

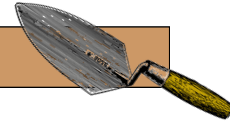


Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



Volume 19 Issue 2

Summer 2016



Group News - "Dig Appleby"

The committee are delighted to announce that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded the Group a grant for our proposed project to investigate the history of the town of Appleby. The project will now have the official title of 'Dig Appleby – Breaking the ground' and will run for one year, beginning on 30th June 2016 and ending on 30 June 2017. There is an additional month allowed at the conclusion of the project to allow for final reports etc. to be written and submitted. There will shortly be a press release for the local and county media and this will be followed by an open meeting to introduce the project to the people of Appleby.

It's important to understand that the HLF grant is not intended just to satisfy the desires of a small group of people. The requirement is that through the project aided by the grant, as many local people as possible are involved in a practical way, helping them to understand the history of their town, to learn new skills and at the end of it, to feel that they have jointly achieved something significant.

The members of the committee are already getting into the detail of the organisation but the timescale for what we intend to do is quite short and we would welcome help from any of you who would like to become involved. There will be opportunities for research, assistance with publicity and organisation as well as excavation, once the targets for the project are identified. But even if you can't be directly involved you can help - right now. As members of the group and as residents of the area you can network - please talk about the project, inform your friends, neighbours and colleagues and help us to generate enthusiasm within the town and the local area.

If you **would** like to help us with any part of the project, please contact Martin Railton using our email address at digappleby@applebyarchaeology.org.uk.

Richard Stevens

"Dig Appleby" Launch

'*Dig Appleby- Breaking the ground*' will be launched in Appleby Market Hall at 7:30pm on Friday 8th July.

The first phase of the project will focus primarily on the evidence for the medieval the town at Appleby-in-Westmorland. This will be achieved through a combination of documentary research and archaeological investigation for which full training will be provided as part of the project.

Activities will include a guided visit to the archives office in Kendal to view early documents on Appleby, and some training in how to read medieval texts. This summer we also plan to undertake some test pit excavations around the town to determine the levels of surviving archaeology, followed by some larger investigations later in the year. Full training will be provided in order that Appleby residents can excavate and record their own 'Big Dig' style test pits in their own gardens and thus contribute to the project further. This will be followed by sessions looking at the finds recovered with experts on hand to help date them.

These preliminary investigations may lead to more in-depth archaeological investigations in the future, which may also look into other aspects of the town's history and archaeology.

We will be posting the results of our work on social media so that everybody has convenient access to the latest information. While we are finalising arrangements in this regard, please check the Group's website for links to the information feeds, so that you can keep abreast of plans as they develop.

We hope we'll see you all in the Market Hall for the launch at 7.30pm on the 8th July

Martin Railton



Contents

- Page 2: *An Abbey in the Vale of Deadly Nightshade*
 Page 3: *Lime Burning and Lime Kilns in Westmorland*
 Page 4: *An Evening Visit to Smardale Lime Kilns*

An Abbey in the Vale of Nightshade

Appleby Archaeology Group's current season of evening talks came to a close in April when Dr Fiona Edmonds, Senior Lecturer in Celtic History at Clare College, Cambridge, spoke about Furness Abbey and her Daughter Houses. Dr Edmonds presented an interesting, detailed account of the Abbey's place in the complicated "Irish Sea Province" in the 12th and 13th centuries. She explained how Furness Abbey was part of this maritime sphere of influence, its links with Northern France, and how the Abbey extended its influence through the establishment of daughter houses.

The Abbey was founded in the 12th century and in its day was regarded as remote and isolated – early writers referred to it as a place "surrounded by perilous seas" and perceived it to be located at the far outer edge of the English kingdom. In addition it was situated in a part of England which was a turbulent region – there was always the threat of conflict with the Scots and the border lands between the two countries were notoriously unstable.

