The recent annual general meeting of the Appleby Archaeology Group was concluded by the members' evening, when the group and a number of visitors were entertained by two speakers.

The first of the evening's talks was given by the founder of the Group, Martin Railton. He explained that, following the geophysical survey of various sites on Brackenber Moor carried out by the Group in 2009, it had been decided this year to excavate the site suspected to be a Roman Signal Station. Following discussions with the North Pennines AONB Partnership, who kindly offered to include the excavation into their Altogether Archaeology Project, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd were invited to supervise the work.

Consequently, in June last year, members of Appleby Archaeology Group and volunteers from the Altogether Archaeology Project assembled at the site, which is located on the part of the Moor occupied by Appleby Golf Club.

Martin said that there are a number of archaeological features of possible Roman date in the vicinity of Coupland Beck, at the southwest corner of Brackenber Moor. The A66, to the east of Coupland Beck, is known to follow the course of the High Street Roman Road. A Roman encampment at Coupland Beck and the site of a camp illustrated on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map immediately to the north of the road have also been recorded. It has been proposed that the Roman signalling/observation system which is associated with the Roman road across Stainmore, continued into the Eden Valley, and that a Roman Signal Station was located on Brackenber Moor.

The site itself comprised a circular earthwork enclosure, consisting of a ditch and outer bank, with entrances on the north and south sides. It is situated on the east side of Brackenber Moor, within a loop of the Hilton Beck. The site is recorded as a possible Roman Signal Station in the Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Record, although this interpretation was based purely on comparisons with other sites. The 2009 survey seemed to provide evidence in support of this interpretation, although the east side of the earthwork appeared to have been disturbed by later activity. The site had also been interpreted as a prehistoric enclosure however, as the form of the monument is also consistent with other prehistoric ritual enclosures. A primary aim of the evaluation was therefore to confirm the nature and date of the Brackenber Moor site.

Martin went on to say that there had been much excitement when a cluster of pits was found at the centre of the enclosure, most of which contained deposits of burnt bone and charcoal. One very truncated pit contained the decorated rim of a Bronze Age collared urn containing cremation material, with a suggested date range of 1900-1750 cal BC. The vessel was inverted, with the base of the pot missing, along with the upper fill of the pit. Close to the entrance to the enclosure another well-preserved pit contained a mass of bone, charcoal and fragments of two small accessory vessels, both with fine twisted cord impressions around the exteriors. It now seemed clear that the site functioned as an embanked cremation cemetery. There had also been evidence of a burning episode across the whole of the monument, after which it appears to have been 'closed' by the construction of a stone cairn over the central

platform. The centre of this cairn had been subsequently removed and many of the cremation pits truncated, probably as a result of an antiquarian investigation. Medieval ridge and furrow cultivation had also removed the east side of the monument.

Immediately to the west of the enclosure was another ditched feature, which is believed to be associated with it, although the interpretation of this has been problematic. This feature measured 8.3m long and 3.3m wide comprising a level platform, with straight sides and circular ends, defined by a shallow ditch with an outer stone bank. No finds were recovered to date this feature, but similar structures have recently been identified on Fylingdales Moor in North Yorkshire, where they are associated with late prehistoric round houses.

Martin ended by remarking that this work has made a major contribution to the research being undertaken by the Appleby Archaeology Group on the history and archaeology of Brackenber Moor, which is slowly revealing a significant and long-lived prehistoric landscape. It is hoped that analysis of the cremated bone recovered, and radiocarbon dating of the charcoal samples, will provide additional information about the site. As for the Roman signal station, whether or not one ever existed on Brackenber Moor, in a different location to the evaluation site, is still to be determined. It is however looking unlikely.

The evening's second talk was given by the retiring Chairman, Richard Stevens, whose subject was the search for a mediaeval chapel in West Cumbria. He explained that he had joined the West Cumbria Archaeological Society in 2010 after reading about the excavations at Holm Cultram Abbey, and that the 4 year Abbeytown Project, which had been carried out in conjunction with Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd., had recently been completed by a search for one of the outlying chapels belonging to the Abbey.

The search had begun in the County Record Office, where documents describing the locations of 8 such chapels were found. Most have now disappeared and it was for one of these missing chapels that the Society had decided to search. It was known that the chapel, St. Cuthbert's, was in the vicinity of New Cowper Farm near Westnewton and that there were clues in the fieldnames – Chapel Hill, Chapel Fields and Chapel Moss were easily identifiable. The research had shown that the only remaining sign of the chapel in the late 19th century was a few scattered stone chippings and in fact the last reference to the chapel as a complete building was after the dissolution in 1552, when it was cared for by a hermit. However, no excavation had ever been tried and so the Society had decided to dig on the site.

The work started by carrying out a detailed geophysical survey, initially of the field where the chapel site is marked on the Historic Environment Record. Having found no sign of anything resembling a building here, the survey was extended to the adjacent fields and in total, almost 100 20m squares were eventually surveyed, the resulting plots being available for the volunteers to see each day.

Strong magnetic anomalies were found in two of the fields and excavation trenches were dug to investigate the source of the signals. In one trench, large amounts of slag, haematite and in

situ burning were discovered, suggesting that iron working had been carried out. This trench had provided a useful piece of dating evidence in the form of a small piece of mediaeval pot.

In the second field to be surveyed a large, semi-circular feature with a possible defended entrance and several radiating linear features were seen in the plots, as well as a number of further magnetic anomalies. Trenches were excavated over all these signals, in fact a total of twelve were excavated during the two weeks of the project.

Two sections through the semi-circular ditch were excavated, one of which showed signs of burning in the top of the fill and this had been the source of one of the strong magnetic signals. In the second of these sectional excavations a piece of dressed sandstone was discovered. The stone had been cut square at one corner and was the only artefact recovered which could be readily associated with a stone building.

An extension to one of these trenches was excavated in the closing days of the project and it revealed an arrangement of stones which could have been packing for a wooden post and a fragment of circular, worked and perforated stone was found nearby.

Richard ended his talk by presenting the conclusions from the project. The original sources in the Record Office had pointed out that many ancient dressed stones were to be seen in the farmhouse and barns at New Cowper. With the exception of a single piece of worked stone, no such remains were found on the site, so it appears that if indeed the chapel had been a stone construction, the building was dismantled and the stone reused some time after 1552. It is however just possible that the building might have been constructed of wood. There is strong evidence of metalworking around the site and it is known that the Abbot at Holm Cultram had rights to take iron ore at Egremont, so it's not impossible that small scale smelting may have been carried out on the site by the monks. St. Cuthbert's chapel might indeed have been built on the site because monks were working there & needed a chapel for their devotions, but this is conjecture.

The semi-circular and linear ditches discovered resemble a typical prehistoric field system and organic samples taken from the ditches have been sent away for Carbon 14 analysis. The results are eagerly awaited by the members of the Society.

Finally, Richard said that both the evening's talks had a familiar tale to tell: In archaeology, you begin by looking for one particular type of site and often discover something completely different.