

Dates for your diary

Tuesday April 15th 7:30 Small Hall, Thropton. With 2014 the centenary of the outbreak of World War One, Keith Maddison will be talking to us on “Archaeology on the Western Front” – covering the work he has done on trench systems in Belgium and France.

Thursday May 1st 7:30 Main Hall, Thropton. The AGM, which will follow the usual format of some business, followed by a talk. This year the historian, hill walker and author, Chris Davies, will present “Almost forgotten: the search for aviation accidents in Northumberland”. Refreshments will be provided.

Friday May 30th Barry Mead, who spoke to us so entertainingly last year, will lead a walk around the site of Bedlington Ironworks and the town itself. Details of timing etc. will follow.

Wednesday June 12th 7:30 Small Hall, Thropton. Colin Durward will talk to us about the refurbishment of Blyth Battery. Built in 1916 to defend the port of Blyth and its submarine base, and upgraded for World War II, it is the most intact, accessible and intelligible coast defence battery in the North East. This talk has been re-arranged from February, when bad weather forced its postponement.

Sunday June 15th 11am Meet at Northumberland Park Metro Station for a guided walk, led by Gordon Moir, along the area’s waggonways and old railways.

Thursday July 17th to Sunday July 27th This season’s dig at Barrowburn. More details are in the article below.

Friday August 15th to Sunday August 17th The Kirknewton Festival of Archaeology. Nearer the time more details will be available on the National Park website.

Saturday August 16th & Sunday August 17th. As part of the events around the World War I commemoration, CCA will lead walks to the practice trenches dug by the Northumberland Fusiliers on the land above Rothbury. Details to follow.

Wednesday September 24th 7:30 Small Hall, Thropton. Richard Carlton will talk about the remains of the 18th century waggonway found at the Neptune Shipyard near Walker which was used by horse-drawn carts to carry coal down to the river.

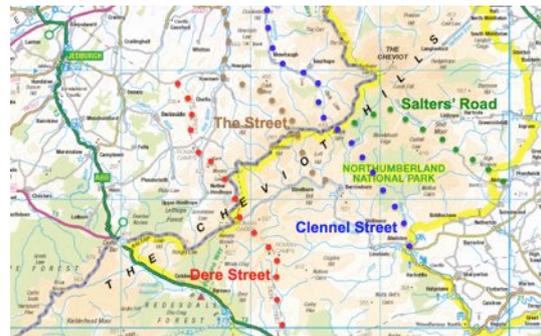


Sunday October 19th 2:30pm Rothbury Jubilee Hall. Clive Waddington will give the annual David Dippie Dixon lectures – focusing on ‘Rescued from the Sea’, the excavation of a burial cairn (and a lot more) at Hauxley last summer in which some CCA members participated.

Wednesday November 12th 7:30 Venue TBD. Chris Bowles, the Archaeology Officer for the Scottish Borders, will talk to us about ‘The Dark Ages in the Borders’.

The Border Roads Project

Those of you with long memories will remember that at the last AGM we talked about a future project for CCA that would involve walking the old Border Roads, surveying, photographing and documenting the archaeological sites along them.



The objective would be to end up with walking guides for visitors, a book and a good website that contained everything we'd found.

We put together a three year project plan and budget for this, and in the autumn we submitted an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for just under £70,000. That sounds like a lot of money (well, it is) but it covered the design and production of the items described above, three seasons of excavation and items such as commissioning aerial photography – as well as lots of post-excavation tests etc.

In December, the HLF told us they couldn't give us this grant, but said that they liked the idea of the project and asked us to re-apply with lower costs. They also suggested we should try to get funding from other organisations.

We've been through the budget very carefully, taking some things out and finding cheaper ways of doing others (e.g. aerial photography). And we've also been given a grant of £4900 by the National Park from their Sustainable Development Fund. The upshot is that we've put in another application to HLF for under £45,000 – a reduction of about 35%. We hope to get a decision in May, and we'll obviously tell members as soon as we hear.

Barrowburn 2014

The dig this year will be from Thursday July 17th to Sunday July 27th, with a rest day on Tuesday July 22nd.

At the moment, here are two main items at the mill site that we want to investigate further. Last year we found what looked like a paved area just upstream from the western wall. We uncovered part of it, but we couldn't do a complete job on it because of an adjacent spoil heap.



