen feet. The entire Stamp Hill gypsum mine collapsed and it was only by the grace of God that no lives were lost - it is traditional that no mining should take place on a Sunday. As it was, two maintenance men who were at the entrance on their way to investigate an earlier roof fall had a very lucky escape. They were blown off their feet by the explosive rush of air emerging from the collapsed workings but were otherwise unhurt. The mine never re-opened.

Concluding his talk, Ian was warmly thanked for a highly informative lecture on an aspect of life in the Eden Valley which is now largely forgotten.

Martin Joyce

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time, so if you want to go you could try giving Richard a ring. Alternatively, if you've got your own transport, just tag along behind.

Have a good summer. Best wishes, Martin Joyce

## Summer Outings

### Evening Visit to Gamelands Stone Circle via Rayseat Pike Long Cairn

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June

Meet at 6.30 at the second cattle grid to the south of Mazon Wath on the Little Asby to Newbiggin road at NY 694 068 (though now that I've done the recce, I think we'll actually set off from a point 400 yards further north). Boots are advised for the excursion to Rayseat Pike, otherwise stout shoes should suffice. My contact number is 017683 61131.

Martin Joyce

### Coach trip to Furness Abbey via the Barrow Dock museum

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> July

I thought that I'd better confirm to everyone that the trip to Barrow Dock Museum & Furness Abbey on 10 July will take place as previously announced. There are 16 attending, all of whom will fit nicely into a Robinson's 16 seater minibus. The pickup and drop-off will be the Broad Close car park in Appleby and the bus will depart at 9:30am. We expect to return somewhere around 4:30-5pm.

There is no charge for the Dock Museum but English Heritage members should take their membership cards for entry to Furness Abbey. The normal entry charge will be payable by non-members. Currently, entry is £3.80 or £3.40 for concessions. Should there be 11 or more non-members, we will be entitled to a 15% discount. Although EH have no guided tours at Furness, we have managed to convince a local historian and interpreter to take us round. This should take about an hour.

We can agree our own timings on the day, the only fixture is the time we meet up with the guide at Furness, which is 2pm.

The cafe at the Dock Museum offers a variety of meals and snacks, whereas the cafe at the Abbey has, I believe, more limited fare.

There is an excellent website on the abbey at <http://www.furnessabbey.org.uk> where those wishing to ask awkward questions can gen up in advance.

Looking forward to seeing you on 10 July.

Richard Stevens

## Autumn Programme

### 2010 Excavations at Papcastle, Cockermonth

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> September

**Mark Graham**  
Grampus Heritage

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**Hornby Castle**  
Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October

**Eric Matthews**

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### Archaeological Landscape Survey of the Sizergh Estate

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> November

**Jamie Lund**  
National Trust NW Region

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### Cumbrian Connections : Lithic analysis in the Upper Eden Valley

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December

**Annie Hamilton-Gibney**



**SENDER:**

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