The geography of the Furness peninsula, protruding into the Irish Sea, meant that land-based communication with, and access to, Furness Abbey was difficult. Consequently the monks at the Abbey had to find ways of crossing land known to be dangerous if they were to receive visitors or make journeys themselves and they employed guides to help them cross treacherous sands and bays. We can thank these early monks for this because today's "Queen's Guides" are in a way "direct descendants" of those early guides who used to lead the monks safely across risky areas.

Piel Castle was constructed to guard the entrance to the monk's harbour and was probably a welcome sight to visiting travellers who would realise they were at least somewhere near this isolated Abbey.

During the 12th and 13th centuries monks came to England from Savigny in Normandy along with elite nobles and lords, magnate families which included the future King Stephen. Using Savigny as the model mother house, Stephen founded abbeys over here – Tulketh Mill in Preston is now on the site of the former priory there. This community moved to the Furness site and Furness Abbey developed into one of the most powerful Cistercian monasteries in England.

Despite being firmly rooted in its Norman beginnings, Furness Abbey looked beyond its immediate vicinity. Dr Edmonds suggested how people in the region, in-

cluding the monks at Furness Abbey, looked to the Celtic peoples of Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland, and also farther afield to Scandinavia. She showed images of several very early documents relating to the area and the monastery where place names and personal names indicated strong historical and cultural links to those areas. A Tax Collector's list for the region from the very end of the Anglo Saxon era showed a mix of Scandinavian and Gaelic personal names suggesting a mixed population, and further documents showed the high incidence of place names with links to other parts of the world including Ireland and Scandinavia. A relatively little-known figure, Jocelin of Furness, was writing in the 12th and 13th centuries and lived most of his life at Furness Abbey. His writings indicate a more far-reaching geographical interest and influence than one might imagine for such a remote Abbey. Jocelin is now perceived as one of the most important and influential medieval writers in Northern England.



The ruins of Furness Abbey

Dr Edmonds went on to show how the monks at Furness Abbey became more involved in local communities and their Irish Sea connections and gradually moved away from their original international sphere and links with Savigny. The Abbey began to develop a network of daughter houses in a process called "filiation" where one abbot and twelve monks (representing Jesus and his disciples) would set off to establish monasteries elsewhere. In 1135, within a decade of its own founding at Furness, the Abbey established daughter houses at Calder (near modern Selkfield), followed by Fermoy in Ireland, Rushen on the Isle of Man, and Swineshead in Lincolnshire to name just four. The wide geographical area shows the developing importance of Furness Abbey at this time. Initially the monastery at Calder was not a huge success as it

was repeatedly attacked by the Scots, eventually destroyed by them, and the monks made homeless. The Abbot of Furness refused to take them back at the Abbey so they had to make their own way in the world, eventually establishing Byland Abbey on land given to them. There is a possibility that the establishment of Swineshead was due to the wool trade – many monasteries became very rich in the medieval era due to their involvement in this trade.

In 1351 the dead body of the then Abbot of Furness was found in the precincts of the Abbey and twelve jurors declared that he had been poisoned. It was decided that the guilt lay with three monks at the Abbey who had mixed together a lethal concoction of poisonous plants from the monastery physic garden – one of the poisons was *Atropa Belladonna* – Deadly Nightshade.



Atropa Belladonna - Deadly Nightshade

Furness Abbey fell into ruin during the 1530s in the Dissolution and its lands passed to the Duchy of Lancaster in 1540 but the far-reaching connections remain with the existence of modern multi-nationals, ship building heritage and the huge numbers of tourists to the area.

Carol Dougherty

Lime Burning and Lime Kilns in Westmorland

In March Dr David Johnson presented an illustrated talk to a full house of Appleby Archaeology Group members and several interested visitors. Dr Johnson is a member of Ingleton Archaeology Group and has in the past been awarded the Highly Commended "Community Archaeologist of the Year". He has many articles and publications to his name and his passion for the subject of the evening was very evident

throughout. He began his research into lime burning and lime kilns over 20 years ago and has so far examined more than 3000 sites throughout the Yorkshire Dales, the National Park and Cumbria.

