

The final meeting of the Appleby Archaeology Group's 2011-12 lecture season welcomed Paul Frodsham to the Public Hall. Paul is the Historic Environment Officer for the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership, as well as an author of a number of books with archaeological themes. He had last addressed the Group in 2010, prior to the start of the AONB's 'Altogether Archaeology' pilot Project and the purpose of his latest talk was to update the Group on the results of the Project, as well as the plans for the future.

The Altogether Archaeology Project is a lottery funded and community based programme of archaeological activities of various kinds, all taking place within the area covered by the North Pennines AONB. The Project timeline starts in the Middle Stone Age and takes in everything up to and including the Industrial Archaeology of the 19th century.

Paul began by explaining that his own archaeological career had begun in Northumbria and he confessed that his early impressions of the North Pennines had been that there was nothing much of interest there. However, he was by now fully aware of his mistake and he went on to say that, although the area covered by the AONB has no World Heritage sites and indeed, with the exception of the lead mining landscape, few others considered to have national significance, the archaeology is nevertheless of great importance because it reflects the everyday lives of the people who have inhabited the region over a continuous period of some 7000 years.

More than 400 volunteers had taken part in the pilot Project, many of them participating in a number of the activities, which had included archaeological excavations, guided walks, landscape surveys, finds recording and workshops. They included people who came with many years interest in history and archaeology, as well as some who had no previous knowledge and experience. They had come both from within the boundary of the AONB and also from neighbouring areas. All the activities within the Project had been carried out by the volunteers under the supervision of professional archaeologists and had included training in the various techniques required.

Paul went on to give the meeting a short but prolifically illustrated summary of all the activities which had so far taken place. The landscape survey at Holwick, in Teesdale, had discovered the imprint of habitation dating from the Mesolithic to the present, with a huge number of sites in a comparatively small area. The search for a 13th century hunting lodge belonging to the Bishops of Durham in the village of Westgate, Weardale, thought to be lost, had revealed through excavation massive walls and a beautiful spiral staircase before being reburied. In the east of the AONB, an excavation at Muggleswick Grange, which had been built for the Priors of Durham, also in the 13th century, had discovered a high quality building in the shadow of the standing remains. The Maiden Way, a Roman Road connecting the forts at Kirkby Thore & Carvoran, had been excavated near Whitley Castle to the north of Alston and the foundations drawn and photographed. The Tortie Stone, a boulder with rock art carvings near Hallbankgate, had been excavated and Mesolithic flints had been found, together with a probable Bronze Age house, in the near vicinity. The excavation of a supposed Roman Signal Station on Brackenber Moor, on land owned by the golf club, was of particular interest to the members of Appleby Archaeology, many of whom had participated. This site eventually proved to be a cemetery containing a number of Bronze Age burials.

Other activities had included taking part in a long term Newcastle University excavation on Bollihope Common, a survey of molehill casts around the Roman fort at Whitley Castle, where English Heritage are currently conducting a project & where a small bronze dolphin had been discovered during a walk over the site, an air photography workshop and cataloguing earlier finds from the North Pennines at the Bowes Museum. There had also been a number of organised & guided walks, to locations including Binchester Roman fort and Nine Standards Rigg.

Paul then went on to explain that, following the award of a Project development grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, he had been involved talking to various groups and individuals throughout the area, putting together a programme of work for a three year extension to the Altogether Archaeology Project. The details of the programme had been largely completed

and in March a full application for funding had been made to the HLF, with a decision expected in June. The Fund had encouraged the Project since the beginning and Paul told the meeting that he was hopeful of success. With fingers well and truly crossed, he outlined some of the exciting ideas being worked on for new project modules, including Long Meg, Garrigill, Geltsdale, Allendale and a focus on the early Medieval, Saxon and 'Dark Age' period in the AONB. There would also be the possibility of further work on the pilot project modules.

Paul concluded his talk by emphasising that the North Pennines AONB was absolutely full of undiscovered archaeology, the extent of which was only now being realised. The reason for this had been largely because the area was remote from most centres of research and had been to some extent overlooked. The Altogether Archaeology Project was an opportunity to correct this paucity of knowledge and it was inspiring to know that it would be carried out in the main by local volunteers.

Finally, Paul was sincerely thanked for his stimulating and informative talk.

The new lecture season begins on 10th October 2012 and details of the Group's summer activities can be found on the Appleby Archaeology website.