



# Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



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## Group News

As you can see, your committee has decided to retain the Newsletter in its traditional form. We've noted the popularity of email as an alternative but for the immediate future will continue to use conventional postage.

Thank you, once again, for your help with this decision.

The 2013-14 lecture programme has been finalized and details of the first half of this can be found on the back page. I hope you will agree that this looks extremely interesting. There's a reminder there too of our planned trip to Segedunum at Wallsend on 15<sup>th</sup> September. Places are still available for this, I believe, and for just £15 you get a full-day trip to Segedunum with free guided entry and the possibility of a visit to Binchester on the way home. This surely has to be the bargain of the year! Please note too the revised date for the excavation on Brackenber Moor which is now scheduled to start on 5<sup>th</sup> Oct and finish on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

If you are interested in either of these events, please contact us via the Apparch admin email address (see website) - or , if all else fails, ring Phyl on 017683 53463

*Best wishes, Martin Joyce*

## An Evening Visit to Prehistoric Shap

Was it really the evening of Appleby Archaeology's mid summer walk? It was warm and dry with midges in the air as the group of eighteen gathered at Wet Sleddale road end to walk the route of the ancient Shap Avenue.

Jean Scott Smith, vice chairman of Shap Local History Society, led the walk and those of you who came to Mardale a year or two ago will remember her encyclopaedic knowledge of the area. She was able to make us feel that we had slipped back into pre- history as we walked among the stones..

Neolithic Shap must once have been an impressive spectacle. From the stone circle at Kemp Howe to the south of the modern village an avenue of stones curved away to the

north, intersecting a second, larger circle in the vicinity of the Greyhound Hotel and eventually terminating at a tumulus now known as Skellaw Hill - the hill of the skulls. Unfortunately, while these monuments remained largely intact until relatively modern times, they are all now in a sadly degraded condition.

The casual visitor would find it hard to trace the route of the stone avenue, but Jean was able to point out the undisturbed stones, mostly of pink Shap granite, and also to indicate the position of the stone circles. Six stones of the southern circle, Kemp Howe, remain to the west of the edge of the railway embankment. This circle was complete until construction of the railway in the 1840s cut it in half. Then, when sidings were added in the 1960s alongside the railway, the stones of the eastern section were lost altogether.



*The surviving stones of Kemp Howe guard their view of Shap Fells - picture courtesy of stone-circles.org.uk*

As we walked northward from Kemp Howe through the village in the direction formerly taken by the avenue Jean pointed out several stones within a row of houses. We noted a spring close to the Greyhound Hotel a short distance before we reached a higher point and the site of the large circle (Karl Lofts). A guide book of 1923 says that this was reputed to have been 400 feet in diameter with a central stone from which fourteen "yat-stoops" (gate-posts) were made.

The avenue now changes direction slightly and we turned to walk across the fields where we were able to look

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closely at several large stones. One of these, possessing a distinctive flat top, is known as the Barnkeld stone. It is said that the local fife and drum band used to parade here with the drummer standing on the stone. Further north we reached the Goggleby or Guggleby stone which had to be re-erected after it fell over in 1969. Jean mentioned that there had been a minor earthquake around that time. The archaeology department from Lancaster University excavated in advance of the re-erection but found no material to help to date the stone. However, the exercise was useful as it gave a good opportunity to experience first-hand the problems involved in positioning a 12 ton megalith.



*The Goggleby Stone - photo courtesy of Stephen Wilkinson of [treearth.com](http://treearth.com)*

A little further on we spent time examining the Aspers stone. This is a huge stone tilted on its side with well defined cup and ring marks. These marks and others on a prostrate stone in a different spot led to several members lying on the ground to examine them more closely.

As we walked Jean pointed out a number of landscape features aligned with the stones. The most prominent is Shap Thorn to the south, which can be seen from a considerable distance and is at the convergence of ancient track ways. This landmark is in line with the Skellaw tumulus which is accepted as the northern end of the avenue.

Jean drew our attention to the fact that there are a number of springs close to the circles and avenue. Before we walked back to the cars we visited Keld (keld is the Icelandic word for a spring) where we saw crystal clear water spouting from the spring and visited the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Keld Chapel - a simple peaceful place which was a chantry chapel for the monks from Shap Abbey.

Everyone enjoyed the walk and thanked Jean for her skills as a guide. This year we did not need to warm up in the pub as has been the case for the past year or two!