He began by outlining his research methods which include field surveying, archival and documentary accounts and hands-on archaeological excavations. He revealed to the audience the wealth of information which can be found in old records (some very ancient indeed), monastic accounts, enclosure awards, farm accounts, estate records, pictures and old maps. He also described how he once found the remains of a splendid mid-17th century kiln, known as a sow kiln, after following his gut instincts that a curved, saucer-like feature on the ground was something special – despite a surveyor having told him there was absolutely "nothing there" – photos of his excavated find revealed a fine example of this type of kiln – it was "most certainly there"!



Reconstructed "Sow" kiln

Dr Johnson continued his informative talk by providing a comprehensive overview of the many uses of lime in everyday life and in farming, rural trades and building. He described an early practice called "Needfire" (which is peculiar to the Craven district and Westmorland) in which cattle were led to walk through the fumes of burning lime to which had been added herbs and garlic as this was believed to stop diseases in animals. In the 1700s in Westmorland a farmer apparently also persuaded his wife to do the same to cure her bad chest!

He showed the audience some examples of old land-sales notices where the presence of a lime kiln was highlighted and brought to the attention of any prospective buyers. In the 16th and 17th centuries Westmorland tax assessments rated the area as "poor and

remote" so the ability to improve the acidic soil with lime would become a big consideration in any land purchase. In the late 18th century almost 80% of Westmorland was still rated as "waste" (unimproved) but fortunately several things began to have an effect on bringing about a change: the "Improvers", Parliamentary Enclosure Acts, early Board of Agriculture, and landowners who impressed upon their tenant farmers the need to use lime to produce high quality crops and to produce what Webster in the late 1800s called "a fine sweet herbage".

He explained that nearly all kilns, whatever shape and size, were built into the hillside and all worked in the same way reaching a heat of about 800 degrees Celsius in the centre, and about 60 degrees Celsius at the bottom. He then produced an original 1950s limeburner's shovel which had been used to get the lime from the bottom of the kiln – it was a substantial tool and definitely not for the fainthearted.

Dr Johnson ended his talk with some facts and figures about kilns in the Westmorland Barony – sadly many of the kiln sites he has researched are in a state of some disrepair whilst almost a quarter of them have disappeared without trace, but ended with photos of some excellent examples of kilns which are well preserved and are a fine testament to the heritage of this activity in Cumbria.

Richard Stevens

An Evening Visit to Smardale Lime Kilns

Fired with enthusiasm by David Johnson's excellent lecture on Lime Kilns back in March (see above for Richard's report) a small party met in Smardale last month so that Carol and Alan Dougherty could show us the Victorian lime kilns at the head of Smardale gorge.

It was more than a little chilly as we walked along the former railway embankment through Cumbria Wildlife Trust's nature reserve, but the sight of the bluebells and primroses in full bloom more than made up for the discomfort.

Though I'd been to Smardale Gill before I had only viewed the remains of the railway from a distance. Seen at closer quarters the preserved remains of the old Smardale Gill viaduct on the derelict Stainmore line and the modern Smardale viaduct on the Settle Line were much more impressive. Smardale Gill has cut a scarily deep and steep-side valley through the limestone here and the ambition which led the Victorian

engineers to build terraces and viaducts to carry their railways through and across the gorge can only be described as heroic.

The lime kilns proved to be built on an equally megalithic scale. They were built directly alongside the railway line so that the lime could be loaded straight into the waiting wagons. The raw limestone feeding the kilns was quarried immediately behind the kilns and hauled up to the top of the furnaces by a small stationary engine.



Smardale Lime Kilns - photo courtesy C R Jennings

Everybody was extremely grateful to Carol and Alan for their careful research of the history and purpose of the line and for showing us the traces of earlier activities clearly visible in the surrounding landscape. This is an extremely interesting area which I am very keen to revisit.

Martin Joyce

Summer Events

A guided tour of old Brough

Tuesday 14th June

Meet at 6.30 on the village green at Church Brough at NY 79395 14057. Park in front of the school at NY 79415 14232. We'll visit the Norman Church and Castle before moving on to tour the later, 12th Century, Town at Market Brough.

