

Appleby Archaeology December 2007

Members of the Appleby Archaeology Group enjoyed Donald Angus' informative and entertaining talk about Threlkeld Quarry. Mr Angus has a long family association with the quarry and now spends much of his time working there in a voluntary capacity.

He spoke briefly about the geology of the Lake District and the Eden Valley and its contribution to wealth creation. For centuries granite, slate, sandstone and limestone have been used for building. Before the railways, when the transport of stone was difficult people used local stone as can be seen from the use of sandstone in Appleby and of granite and slate in Keswick.

Four thousand years ago stone was taken from the fells to make tools and later the Romans made full use of local stone in their buildings. There is evidence of monks obtaining slate from Honiston and sandstone, which is easily worked, was used to build the 12th century abbeys at Shap and Furness. The remains of lime kilns provide archaeological evidence of the wide use of lime as a fertiliser and many buildings demonstrate its use as plaster. Prior to mechanisation, in the nineteenth century stone was cleared by hand.

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The quarry at Threlkeld was opened in the 1870s, by a Mr Harkewtz. A crushing plant, powered by steam, was set up in a siding on the Cockermouth Keswick and Penrith railway which had been built in the 1860s. The stone quarried was used by the Manchester Corporation Waterworks for their Thirlmere scheme, for railway ballast on the Crewe-Carlisle railway as well as for road stone and kerbing

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The rock, which is a very hard fine granite was blasted loose using gunpowder, placed in deep holes drilled at the base of the rock face. Later on the gunpowder was replaced by a mixture of fertiliser and diesel. Both types of explosive shifted out blocks of rock which were then hand loaded into wagons and taken to the crusher by a narrow gauge cable railway. As the demand for stone increased the railway line was extended to other quarries and to Threlkeld station and the cable was replaced by steam powered locomotion.

By the 1880s the skilled task of making setts, small rectangular paving block used for road building, was established and continued until 1936. Making the setts was a very skilled task as

they were fashioned using only a hammer and designed so that they locked into one another. As this type of granite can not be polished it provided a non slip surface and was used for the steep roads of northern towns.

Concrete tiles were produced at the end of the 19th century and examples of these have been dug up during recent developments at the site. These floor tiles had beautiful patterns and colours. Their use was not confined to this area and they can be seen in Manchester Town Hall, and they can be found locally in Threlkeld Church and the Conservative Club in Keswick. Manufacture of the tiles was replaced by making paving flags in 1900.

In the 1890s many houses were built, in stone, and these attracted people to work at the quarry and by 1901 one hundred men were employed. Mr Angus' grand parents moved to the area because of the good housing and he remembered visiting them as a child and had recollections of oil lamps and the Saturday morning collection from the earth closets. The houses were not modernised until the 1950s

The men worked in unhealthy and dusty conditions and there was a high incidence of chest conditions such as silicosis. There were also injuries especially to the eyes from chips of stone and Mr Angus recalled having seen many men walking around Threlkeld with black eye patches, a far cry from today's health and safety practices. The workers, however, were very loyal and if a problem arose would work on until it was solved.

The quarry closed in the 1937 and was reopened in 1949 when, as part of a major modernisation, a new crushing plant was set up. By the 1950s the quarry was producing 500 tons of granite chippings a day which were used for ballast, aggregates, tarmac and ready mixed concrete. Unfortunately this plant was so placed that access to the granite became impossible and in 1982 the quarry closed.

The site was then cleared of anything sellable and a number of proposals for its use were put forward. A small business park was built. A Trust was set up in 1992 with the idea of developing a museum and a start was made on landscaping and restoring old buildings. In 1995 the Trust was wound up and the future of the museum was handed over to the current Museum Company, who ten years ago, opened the museum. Everyone involved works in a voluntary capacity and today they continue the work to restore the quarry, its buildings and machinery. The visitor to the

site can now travel on a narrow gauge steam railway, enter a mine and admire the working collection of Ruston Bucyrus excavators in addition to enjoying the museum's geological and historical exhibitions.

The talk concluded with a series of slides illustrating the ongoing work of restoration at the site

In his vote of thanks Harry Hawkins spoke of how yesterday's industry becomes today's archaeology and thanked Mr Angus for his very interesting talk.

The next meeting of the group marks its tenth anniversary and will take place on Tuesday January 8th in the Supper Room, Market Hall, Appleby. The AGM is at 7pm followed by a Members Evening and celebration. At 7.30pm. Phyllis Rouston will speak on *Archaeology on Arran* and Harry Hawkins will review *10 years of Appleby Archaeology*.

Phyllis Rouston 21/12/07