



Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



Volume 16 Issue 2

Summer 2013



Group News

First of all a big "thank you" to everyone who contributed to the Newsletter Survey. Twenty five forms out of a possible 56 were returned, representing 33 out of a possible 69 individuals. The Committee hasn't met to discuss the feedback yet but it's already clear that most people are in favour of keeping the Newsletter in its current form, with opinion evenly divided over whether it should be printed or emailed. If we were to move to a digital version, most people would prefer the emailed re-formatted option. Very few went for the Facebook, website or Blogging-site options. I'll let you know in due course how we decide to respond to this information.

Secondly, somewhere overleaf you'll find an advert for "**Barnard Castle Through Time**" a new book shortly to be published by Amberley. You may be wondering "why?". Well, if you look more closely, you will surely spot the fact that one of the authors is our membership secretary, Carol Dougherty. Carol writes as follows:

"Barnard Castle - Shops, Pubs and Trades" is part of the "Through Time" series and charts the character and ownership of many of the establishments in Barnard Castle from the 1800s to the present day.

It has been completed as a very fond testament to my father-in-law, the late Mr Ken Dougherty, former resident of Barnard Castle, who spent many years diligently researching the history behind the shop fronts. I have worked with established writer Paul Chrystal to put together some of Ken's notes and photos to produce this unique door-to-door-survey of the development of the town.

Published by Amberley, innovators in local history and niche publishing, it can be obtained directly from them or from the Teesdale Mercury in Barnard Castle."

We hope you'll all buy a copy! In the meantime we also hope to see a good number of you on the summer outings. See back page for details.

Best wishes, Martin Joyce

Rescue Archaeology on the Carlisle North Development Route

Archaeologists working ahead of construction on Carlisle's new CNDR (Carlisle North Development Route) bypass back in 2009 thought that their biggest problem would be finding a way of minimising its impact on the remains of the Roman Wall. The new road crosses the Wall where it runs alongside the south bank of the River Eden. What the archaeologists didn't realise was that they were about to stumble upon one of the largest assemblages of prehistoric remains in the North West!



Sunlight through flint arrow-head

Apparch members were enthralled by Fraser Brown's account of the excavation when they met to hear his talk on 9th April. Fraser is a project manager with Oxford Archaeology North and had been employed to supervise the investigation and recording of any archaeological remains which might be endangered by the development of the road.

It was quickly established that remains of the Roman wall to the south of the river had already been largely destroyed by natural movement of the river banks. The archaeologists were, however, able to recover valuable information about successive phases in the construction of the wall. This had been built initially from turf before being replaced with a more permanent stone structure.

Having dealt with the issue of the Roman wall, attention

Contents

Pages 1/2: *Rescue Archaeology on the Carlisle North Development Route*

Pages 3/4: *Epiacum - the Roman fort at Whitley Castle*

Page 4: *Summer Outings*

then switched to the north bank of the Eden where aerial surveys had shown crop marks indicating the possibility of even earlier remains. Investigation revealed massive ditches which suggested that these might have been henge monuments - a class of earthworks which are generally recognised nowadays as prehistoric meeting sites.

This was unexpected and extremely interesting. But the archaeologists now experienced a major shock which in turn looked as if it might compromise the entire road development programme.

On the gravel terraces below the tentative henge monuments, just where a massive embankment leading to the northern end of the new bridge would have to be constructed, trial excavations turned up a scatter of worked flint remains. Initial investigations, working in very muddy conditions failed to produce further enlightenment. However, when the archaeologists returned the following day after overnight rain, they were stunned to find a fine crop of some 300 flint fragments winking in the early morning sun. The rain had washed the mud off! These were microliths - a type of flint tool associated with mesolithic occupation which, in this country, dates back to the period between 9000 and 4000BC. After further examination Fraser had to tell the CNDR development team that this was a site of massive archaeological importance and that it was going to require comprehensive evaluation.

In retrospect it is a tribute to all concerned that the CNDR ever got built since several factors now combined to create the engineering equivalent of a perfect storm. On the one hand the archaeologists had a site which would eventually turn out to contain a wealth of information spanning the entire period of Carlisle's early history from the mesolithic to the early medieval period. On the other hand the engineers had to find a way of accommodating a potential construction delay that might be measured in months. Naturally this would have severe implication for the financing of the project and, to make matters worse, this was occurring at the height of the "credit crunch". Finally, you may remember that the autumn of 2009 also saw the devastating flooding which tested Carlisle's new flood defences to the limit and caused huge damage down the west Cumbria coast - not the best time to be conducting a forensic archaeological investigation on a flood plain.

Nevertheless, finance was found and agreement was reached allowing the archaeologists a seven month window to complete their work. Before long, seventy professional archaeologists were poring over the site, which was now operating on an industrial scale. Techniques imported from Holland were employed to pressure-wash barrow-loads of silt and recover the remains. Ponds and lagoons were constructed to cope with the over-spill. Six archaeologists worked for 10 hours a day recovering tiny frag-

ments of flint with tweezers from the dried residue. In the end around 300,000 lithic items were painstakingly recorded.



