

# The Prehistoric Origins of the A1

9<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Blasie Vyner

On February 9th Blasie Vyner, a well known archaeologist, entertained members of Appleby Archaeological Society with a talk on the prehistoric origins of the A1. As anyone who has travelled on the A1 in recent years knows work has gone on to upgrade the old "Great North Road" to motorway standard. As with any major development work the historical and archaeological impact of the work has to be assessed prior to the start of construction.

In the past it has been assumed that the Romans were probably the first to use the A1 corridor as a major route way as it is constructed on or near one of the most famous Roman Roads in Britain Dere Street.

In fact the archaeological evidence starts much earlier with the mesolithic (10,000-8,500BC). Over 4000 pieces of worked flint have been found and some rare stakeholes which suggest that the inhabitants had been living in tent like structures or 'benders'

There is much more evidence for the A1 corridor to have been used as a Neolithic route way.

Mr. Vyner used a map of the drainage basin of North Yorkshire to show that on or near the lowest crossing point of the rivers in Neolithic times there are still the substantial remains visible today. The Warfe, Ure, Aire, Nidd and Calder all have well known Neolithic complexes and a rough North-South line can be drawn suggesting a Neolithic Routeway which incorporates standing stones, burial mounds, henges and cursus (a long oval enclosed area).

The archaeologists working in advance of the A1 reconstruction found evidence not just of spectacular monuments such as the ones at Thornborough Henge and the Devils Arrows standing stones but of the people who lived on or near them. In the Neolithic most of the land would have been heavily forested and the land would have been prone to flooding with deeply braided river channels; knowledge of safe crossing places would have been very important.

M. Vyner postulated that the monuments were used as meeting places; perhaps as markets or places to find a wife or sell your pigs. Midden pits have revealed examples of food debris including hazelnut shells and broken pots; these latter included some quite sophisticated grooved wear dated to c2700BC.

Near Catterick a double palisades enclosure had been found which dated back to 2800 and which would seem to have been in use for almost 1000 years. A rare example of rock art has also been found at Catterick.

When the findings of the excavations are fully investigated it is hoped yet more discoveries may be made about life in Yorkshire in the Neolithic period.

Blasie was thanked by the new chairman Martin Joyce and members were reminded of the next meeting on Thursday 9th March which is the first of two talks on The Excavation, Conservation and Analysis of the unique Viking Burial at Cumwhitton.

*Heather Edwards*