Appleby Archaeology January 2011

The Annual General Meeting of Appleby Archaeology held in January was followed by the Members Evening when the speaker was Dr Stephen Walker. Stephen, who became a member of the group in 2010, grew up in Kirby Stephen and has now returned to live there, spoke on his research into *The Origins of the The Nine Standards*.

The Nine Standards are located near the summit of Hartley Fell known as Nine Standards Rigg and have fascinated Stephen for a long time. In 2008 he published his book *Nine Standards: Ancient Cairns or Modern Folly?* The book is described as "a well-researched and entertaining account of all that is known about the nine stone monuments which stand on the skyline above Kirkby Stephen."

Stephen spoke briefly on his documentary research and continued, using excellent slides to consider why and when they were built.

The first step was to try and find out what was known about the monuments and he began by reviewing the documentary evidence. The historical records that were studied included maps, charters, boundary rolls and perambulations. Maps record the existence of the Nine Standards as far back as the late17th or early 18th century but the first mention of them appears to have been around 1138 in documents associated with the Gant family of Swaledale. It is possible that the Nine Standards were boundary markers on the contested landscape of Upper Swaledale. In 504AD there is a reference in Old Welsh sources to a battle site north west of York called "toothed mountains" and this may refer to Nine Standards Rigg with the projecting stone monuments appearing like teeth on the horizon. The evidence strongly supports the idea that these stone cairns were not built as a folly but have overlooked Kirby Stephen for many hundred if not thousands of years.

The series of slides which were then shown illustrated the commanding position of these monuments and the many unexplained features that surround them.

The cairns stand just below and north of the summit at 605m facing north north east and they have a commanding views in all direction except to the south east and east. They can been seen from some distance, about eight miles, when approaching from the west. They are close to the watersheds of the Eden, the Lune, the Greta, the Swale and the Ure. The location in itself might suggests the cairns marked somewhere significant. Over time they have been rebuilt. Most recently in 2005 when the dry stoners

used photographic records to guide their reconstructions. The cairns have no foundations but are built on pavements and some are between three and four metres in height.

Arial photography and satellite images identify the underlying geological feature but closer inspection of the area around the cairns seems to show this has been cleared of peat and also shows a feature that might be an enclosure. The "enclosure" has a different orientation to the cairns which may mean that it is of a different date to the cairns. It is marked by mounds and ditches with different types of vegetation. There are scree slopes to the west and dug out trenches and possible quarries to the east. There is no record of any archaeological excavation on the site. One idea suggested was this was a burial site with a possible long barrow but without physical investigation of the site nothing can be confirmed.

A number of similar sites are known in the locality. Dates have been attributed to some but there is little confirmed dating. Evidence of earlier activity is thought to have been found at Farady Gill where the chert deposits are said to have been worked in the Neolithic (4000C-2500BC). Jack Standards is thought to be Bronze Age(2500-800BC) and a dyke from Hollow Mill Cross to Coldbergh Edge is said to be like the "reaves" of the Bronze Age field boundaries found on Dartmoor. A gold torque found on Winton Fell in the late 19th century was dated to the Bronze age. A number of other hilltop enclosures in the region such as Carrock Fell in the Lake District and a complex at Ingleborough have been recently dated to the 3rd and 4th millernia.

Stephen concluded by looking at possible ways forward. Surveying the site is one possibility however the stony nature of the ground means that only certain methods would be possible. GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) may provide some evidence to determine whether or not there is a long barrow present but the method of choice would be LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) this technology builds up a high resolution model of the ground surface. This method has been used at Alston where previously unrecognised archaeological features have been revealed. In the meantime Stephen will take members of the group to the site in early summer for the group to reach its conclusions!

A number of question were taken from the floor before the chairman Richard Stevens thanked Stephen for a fascinating talk which had stimulated thought and discussion.