

The Appleby Archaeology Group held their Annual General Meeting & Members evening recently. On a snowy night, the members listened to a brief roundup of the preceding year as well as outline plans for 2015 and beyond in which the Group were promised a series of practical mini-projects focussing on the history of the town of Appleby.

Following the AGM, those attending were treated to three short talks by Group members.

The first subject of the evening was the site of Musgrave Church Field, which was presented as a double-act by two members of the Group, Dr Mike Lea and Mr Martin Railton.

Musgrave Church Field lies to the west of St Theobald's Church on the north bank of the River Eden south of the village of Great Musgrave. First, Dr Mike Lea explained the historical background to the site, and explained some of the projects undertaken by the Musgrave Church Field Trust.

A church has been present at the site since the 13<sup>th</sup> century and may have been placed near an early river crossing. However, the site was prone to flooding and in 1845 the church was re-built on higher ground. This followed the 'great flood' of 1822 when the church and associated rectory stood 3 or 4 feet in water, and most of the bridges on the River Eden were destroyed. The rectory stood at the east end of Musgrave Church Field until it was demolished in 1884. However this was known to be an 18<sup>th</sup> century replacement of an even earlier building, the location of which is unknown.

Dr Lea explained how the development of this building, and the associated barn, byre, stable and other buildings can be followed in many archive documents such as Glebe Terriers, Probate Inventories and Tithe records. In 2005 Musgrave Church Field was purchased by the Trust for community use, and has received funding under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. As a result archaeological surveys were also commissioned to help inform the management of the site. The Tithe Barn was also restored in 2013 and is now used as an educational facility.

The surveys of the Church Field were then described by Martin Railton. In 2007 the earthwork remains of St Theobald's Rectory were recorded in plan and profile. These comprised the remains of at least two buildings as well as the earthen banks of the former rectory orchard and gardens, which were considered likely to be 18<sup>th</sup> century in date. These were situated on the north side of an earthen dyke, which had evidently been constructed on the north side of the River Eden as an early flood defence.

In order to investigate further, geophysical surveys were undertaken at the site by Trust volunteers in 2014. These included an earth resistance survey, which it was hoped would detect evidence for the buried stone walls of the 18<sup>th</sup> century rectory and possibly reveal evidence for the earlier building. Large spreads of rubble were detected beneath the turf which almost certainly corresponds to the remains of the 18<sup>th</sup> century building. The banks and

ditches of the former gardens were also surveyed. A magnetic survey of the field was also undertaken and this recorded a number of sub-surface features including enclosure ditches, drains, a former track way and possible rubbish pits or tree throws. It was suggested that following this an archaeological excavation could help confirm the location of the earliest building at the site.

The speakers helped demonstrate the value of combining archaeological fieldwork and documentary research in order to investigate the history of the site, an approach which it is hoped will be replicated as part of the Group's research in the Appleby area this summer.

The final presentation was given by Trish Shaw, who brought members up to date on the 2014 season's discoveries at the Cistercian Abbey of Holme Cultram, the site of a continuing investigation by the West Cumbria Archaeological Society.

Trish explained that the target of the investigation in 2014 had been the monk's refectory and kitchen, the object being to obtain knowledge about their diet. Using a number of slides, she showed the large open area excavation which had revealed the kitchen, complete with a large hearth, together with various drains and sluices from many different building phases of the Abbey. The key find had been a large arched cistern, the purpose of which had been to store water until required to flush the main drain into the tidal River Waver, from where the residue washed out to sea. Preserved wood had been recovered and would eventually be dated using radiocarbon techniques as there were not enough tree rings for dendrochronology to be used. Other medieval finds included well preserved leather, a ploughshare and a chess piece.

In closing, Trish said that around 5 tonnes of organic remains had been sampled and was currently being processed in order to determine the main constituents of the monk's diet.

Further details and many photographs can be found via the Solway Wetlands Landscape Partnership Scheme website.