

Dates for your diary

Wednesday January 28th 7:30pm

Thropton Small Hall. John Nolan will bring us up to date on the 2014 results from the dig on the Hepden Burn site and David Jones will outline the final developments on the mill project.

Thursday February 12th 7:30pm

Thropton Small Hall. Dr. Kate Sharpe, from Durham University, will describe her work on rock art and the associated use of stone in the North-East, Cumbria and Yorkshire.

Wednesday March 25th 7:30pm

Thropton Small Hall. Dr. David Petts is from the Centre for Roman Cultural Studies at Durham University. He will talk about his work at the Roman fort of Binchester, where he runs the university's archaeology field school.

Thursday May 14th 7:30pm

The AGM. Thropton Main Hall.

We will be organising at least one further talk for the spring. We will also be scheduling a number of field trips, including visits to Blyth Battery, Bedlington and the ironworks, and the Cold War missile test site at Spadeadam.

Barrowburn 2014; Mill Update

In the August newsletter we described the final season at the mill. Since then we've closed the financial side of the project with HLF, although there's clearly more work to be done around archiving and publication. The first paper will appear in the 2014 edition of *Archaeologia Aeliana* and the second one, we hope, next year.

We were able to afford one more C14 test, and we used this on one of the two pegs found in the river in 2013.



Jacqui Huntley of English Heritage had identified this as most likely being of willow or poplar, 4 years old and with a bark edge. The 2 sigma calibrated dating was between AD 1190 and 1275, so it probably makes the peg contemporary with operations at the mill. While we can't be sure it was found in its original place, it is one more piece of evidence that there were wooden structures immediately upstream from the wheel pit.

Secondly, in the last newsletter we mentioned that we had entered the project for a Community Archaeology award operated by the Council for British Archaeology and the Marsh Trust. Well, we didn't win, but we were shortlisted and were highly commended.



The winner was an initiative from Cornwall where, working from old photographs and drawings, a community project rebuilt and restored the Carwynnen Quoit, a Neolithic dolmen and probable chamber tomb that had collapsed some 50 years ago. Three other projects - from London, Merseyside and Scotland - were also highly commended.

Border Roads Update

We are working with local authorities on both sides of the Border to generate lists of sites along the principal routes from the SMR or the equivalent. These will be very useful as an initial guide for walking groups. We've also spent time with the archivists at Woodhorn who have given

us initial advice on how we might structure our research. They have also kindly offered to run a half-day workshop for us in the New Year where they can go into more details and help us start. We're hoping that this will be around the end of January and we'll circulate details as soon as we have them. We should be able to handle up to 12 or 15 people.

Autumn talks

We've had some excellent speakers this autumn. Here we summarise two of the talks they gave – The David Dippie Dixon lectures by Clive Waddington, and Richard Carlton's talk on the 18th century waggonway found at North Shields.

With an audience of 100 people, probably our largest to date, in October Clive Waddington talked about the 2013 dig at Low Hauxley, one in which several CCA members took part.



Exploration of the site goes back some 30 years, when a team from Edinburgh excavated a cairn in the sand dunes behind the beach, finding flints and the remains of an inhumation. Subsequent digs found more human remains and beakers, while evidence from accelerating erosion showed that the site was a complex one, with activity from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age and later. Adding to the picture were the remains of human and animal footprints in peat beds on the beach, and a number of rectangular pits cut into the sandstone on that beach, whose function and date were unknown.



So in 2013 a large trench was opened up in the dunes, with its eastern edge abutting the beach. One objective was to investigate the remains of a cairn at that eastern edge.



When exposed, it was seen that the cairn had been built in a number of phases, being extended at least twice. Bone retrieved from a cist was dated to about 2400 BC and appears to be the remains of a youngster in an early Beaker burial.



Across the site a highly organised team worked with the diggers to retrieve and catalogue every piece of flint found. In all these totaled about 15,000, from the Mesolithic (maybe 8000 BC) to the Neolithic some 5000 years later. This is a Neolithic arrowhead from the 4th century BC.



Flint densities and faint scooped remains in the well-preserved stratigraphy provided evidence of Mesolithic dwellings and implied extensive use of the site over long periods. They may indicate that people were based in one location all year round, as opposed to leading a more transient and mobile lifestyle.

The hut scoops were around 30m² in size and were large enough to accommodate up to 8 people. Digging around them revealed other interesting objects – notably bevelled pebble tools and the remains of ochre.



Comparison with similar remains at other sites and with Inuit practices in North America hint at the possibility that these were used to help build boats, with the pebbles pounding and softening seal skins to form the hulls, and the ochre acting with pine resin as a caulking agent.

Settlement at the site was undoubtedly disrupted by the giant tsunami from the Storegga Slide in around 6200 BC. In this event, an underwater landslide off the Norwegian coast caused a massive wave that travelled across the embryonic North Sea; remains of this wave have been found in Scotland several metres above the current high tide mark and many miles inland. Clive believes the run-up in Northumberland would have been equivalent to a high tide six metres above normal. And although North Sea levels were rising at this stage, the disaster at least hastened the disappearance of Doggerland, the land bridge between Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands.

