

-1 Appleby Archaeology Group December 2006

Appleby Archaeology welcomed Gareth Davies, formerly with North Pennine's Archaeology and now a research student at Nottingham, to their December meeting. He spoke of a long term project to investigate the entire range of human settlement and land use in a Norfolk Parish.

The parish of Sedgeford lies 14 kilometres north of Kings Lynn at the centre of what would have an Anglo-Saxon administrative area. The project has concentrated on an area south of the river which bisects the parish.

In the 1950s deep ploughing brought a number of artefacts to the surface and in 1955 excavations in Boneyard Field identified an Anglo-Saxon Christian cemetery. Excavations in 1988 found further evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity. The present project, which is community based, has been running since 1996 and involves volunteers supported by professionals led by Neil Faulkner

In 1965 a torc, a neck-ring and status symbol of the Iron Age, was unearthed by ploughing. This damaged torc, now in the British Museum, dated to around 100BC. It was similar to the best of the torcs found at Snettisham, the next-door parish.

Field walking and metal detecting were undertaken to find focuses of activity and so far about a third of the parish has been surveyed. Geophysical studies were completed where there was evidence of activity. Excavation was then targeted on an area known as Boneyard where the Anglo Saxon Christian cemetery had been found and where, later in the project, part of the damaged torc and a hoard of gold coins were discovered. Test pits were dug over a wide area including the present day village.

The oldest artefacts found were Mesolithic flints and possibly from the early stone age. Three phases of Iron Age occupation were identified from the different types of pottery found. The 2003 season proved very rewarding and exciting when the hoard of gold coins was found. Twenty were hidden in a cow's humerus and others were scattered nearby. The coins depicted a stylised horse and are thought to be Gallo-Belgic. It is likely they were minted in the mid first century BC for mercenaries fighting in Gaul. Similar hoards have been found elsewhere in Norfolk and evidence from these other sites shows that torcs were buried on elevated ground and

coin hoards at the valley bottoms.

On the same day as the hoard was found a horse burial was discovered a short distance away. Several years before another horse burial had been found and the finding of a second and the nature of the burial suggests that the horses may have had a sacred significance.

Finds of pottery from the first to the fourth centuries AD and of coins from the third point to there having been some Roman activity on the site. An intriguing recent find was that of a body, possibly murdered, in a fourth century Roman granary oven.

The Anglo-Saxons appear to have been present from the fifth to the eleventh centuries AD but most of the evidence relates to the middle period from 650 to 850 AD. A number of early 5th century pagan cremation burials have been excavated. The burials in the Christian cemetery, where the bodies were aligned west east with no grave goods, were dated to the eighth and possibly late seventh centuries. The burials were most dense in the valley, in places up to five deep, but were more widely spaced on higher ground away from the river. Many of the skeletons had their arms close to the sides of the body which suggested that they were shroud burials. Copper alloy pins found alongside supported this theory. A more splayed out position of the remains indicated coffin burials. Three hundred burials have now been excavated and it is evident that the people buried represented a pre-industrial village community which, was in all probability, relatively well off. There was evidence that they had suffered from osteo-arthritis and toothache and that some had met a violent death.

Finds of post holes and drainage gullies indicated that there was a settlement area away from the cemetery. Post holes and drainage channels were also found cutting through the cemetery and these along with artefacts in the soil layers above the burials are evidence of a later settlement site. In the late Anglo-Saxon period activity appears to have moved away from the excavated area towards the position of the present day village where late Saxon graves were found near the early medieval church with its 12th century round tower.

The artefacts, most from the 7th and 8th century, included pottery, a large number of animal bones, a few coins, items of jewellery and evidence of weaving.. Two styli found on the site would have been used for writing and tell us that some of the people were literate. This possibly means that there was of an ecclesiastical presence in the village.

Gareth concluded by saying that, so far, this project has found evidence of human activity throughout the iron age to the present day and it has increased our knowledge of the middle Anglo-Saxon period and is continuing to provide an opportunity for a community to become involved in a long term project to learn about the lives of the people who over the centuries have lived and worked in the parish.

Gareth answered many questions from the interested audience before being warmly applauded

The next meeting will be in the Supper Room, Market Hall, Appleby on Tuesday January 9th starting with the AGM at 7pm followed by a Members' Evening at 7.30pm. The speakers will be *Anne Bell on Keeping the Barbarians Out* and *Martin Joyce on Holy wells of Eden*.