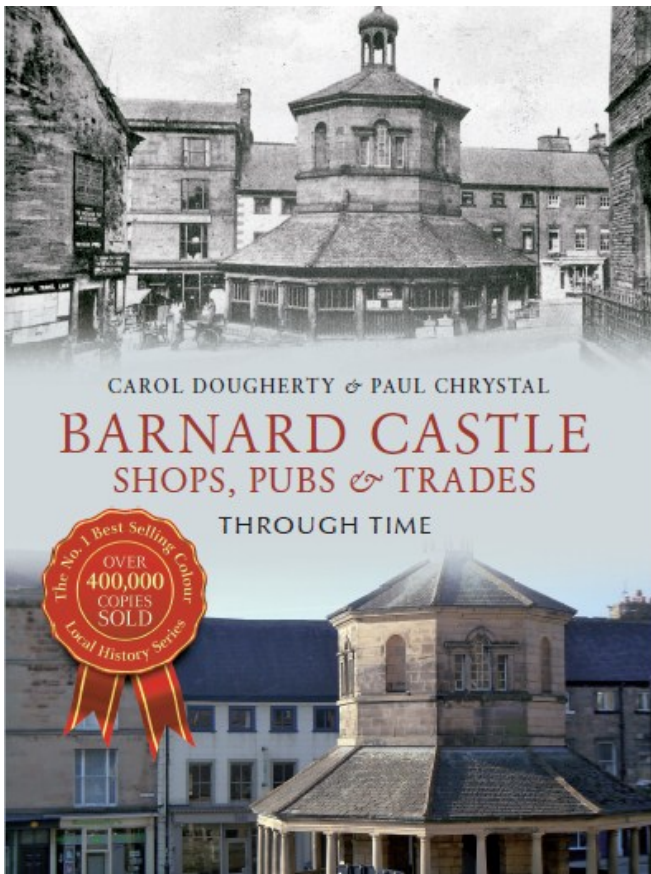
Sieving the silt - industrial archaeology!

It was now clear that the site had been occupied over an extended period by a group of nomadic early Cumbrians who had constructed hearths and homes here and who had used materials brought from a wide area stretching from the Isle of Arran to the north, the Pennines to the east and the Langdales to the south to construct tools and weapons.

But as work continued it became apparent that the site had still more to tell us. Working back towards the Eden, the archaeologists now found themselves excavating biological remains preserved in the silt of abandoned river channels. Among the debris of ancient beaver lodges lay worked timbers and structures dating back to the neolithic period - the time when the first farmers were beginning to settle in Cumbria. A wealth of pollen, charcoal and seed remains were recovered which will provide a treasure trove for post-archaeological investigators. But a variety of human artifacts, discarded or deposited, also lay here - polished axe heads and the rubbing stones used to produce them, arrow heads and pottery remains. Chief among the finds was a pair mysterious wooden tridents, almost 2m in length. Examples of these have been seen elsewhere (eg at Ehenside tarn) but their purpose is unknown. Radio-carbon tests have dated these to the fourth millenium BC.

No doubt much more information will be available once post-excitation work is complete but it is already clear that the CNDR excavation has enabled us to take a major step forward in developing our knowledge of the early occupation of Cumbria. Someday we can look forward to seeing a display of the material covered at Tullie House museum but meanwhile we can also enjoy the benefit of driving round the wonderful new road, safe in the knowledge that its construction has not been at the cost of the destruction of priceless information.

Martin Joyce



Epiacum - the Roman Fort at Whitley Castle

Appleby Archaeology Group welcomed Alastair Robertson, a well known local historian from Alston, to their final meeting of the 2012/13 winter season. The subject of Alastair's talk was the ongoing investigation at, and development of, Whitley Castle Roman Fort a few miles from Alston itself. Alastair explained that he had first discovered the fort many years ago, by the simple expedient of knocking on the door of Castle Nook farm, on whose land the fort is located, to ask permission to have a look. From that simple beginning, he went on to write the first modern handbook to the fort and helped the landowner to set in motion the process which recently resulted in the granting of Lottery Funding to develop the site as a historic and cultural centre.

The fort is believed to have been called Epiacum, since the Roman geographer Ptolemy mentioned it as one of the 9 towns or civitas belonging to the Brigantes – the principal indigenous tribe of this part of Britain during the time of the Roman occupation. The name Epiacum is derived from the Roman goddess Epona, the protector of horses. Although the origin of the association with the fort is unclear, it is known that the fort maintained a contingent of cavalry.

The fort probably has a very early foundation date, pottery having been found in association with an altar found nearby has been dated to 100AD. This could place the Roman presence in the area prior to the construction of Hadrian's Wall in 122AD. A coin found under the pedestal of the altar dates to 150AD and is currently in the Newcastle Museum of Antiquities. So why is the fort located where it is? The answer is lead metal and silver, both of which are extracted from lead ore. The Alston area is famed for its lead mining history and also for the high percentage of silver in the ore. It is not fanciful to suppose that as soon as the Romans discovered that there was lead in the area, they wanted to mine and control it.