It's probably old, because there was tumble from the wall on top of it, as well as a piece of a 14th century jug. Maybe it's the remains of a floor from a building associated with the mill – or perhaps it was just an area of hard standing.

Secondly, there were hints that the western wall (which you can see in the picture above) turned upstream at the river end. If it did, then that might give us more information about what was going on in the area next to the mill.

Although there is more work to do at the mill, we have submitted an initial paper on the project to *Archaeologia Aeliana*. This looks at the evidence for the mill in the area and examines its social and historical context. If it's accepted, the paper will be published later this year and we'll follow it up with a longer paper, hopefully next year, looking specifically at the archaeology.

This season we really want to focus on doing more work at the Hepden Burn site, where in 2013 diggers also found a high quality floor.



From finds such as pipes, we know this structure was in use in the 17th century – but we don't know what it was used for and there are hints of earlier structures underlying it and next to it. There is certainly a view that the floor in the picture above is too good for it to have been used just as an enclosure for sheep or cattle.

If you want to dig, the booking process is now open, so if you haven't done so already please e-mail David Jones (domj49@yahoo.co.uk) or call him on 01669 620436 – and let him know the dates you'd like to work on.

Trowels at the Tower

In late March CCA members and others went to Hepple Village Hall to hear about proposals for consolidating and stabilising Hepple Tower.

Jules Brown, from the North of England Civic Trust (NECT), talked about a programme they run called Trowels to the Rescue. They work closely with both English Heritage and local communities to manage buildings that are considered to be at risk. These are not buildings that have been deliberately neglected, but rather ones that are victims of circumstances – such as being the subject of planning constraints or general lack of funding. As well as Hepple Tower, they have identified a number of other buildings in the north-east, including St. Mary's church at Woodhorn, a stretch of the Durham castle walls and the Cleadon Chimney. Previous projects have included work on a monastic cell on Coquet Island, the remains of Newminster Abbey in Morpeth and a bastle at Evestones. Clearly, funding is a key requirement; in the past grants have come from English Heritage as well as the Heritage Lottery Fund and other bodies.

Peter Ryder then talked about the tower itself and its history.



Dating from the 14th century, and not strictly a pele tower, it was built when Hepple was a barony. Ownership passed down through generations of the Ogle family, but as early as 1541 it was described as being 'scarcely in good repair' – and things haven't really got any better.

A grade II* listed building, the remains are about 40 feet high; the interior walls are some eight feet thick and most of the tunnel vault is still intact. Now threatened by encroaching vegetation, there are signs of stone and pointing decay, although the mortar is sufficiently robust to have resisted past attempts to quarry the ruin for building stone. There are signs of some 'modern' repairs and over the years there appears to have been a succession of different buildings butted up against it.

Once lived in by humans (it may have looked like Tosson Tower), it now houses bats. As ecologist Claire Snowball described, these are protected species, so if you were thinking of buying or selling a bat, don't. It does mean that before any work can be done on the Tower there have to be surveys to establish the number and nature of the bats roosting there – and when work is carried out it must be at appropriate times and done in such a way that the bats have somewhere else to roost.

The next steps are to do these surveys and for NECT to investigate sources of funding. When this is in place, and it may take some time, they will engage specialist contractors and there will be opportunities for us to get involved and work alongside them. We'll keep you informed as the project develops.

Visiting Newminster Abbey

The Abbey was mentioned above, and although it's some way away, it's of interest to CCA because its monks were responsible for the mill at Barrowburn. What's left of the Abbey is on private land, but the owner was kind enough to invite a small group from CCA to visit the ruins to see if the stonework on the site looked anything like that in the wheel pit at the mill.

Although parts of the site were excavated in the 1960s and it's been surveyed since then, it is now very overgrown. A complicating factor is that there have been various attempts at what might politely be called aggressive restoration. The cloisters, for example, were almost entirely reconstructed in the early 20th century. In places, this work involved the use of imported masonry which confuses things still further.



However, other parts of the ruins have not been updated, such as the Abbot's lodgings.



The blocks at Newminster are not like those in the Barrowburn wheel pit. The Abbey sandstone has a definite russet tinge, like a lot of local material, while the blocks at the mill are of a distinctive blue/green hue. They must have come from different quarries, but where they are not covered by moss, the tooling on some of the Abbey blocks looks similar to that at the mill. We also looked for scratches on the blocks, like the possible assembly marks in the Barrowburn wheel pit. We didn't find any, but there were quite a few mason's marks and scratched crosses around the site.