**Phyllis Rouston**

## **Kirkhaugh, Alston - The Klondike of Prehistoric Britain?**

Kirkhaugh is a small hamlet on the north side of the Tyne valley a few miles from Alston. Unlikely as it may seem, Dr Andrew Fitzpatrick of Wessex Archaeology regards Kirkhaugh as the "Klondike of prehistoric Britain" because of its potential for archaeological discoveries

The site has long been noted for its prehistoric burial cairns. When one of these was excavated in 1935, amateur archaeologists from Newcastle found 'Beaker' pottery, some flint tools and a rare gold ornament.

The ornament was of a very distinctive type. It took the form of a small elongated oval of thin sheet gold with a protruding tang along one edge and had been rolled to form a semi-cylindrical shape. Ornaments like this have been recovered from other sites - a particularly fine pair was found in the grave of the famous "Amesbury Archer" near Stonehenge. Dr Fitzpatrick took part in this excavation.



*Kirhaugh ornament*

These ornaments are known as "basket earrings" because of their distinctive shape, and because it was at first thought that they would have been worn as earrings with the tang passed through a piercing of the ear. It is now thought more likely that they would have been wrapped around plaits, bunches or locks of hair. The basket earring is one of the earliest forms of metalwork known in Britain.

Speaking at a lecture delivered at Alston town hall in July this year, Dr Fitzpatrick explained how tooth analysis had established that the "Archer's" early years had been spent in Central Europe, probably near the Alps, and speculated that he was a pioneer of metal working in Britain and a vital link between Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain.

The gold ornament found at Kirkhaugh is now in the Great North Museum in Newcastle. It is believed to be some 200 years younger than the Amesbury example but fits in with Dr. Fitzpatrick's theory that the person buried here in Kirkhaugh was prospecting for minerals in the ore-rich soils of the North Pennines at a time when metal-use was

becoming more common and when new sources were needed. One of the flint tools from Kirkhaugh has been tentatively identified as a smoothing stone for burnishing metals.

There are at least two more cairns in this remote spot, neither of which has been excavated. If funding can be found, Dr Fitzpatrick hopes to excavate at Kirkhaugh next year in collaboration with Altogether Archaeology.

As archaeological techniques have evolved dramatically in the last 80 years we can perhaps look forward to new and exciting finds in the near future.

*Heather Edwards*

### The Durham Gospels Exhibition – your questions answered

Honestly, I really did mean to go to see the Gospels exhibition at Durham this summer. Everybody else was going and, well, it seemed the least one could do, given that St Cuthbert had himself managed to travel the entire length and breadth of Cumbria, despite being dead at the time. But the whole event seemed so overblown – I mean they even had a “poet in residence” and at the end of the day wasn't it just a book?

But I have to admit that I felt my conscience troubled by my idleness and there were one or two questions that nagged. What was so special about this book and how had it survived?

Then one night a few weeks ago, while listening to Radio Three on earphones in an attempt to drown the heroic snores of fellow guests in an overheated hostel in Inverness (another story altogether), I found myself listening to an excellent feature on the Gospels exhibition. My questions were answered, and I was sufficiently encouraged to perform some further cursory research. So, since I'm sure that I'm not the only one who couldn't be bothered to go to Durham, here are the answers to those nagging questions - think of what I'm saving you!

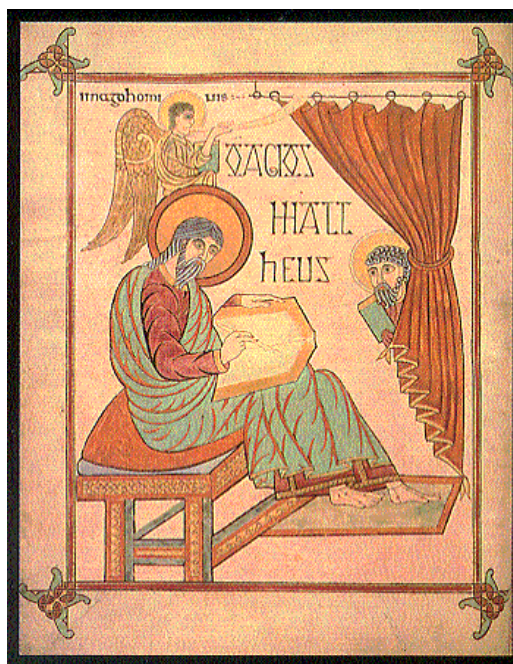
#### So, Martin, what's actually on show?