The fort lies on the Maiden Way, the Roman road over the high Pennines which connects the fort at Kirkby Thore with Garrigill and onward to the Hadrianic fort at Carvoran, on the wall. The road was still in use as a routeway as recently as the 19th century and continues in places as a path even today. A recent excavation on the Maiden Way, by the volunteers of the Altogether Archaeology Project, seems to indicate that the section of the road between Whitley Castle and Kirkby Thore is of light construction, so it may be that most of the lead mined in the area was shipped out northwards, possibly because security might be more assured in that part of the military zone. The Project has recently carried out a survey of the route of the

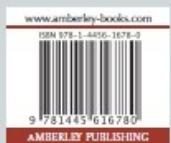


BARNARD CASTLE SHOPS, PUBS & TRADES THROUGH TIME

The medieval borough of Barnard Castle was founded in the eleventh century. A hundred years later Bernard Baliol built a castle and a busy town began to thrive alongside it, with one of the largest corn markets in the North of England drawing custom from far and wide. This unique book charts the character and ownership of many of the commercial establishments in Barnard Castle from the 1800s to the present day and reveals the history behind the modern shopfronts.

This fascinating selection of photographs traces some of the many ways in which Barnard Castle's shops, pubs & trades have changed and developed over the last century

Barnard Castle Shops, Pubs & Trades Through Time is the first book to provide a door-to-door survey of the commercial development of this vibrant and varied town. In so doing it provides a unique, commercial and social history of one of Britain's most significant market towns. Today, as the high street faces another challenge – this time from Internet shopping – it will be interesting to see how the current businesses adapt to face that test.



£14.99

AMBERLEY PUBLISHING
The Hill, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 4EP



southern end of the road near Kirkby Thore and results are forthcoming.

Another Roman road which has been recorded is that between Whitley Castle and Corbridge. The distance between the two forts gives rise to speculation that there might be a fort somewhere between the two in Allendale and in fact a possible site at Old Town has been identified using laser imaging.

Alastair continued by describing the topography of Whitley Castle. It is built on top of a slight natural hillock with long defensive views on three sides. The form of the hill made it impossible for the usual playing card shape to be constructed with the result that the plan view resembles a diamond, an extremely rare occurrence almost unknown in the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, the Romans had done their best to stick with the layout of the buildings as they would have been within the usual rectangular shape. There is some suggestion that the hillock may have been an existing Brigantian site, which suited the Roman requirements rather well. Certainly there are many Iron Age and Bronze age farms in the South Tyne Valley, attesting to the long history of settlement. This settlement continued around the fort during the period of Roman rule and local farms must have supplied it with food, willingly or otherwise. Other people, providing services of various kinds, would have been drawn in to the area and the result was a large civilian settlement, or vicus, just outside the military compound.



Whitley castle - photo courtesy of English Heritage

A singular feature of the site is the set of seven clearly defined earth ramparts - an unusually high number as most Roman forts had just two or three. It is not known if this is because it actually needed heavy defences, or because the early builders were fond of digging ditches and building ramparts. These ramparts still survive to a considerable height. The fort was apparently abandoned in the late third century, that being the date of the most recent pottery found on the site. This date may correspond with abandonment of the outpost forts north of the Wall at Bewcastle, Birrens and Netherby.

Alastair remarked that the fort has been described many times by antiquaries, including William Camden, the author of 'Brittanica', one of the first serious British geographic studies, who was a friend of Reginald Bainbridge, a teacher from Appleby. However, there have been very few excavations. The fort bathhouse was investigated in 1810 but the only work carried out using modern techniques was that by Durham University in 1957, the results of which are now being reviewed. An extensive survey was carried out by English Heritage a few years ago as part of the Miner – Farmer Project and those interested can find the full report of the findings on the English Heritage website. There are currently no plans to excavate on this scheduled ancient monument, although the Altogether Archaeology Project, in association with the owners of the site, have carried out organised molehill surveys over the last two years. Amongst the finds have been glass beads, Roman nails, a loom weight and a particularly fine bronze dolphin, thought to be the decorative end of a strigil, an instrument used for scraping the skin during bathing.

Alastair concluded his talk by recommending his audience to discover Whitley Castle, together with its equally interesting environs, for themselves. He was warmly thanked for his fascinating insight into the history of this little known historic site.

Richard Stevens

Summer Programme

An Evening Visit to Prehistoric Shap

Thursday 20th June

Organiser : Phyl Rouston : tel 017683 53463 : Please contact Phyl if you plan to come so we can organize transport for anyone without a car

Meet at NY567128 near the Wet Sleddale road-end. We'll walk down into the village, then about two miles across the fields in the company of Jean Scott-Smith from the Shap Local History Society. Stout footwear and waterproofs are advised.

A day trip to Roman Wallsend

Sunday September 15th

Organiser Richard Stevens

A Roman day out in the North-East. See enclosed booking form for details

