

CROSBY GARRETT HELMET SECRETS REVEALED.

On Tuesday 11th November a packed meeting of Appleby Archaeological Society was fascinated to hear about the context in which the now famous Crosby Garrett Helmet was buried .

It was discovered on open farmland in Carvetii territory , a self governing province in a remote part of Roman Britain and over 10km from the Roman Fort at Brough and even further from the major military sites of Hadrian's Wall . Most people in Cumbria know the story of how two metal detectorists found the stunning bronze helmet in 2010 but the mystery of how and why it was hidden is something which may always remain a mystery.

Since it's discovery archeologists have been searching the area (find spot) for clues to help them understand the archaeological context of its burial .

Appleby Archaeology Group were able to invite two of the participating archaeologists to speak to their November meeting. Both were contributors to the official reports and the Tullie House guide which accompanied the recent exhibition .

We first heard Patricia Shaw, an independent archaeologist working for Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd. talking about the Geophysical and Landscape survey she and colleagues carried out . They had just four days in which to assess the archaeology of the find spot site and it's immediate surroundings often in atrocious conditions as they encountered some of the worst weather of a Cumbrian winter

A 20m x 20m grid was laid over the designated area to be surveyed by magnetometer and, apart from an area which was too steep to survey, a map plotting the archeological anomalies was produced. From this , and both landscape surveys and field observations it could be seen that there was evidence of linear boundaries, hut circles and enclosures . A large bank and ditch was present and clearly visible on the dramatic photographs which accompanied the talk. There were features from more than one historic period with definite evidence of Romano British settlement.

After Patricia's fascinating talk Chris Healey of Minerva Heritage talked in detail about the archaeological excavations which followed . In the short time scale allocated it was decided to

dig three 3m x2m test pits . The purpose of Trench 1 was to investigate if the helmet had been buried where the detectorists said they'd found it. Trench 2 was to investigate possible hut circles and Trench 3 a possible rectangular feature ; both the latter had shown up as anomalies on the geophysical survey . Once again working in atrocious conditions the archaeologists confirmed that the find spot (Trench 1) showed signs of recent digging and backfilling which indicated that the helmet had been found were reported. Fragments of copper alloy similar to that used in the helmet were also found and have been sent to Liverpool University for analysis along with two Roman coins dated to the 330CE. Fragments of Roman pottery and some animal bones indicating a Romano British settlement were also present . Some stone slabs were also found and evidence of a possible cairn but due, to the backfilling, it was impossible to say which layer the Helmet had been recovered from .

Approximately 50 flints from an earlier era were found In trench two and also remnants of two hut circles

Trench Three showed the edge of a wall, some post holes and evidence of a drainage gully but , apart from fragments of a mortarium (a Roman pottery vessel),no firm dating evidence.

The archaeological evidence suggested a lot of activity in the area apart from the discovery of the helmet.

Field walking was also carried out and objects dating between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age have been found as well as highly fragmented Roman pottery and the bones of cattle, sheep,goats and horses.

Overall the limited evidence suggested that there was a settlement here over many hundreds and possible thousands of years including the Romano British period.

Driving winds and heavy rain accompanied both the enquiries ,a fact borne out by the many slides which illustrated both the accounts .

Chris concluded the talk with slides of recent hoards at Snettisham, Ribchester and Frome illustrating the treasures still lying undiscovered in many parts of the British Isles. The next meeting of Appleby Archaeology Group take a place at 7:30 on Tuesday December 9th at Centre 67 when Dr. Richard Newman will be talking on The Archaeology of

Ports and Coasts . Non members are very welcome .