Well there are actually three books at the heart of the exhibition. First, and principally of course, there's the **Lindisfarne Gospels** - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, hand-written in Latin in a single huge book. It weighs about 20lb – the weight of a car tyre. Then there's the **St Cuthbert Gospel**, a tiny postcard-sized edition of the Gospel of St John designed to be portable. Finally, there are some incomplete scraps of another set of Gospels known as the **Durham Gospels**.

#### How old are they?

They are really quite amazingly old. The **Lindisfarne Gospel** was commissioned as a tribute to St Cuthbert shortly after his death, so dates back to somewhere around 700AD. The second book, the **St Cuthbert Gospel**, was long thought to have been a personal possession of the saint and therefore even older. While this romantic notion has now been discounted, it's still believed that the book was placed in Cuthbert's tomb, a few years after his death in 681AD.

#### I understand the books are in amazingly good condition - how have they survived ?



*St Matthew : Lindisfarne Gospels - photo courtesy of British Library*

Nobody really knows – perhaps it's a miracle. Both the Lindisfarne and St Cuthbert Gospels were held at the monastery on Lindisfarne until the Vikings invaded in 875AD and the monks fled carrying the body of their saint with them. It seems that the books came in the coffin too, alongside the body.

There are occasional subsequent sightings of the books. The **Lindisfarne Gospel** was edited (ie defaced) by a priest called Aldred, provost of Chester-le-Street in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Aldred added a “gloss” ie a word-by-word translation of the original latin into "old-English", written in tiny letters above the original text. The **St Cuthbert Gospel** was removed from Cuthbert's tomb in Durham in 1104 and transferred to the cathedral library. Important visitors were permitted to carry it around their necks in a little leather bag. The books may have remained at Durham until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII but eventually fell into the hands of private collectors, though

the exact details are obscure. Remarkably, they survived almost complete (though the Lindisfarne Gospel lost its original binding - the impressive jewelled, metal binding which is seen today is Victorian) and were eventually acquired by the British Library.

### Why are they important?

On the one hand the books represent wonderful sources for literary historians. On the other they are superb works of art. They have additional significance for the north of England since they illuminate the history of the area in such a truly remarkable way.



*Detail : Lindisfarne Gospel - photo courtesy of the British Library*

### So where's the archaeology in all this?

Well, let's see. My dictionary defines archaeology as "the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artefacts". There's no doubt that a study of these ancient books can tell us quite a lot about the people that made them. Here are a few snippets to whet your appetites.

The scribes used quill pens, of course. Did you know that a right-handed scribe needed a feather from a left wing and vice versa. Also, it apparently took two years before a goose quill was considered sufficiently well-matured to be used as a pen. The inks would have been made from local materials – charcoal and oak-gall. A vivid yellow was made from a mineral called orpiment, thought to have been sourced in the Lake District. Also the scribes only worked in the "writing season". Poor light and cold hands meant that work on the gospels would have stopped in winter. Finally, the Lindisfarne gospel was probably the work of just one monk and we know his name – he was called Eadfrith. I think that's wonderful. His other claim to fame is that he introduced the (apparently novel) idea of

separating individual words by a space

Do you know, I think I may have perhaps now worked up enough enthusiasm to go and see the books for myself. I hope you will too. It will be interesting to see if any of what I've written is really true!

*Martin Joyce*

## Autumn Events

### A day trip to Roman Wallsend

Sunday September 15<sup>th</sup>

Organiser Richard Stevens

A Roman day out in the North-East.

### Brackenborough Excavation

Sat 5<sup>th</sup> Oct to Fri 11<sup>th</sup> Oct

Organiser Martin Railton

## Autumn Lectures

### Cumbria to Cambria: Comparisons between Cumbria and Wales in the Pre-historic period.

Tue 8<sup>th</sup> Oct

Jamie Quartermaine (Oxford Archaeology North)

### Mountains of Meaning: Biographies of Mountains in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

Tue 12<sup>th</sup> Nov

Peter Style (UCLAN)

### Medieval pottery in Cumbria.

Tue 10<sup>th</sup> Dec

Jeremy Bradley (Oxford Archaeology North)

