

Appleby Archaeology December 2010

There was a full house at the December meeting of Appleby Archaeology to hear Martin Railton, North Pennines Archaeology, speak on the *2009 Boroughgate Excavation in Appleby*. Members of The Appleby and Westmorland Society were guests at the meeting and the audience was further boosted by a number of visitors.

Martin gave an outline of the historical back ground with particular reference to the medieval period. Appleby, west of the river, is recognised to be a Norman planned town founded in the 12th century. The layout of the town preserves the original single-street plan focused on Boroughgate, with the castle at one end and the church at the other. A number of other boroughs were created at the same time including Carlisle and Penrith. Appleby was strategically located by the river and on an important route across the Pennines and it grew into an important trading centre whilst some of other boroughs, for example, Greystoke and Kirkoswald failed to develop.

Hill's plan of 1754 shows the original form of the town and the survival of many of the medieval burgage plot boundaries. There were originally 28-30 burgages either side of Boroughgate each with a 12m wide frontage. Each plot would have had a house or shop at the front with yards, workshops, gardens and space for domestic animals behind. The original burgage plot boundaries ran from Boroughgate to the river to the east and from Boroughgate to Doomgate to the west. Doomgate would have been the back lane separating the plots from the common land beyond. By the mid 13th century the town had developed into the main trading centre for the area and had expanded along Scattergate but by end of the 14th century parts of the town were in ruin following the Scot's raids. A period of peace and stability followed the Union of 1603 and in the mid 17th century Lady Anne Clifford restored the town and castle. In the 18th century Appleby grew in prosperity and a number of the original burgages became infilled. Many of buildings were constructed around a courtyard behind the street frontage.

The excavation site covered parts of two burgages between Boroughgate and Shaw's Wiend. Shaw's Wiend would have provided access to the back lane. The changing structures on the plots are seen on the Ordnance survey maps of 1859 and 1898 by which time the land was a single plot with a lean to building at the north east corner which survived until recently.

A planning application to build domestic buildings on the only undeveloped plot of land adjoining Boroughgate led to an archaeological assessment of the site. Three evaluation trenches were excavated

in 2006 by Greenlane Archaeology. No definite remains of the properties or boundaries were discovered but a number of features were recorded and quantities of medieval pottery and medieval glazed floor tiles were recovered. The tiles suggested that a relatively high status house had stood nearby. It was on the basis of this evaluation that Cumbria County Council requested an excavation of the area that would be covered by the proposed new house. This excavation, the first modern excavation in the historic core of the town, was undertaken by North Pennines Archaeology and led by Martin took place in September 2009.

The first stage of the excavation was to remove the 19th century outhouse and a sunken yard and then to carefully excavate down through the layers. The earliest archaeological layer was a medieval compacted stony surface thought to be a yard which lay directly on the clay subsoil. A number of post holes were found which may indicate that there had been a fence or other structure in the yard. Evidence of a later cobbled yard surface associated with a possible drainage ditch was revealed. This was dated to 17th and 18th century. Later this became a garden, seen on Hill's map of 1754, but by 1843 the site was a paddock.. From the end of the 19th century until recently the land was in the possession the bobbin mill on the south side of Shaw's Wiend..

The earliest artefacts were pieces of 12th to 13th century pottery found at the bottom of a medieval pit. A series of medieval cess pits were identified. Some were small and circular and some larger and rectangular and these appeared to have had timber lining. A drawn plan of the distribution of the pits shows that they were grouped at the rear of properties

Cess pits were often placed under cellar floors or in the yards of medieval properties but smell was a problem. In towns they would have been dug out every year or two and were eventually back filled with domestic rubbish and stones at the end of their use. The contents, a valuable fertilizer, were spread on the surrounding fields. This is why medieval pottery and other objects which had been discarded are found today in fields close to medieval settlement sites

These pits contained a vast amount of information and samples were taken from them for environmental analysis.

The analysis of the samples provided evidence of what the people of Appleby were eating in the medieval period. Cherry and bramble seeds indicating that wild fruits were being collected and eaten. Charred cereal grains show that oats wheat and barley were being consumed along with meat from cattle sheep

and pig. The river was also a source of food as fish bones were found. The bones of domestic dogs and cats were also present and may indicate that the skins were used.

Evidence of nearby metal working was seen. Tiny fragments of metal were identified from several of the pits and in another there was evidence that iron had been heated in a furnace. A wide range of objects were made from iron at this time including agricultural implements. In early medieval times small scale smithing often took place in towns but was later pushed to the periphery of the town, because of the noise and dirt.

Over 600 shards of pottery were found and these are providing valuable dating evidence. The pottery is being analysed Bradford University and a report will be published with the results of the excavation. Most of the pottery found was from cooking pots and glazed jugs but preliminary results have identified eleven fabric types from red grit ware to a very smooth buff ware dating from 12th to 15th century. Most of the pottery is Cumbrian ware with direct links to Carlisle, Penrith and Dacre indicating the importance of the market in Appleby. This is the first significant assemblage of medieval pottery from the town. No pottery from the 16th century was found but earthenware from the late 17th to 19th century was recovered from the cobbled yard and garden soil as were fragments of clay pipes.

The excavation at Shaw's Wiend has provided a peep into the daily life of medieval Appleby. The people had a semi-rural lifestyle harvesting wild foods but with access to cultivated crops and domestic animals. Small scale metal working was taking place perhaps to take advantage of the market focused on Boroughgate where the local pottery was also exchanged. The lack of evidence of activity in the 16th century corresponds to the contraction of the town following the Anglo-Scottish disputes of the previous centuries and the reoccupation of the site in the 17th century corresponds to a time of stability and the restoration of the town by Lady Anne Clifford.

Martin was enthusiastically applauded and thanked for a fascinating and beautifully illustrated presentation

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