

Appleby Archaeology Group March 2007

Appleby Archaeology Group welcomed Mr Ted Davis to their March meeting when he spoke on Tile Works in the Eden Valley and Beyond. Mr Davis became interested in tile making for agricultural drainage when he retired to Cumbria and his attention was drawn to a ruined kiln near Lanercost. His presentation was illustrated with photographs taken by his wife who has helped in his research into a forgotten industry.

The manufacture of drainage tiles in Cumberland and Westmorland reached its peak in the 1850s and 1860s. This was a time of agricultural improvement when government grants were available to the large estates. The traditional method of drainage was by drains constructed of sods or stone. From 1819-21, Sir James Graham of Netherby, who had seen tile drainage used in Staffordshire, introduced tile manufacturing to the north west. His agent, John Yule, published an article about this method of drainage in 1829. Tile making continued into the 20th century but by 1912 there were no working tileries in the county. Some had closed when the immediate area had been drained but others had closed with the general decline in agriculture towards the end of the century.

The clay used for making the tiles was dug from pits. It was dug in the autumn and allowed to weather over winter before being further broken down in pug mills. Initially these were horse powered but later steam power was used in the bigger works. The clay was formed into slabs by hand, and then moulded into a curved shape with any excess material being cut off. There is a record of machinery being used at Sebergham in 1845 and machines replaced hand making over the next decade, although an advertisement of 1861 was still asking for hand tile makers. The moulds were then allowed to dry enough to maintain their shape and then were taken to the kiln to be fired.

Clay was extracted close to where the bricks and tiles would be used. Tramways were built to transport the wet clay to the processing area and to minimise damage to the moulded clay, the drying sheds and kilns were close by. The kilns were coal fired and the tileries were often near to the railway such as The Julian Bower Works on the Eden Valley Railway near Temple Sowerby.

Most information on the location of tile works has been obtained from the first and second editions of the ordinance survey maps, estate records, newspapers advertisements and the censuses of 1851 and 1861. Place names can be helpful such as Tilekiln Ponds and Brick Lane. There are few extant remains but sometimes it is possible to trace tramways, as at Troutbeck, the location of the large drying sheds and the remains of kilns. But usually all that can be seen today are the clay pits now filled with water and lying in rough ground with reeds and hollows.

Mr Davis gave details of a number of the Westmorland Brick and Tile works. Culgaith was one of the earliest opened in 1836. Wetheriggs is first mentioned in the 1851 census and two of the kilns there were not demolished until the 1960s. The censuses give information on occupation and for example we learn that a James Gassland who had worked at the Burrells Tilery in Appleby later became a contractor at Coatsike Tile Works at Dufton. There are extensive archives for Hackthorpe Tilery (1846-1866) one of the works on the Lowther Estate. By 1849 some twelve million tiles had been made and used on the estate. Press notices provide valuable information. There are advertisements for tilers, notifications that a tilery is for let and advertisements for the auction of equipment when a works closed. There are records of the celebrations that took place after the estate workers had collected the tiles from the tilery and of tile making shows. At one, in Wigton, the winner of a tile making competition made 2391 tiles in 8 hours.

Mr Davis concluded by describing how the tiles were used to drain the land. He had brought a number of tiles for the members to examine.

He was warmly applauded for introducing the group to a little known 19th century industry and for the fascinating insight into the lives of those who worked in it.

The next meeting will be on the Tuesday 10th April at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room Market Hall Appleby, when David Mason, County Archaeologist, County Durham will speak on *The slaughter of the British : Excavations at Heron Bridge*

Phyllis Rouston 26 March 2007