

Dig Appleby – Breaking the Ground

The first phase of the fieldwork for the Dig Appleby project known as 'Breaking the ground' took place between July 2016 and May 2017 focusing on evidence for the medieval town of Appleby-in-Westmorland. These preliminary investigations were designed to inform the wider project, by helping to determine the archaeological potential of the town, focused primarily on Boroughgate and associated medieval burgages.

The aims and objectives of the project were achieved through a program of archaeological evaluation, comprising preliminary geophysical survey (where suitable), followed by the excavation of a series archaeological trial trenches and test pits, sampling of archaeological deposits, recording, and reporting. The results of the 2016 test pit excavations were reported in the Newsletter previously.

In 2017 two larger trenches were excavated at Castle Bank on the southern edge of the town, focusing on a building depicted on Hill's 1754 Plan of Appleby-in-Westmorland. The trenches (TR1 and TR2) were positioned within a rectangular sunken area of land adjacent to the road, to target the location of the former building.

In Trench 1 a crude surface of cobbles was identified, which filled the west end of the trench. Although very disturbed, these appeared to represent part of a former yard surface. At the east end of the trench, where the ground rose by 0.2m, a boundary bank of orange sandy clay was revealed, covered in small rounded cobbles. Beneath this bank material, was an arrangement of large cobbles defining a possible drain or culvert. No evidence for other structural remains was identified. Nevertheless, the presence of the cobbled surface and possible culvert/drain with a similar alignment to the buildings depicted on the 1754 Plan, indicated that these features were associated with the former building, possibly representing an external yard defined by a bank on the east side.

At the south end of Trench 2, another bank of orange sandy clay was revealed, which was also covered in small rounded cobbles, representing the northern limit of a former field boundary seen to cross the field to the southwest.

In the north end of the trench a 0.2m-deep layer of sandstone rubble was identified beneath the plough soil layer. This comprised large pieces of sandstone and mortar, evidently representing demolition rubble from a former building. This overlay a

cobbled surface, comprising closely-lain rounded river cobbles, which measured 1.2m across, filling the full width of the trench (1m) and bisected by a later ceramic land drain.

The cobbled surface was defined to the south by the bank material, and to the north by a possible sandstone wall foundation. A large flag stone was also identified, which may have represented a threshold. Filling the north end of the trench, and underlying the flagstone, was a 0.05m-deep layer of fine sand which was believed to represent the bedding layer for a flag floor (since removed).

The archaeological features identified in Trench 2 represented evidence for part of a building with internal room, evidently with a stone flagged floor, possible entrance doorway, and outer sandstone wall, with an external cobbled path, overlain by a substantial demolition layer.

Overall the finds assemblage recovered was typically domestic. The pottery recovered dated largely to the 19th century, although there were also small quantities dating from the 18th and 20th centuries. Two medieval pottery sherds were also recovered; however, these were considered likely to be residual.

The results of the investigation at Castle Bank confirmed the presence of the building as depicted on Hill's 1754 Plan, and provided evidence of construction. It is possible, based on the limited evidence revealed by the trenches that the south end of this building was for human habitation, with animals kept to the north. The date of construction is uncertain, but the evidence points to a post-medieval building, which appears to have been demolished in the mid-19th century, based on the finds recovered and the evidence of historic mapping.

Further archaeological work is planned as part of the Appleby Heritage Action Zone

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Plate 1: *TR2 (in foreground) and TR1 under excavation, looking northeast*



Plate 2: *Section of TR2 showing excavated features, looking southwest*