However, although catastrophic - with effects lasting for up to 1000 years - the damage was not permanent, and footprints on the beach show that humans had returned to the Hauxley area by about 5000 BC.



After that, human presence, although not perhaps continuous, was certainly frequent throughout the Neolithic, the Bronze Age and even later. At the back of the trench, away from the beach, the excavations uncovered an Iron Age hearth together with Roman-period paving and Samian ware. The paving had probably been made by robbing suitable stones from the cairns nearer the beach.



And that wasn't the end of it. Those rectangular holes in the beach turned out to be the remains of medieval or post-medieval coal pits dug before the sea was high enough to cover them at high tide. Miners had hacked down through the soft sandstone to reach coal deposits underneath, and then worked outwards, as in a bell pit. In one case they'd even left their mark on the pit wall.



Hauxley has turned out to be an immensely complex and interesting site. Although it has been comprehensively restored, coastal erosion is a constant threat and is currently proceeding at up to one metre a year. Local volunteers patrol the area regularly looking for more material being washed out of the cliff, and Clive and his team have been back on several occasions to carry out further explorations.

Finally, there's now a book about the site available, with a launch at the Great North Museum on December 3rd. Full details can be found at www.nwt.org.uk/rfts-book, and the book can be bought there too.

The Neptune Waggonway

In 2013 Richard Carlton undertook a rescue project at the Neptune ship repair yard in North Shields, prior to the site being redeveloped. It was thought that there might be Roman remains there, given that the yard is near Wallsend and next to Segodunum (as this picture shows, with the yard in the middle distance).



Trenches were dug at various locations on the site, mainly along its NE and NW edges, away from the remains of old dry docks by the river. Walls were found early on in the dig, and these seemed to be along the line of boundaries shown in maps dating back to the 1850s.

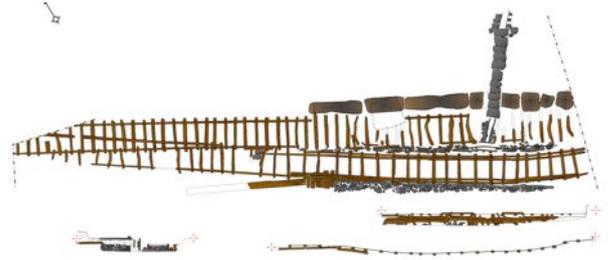
Towards the end of the planned dig, however, wooden structures started to emerge below the level of the tops of the walls, and further work exposed the remains of timber rails.



As excavations proceeded, a much more complex system was uncovered.



A plan of this shows the two tracks – the main way (at the top of the picture) and the siding – together with timber revetments, some pits along the north side of the main way and a drain leading north from the lower siding.

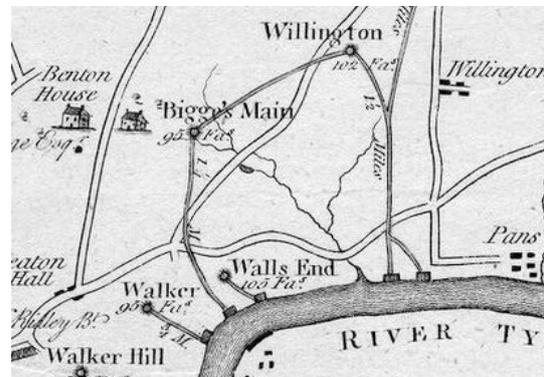


This siding, served by the drain, was probably used as a wash pond to both clean the waggon wheels and stop them drying out with the heat accumulated after the descent towards the river.

Cobbled surfaces would have made the going easier for horses, but the function of the pits at the edge of the main way remains a mystery.

Many of the timbers that form the waggonway are reused ships timbers, probably bought so as to minimise construction costs. Some of the rails were doubled, with one on top of the other, to make the track more resilient.

Richard's interpretation of the site, working from old maps and other evidence, is that the original main way was built along an existing boundary in the 1780s and was used to bring coal down to staiths on the river from pits to the north such as Bigge's Main and Willington. This map from 1788 shows a waggonway linking these two pits and leading down to the river.



The siding was an addition and was probably abandoned while the main way was still in use.

But the most important aspect of the site is its gauge – which is about 4 feet 8 inches. The Killingworth waggonway is remembered as the railway where the standard gauge of 4' 8½" had its origins. But its gauge, which determined the gauge of George Stephenson's locomotives, originated with an earlier 18th century line from Walker Hill to Wincomblee. This gauge was also used on the Willington waggonway which Stephenson linked to and copied for Killingworth. So the discovery of part of the waggonway in the Neptune yard makes it the earliest surviving example in the world of the use of the standard gauge.