

The January meeting of Appleby Archaeology Group and started with the Annual General Meeting and was followed by the Members' Evening. The speakers were members of the group

Martin Railton the field and research officer for the group updated us on the training excavation on Brackenbermoor. Reports written shortly after the excavation in July 2008 were published in number of society newsletters and in the local press so Martin concentrated on the findings and conclusions reached since. He acknowledged the support of Cumbria County Council in providing a grant, through Neighbourhood Forum, to finance the post excavation work.

Using slides he illustrated the process of the dig emphasising that it all been done by hand from the removal of turf to the very gentle scrapping to reveal a possible post hole. All the soil removed was sieved and this activity, which was hard work, was rewarded by the finding of a number of flints. The area was examined by a metal detectorist but this yielded nothing of archaeological interest. Three trenches were dug and they were recorded in detailed drawings, and photographed. Every feature found was recorded in detail to produce a permanent record of the excavation.

One piece of pottery was found and has been examined by three experts who found it difficult to date. It is suggested that it was from a handmade vessel used for cooking and could have been made anytime from the late Bronze Age to the post-Roman Period, with a probable date in the Iron Age. A specialist in stone tools were surprised at the range of flint tools found. Some were well made, from good quality flint, others seemed to indicate less expertise on the part of the individual knapper and inferior flint. Most of the flints came from soil that had been disturbed over the centuries. One piece, a thumbnail scraper was found in the fill of a stone lined pit enabling the experts to give a early Bronze Age date. Soil samples were taken for environmental testing but revealed little of archaeological interest.

The conclusions to date indicate that the earthwork enclosure known as the Druidical Judgement Seat consisted of an inner bank and outer ditch occupying a natural headland with an outer bank on the northwest side. The inner bank was reinforced by cobbles from the nearby stream and

may have supported a wooden fence. The finding of flints suggest late Neolithic or early Bronze Age activity possibly associated with nearby Bronze Age burial monuments. The finding of the one pottery shard, which had probably been disturbed by ploughing, is likely to relate to the possible occupation of the enclosure in the Iron Age.

Martin concluded by advising that the second phase of the excavation would take place early in July 2009, thanks to a further grant from the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society. It is hoped that Phase 2 will provided dating evidence and more understanding of the nature of early activity on the site. It will involve opening up a fourth trench and re examining one of the trenches opened in 2008. Earlier in the year further geophysical studies will be undertaken in the vicinity to identify other possible sites in order to gain a greater knowledge of the surrounding landscape.

The group thanked Martin for the update and look forward to becoming involved in Phase2.

The second talk transported the group from the moors of Cumbria to the slopes of Mount Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples. Using their photographs, John and Anne Walton took the group on a climb to see the volcanic crater and on a tour of Pompeii and Herculaneum. John first visited the sites in 1951 and returned with Anne for a holiday in 2007.

Mount Vesuvius is about the same distance from Pompeii as Cross Fell is from Appleby. It was the eruption of Vesuvius in August AD 79 that buried the Roman towns. Pompeii was engulfed in volcanic ash and Herculaneum in lava and mud. Volcanic ash becomes fertile agricultural soil as well as being relatively easy to excavate. This has led to greater destruction and exposure at Pompeii than at Herculaneum where the mud encased structures are more protected and difficult to explore. A further difficulty is that much of present day Herculaneum has been built over the ancient town.

There was high death toll at Pompeii with an estimated 5000 killed. It would appear, from the written records, that the people did not think the ash would reach them and they remained in the town. At Herculaneum many more bodies are now being found close to the coast which suggests the people tried to escape by the sea.

As John and Anne talked they showed a number of slides and we were taken along roads passing ditches with stepping stones, into the forum and amphitheatre at Pompeii. One road, they mentioned, was unusual as there was a bend in it so that the view along it was blocked. The reason became clear from the graphic sign indicating the way to a brothel.

There were springs and evidence of bathing everywhere. The colours in the murals and mosaics were surprisingly well preserved particularly in Herculaneum. Household items were evident such as pots and wine vessels and even a carbonised loaf. The bodies found have decayed but the shape in the ash can be reconstructed using a special technique so that the people now appear as they must have been when the volcanic material killed them often in bedrooms and taking shelter in cellars. The towns were frozen in time.

The group very much enjoyed the glimpse of life in Roman towns in the first century AD and thanked John and Anne for their enjoyable presentation..

The next talk will be on Tuesday 10<sup>h</sup> February at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall, Appleby, when Colin Smith from the Milestone Society will talk on Turnpikes and Milestones of Cumbria.