

### Dates for your diary

**Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup> 2:00pm** A tour of Bedlington and the ironworks, led by Barry Mead who talked to us about this a year or so ago. Meet at the car park at the bottom of Furnace Bank, Bedlington Station (off Stead Lane). Let Chris Butterworth know if you are coming (01669 621955)

**Thursday May 14<sup>th</sup> 7:30pm** The AGM. Thropton Main Hall. Our guest speaker will be Roger Miket who will talk about the Castles of the Western Isles. Refreshments will be provided.

**Saturday May 16<sup>th</sup> 10:30am** A visit to Spadeadam led by Phil Abramson, the MoD archaeologist. Still an active RAF station, the site was used in the Cold War as a rocket test site, with static firing facilities for the Blue Streak missile.

In the autumn, Barry Mead will be talking to us on September 24<sup>th</sup>, while Vince Gaffney, who is now Professor of Landscape Archaeology at the University of Bradford, will be giving the David Dippie Dixon lectures on October 18<sup>th</sup>.

### Hepden, I'm in Hepden

Not Fred Astaire or Ginger Rogers, I'm afraid, but this year's dig at Hepden— continuing the investigation from last year but also starting work on at least one other site in the area.

At the site by the burn behind the farm, where we've been working for a number of seasons, we plan to uncover yet more of the structure to try to get a complete understanding of its overall shape and to determine the construction sequences and what each one consisted of. We will also be investigating more of the floor that appears to lie under the main cobbling – to find out how extensive it was, possibly date it and to see if the building we've been dealing with so far – at least parts of which are probably 17<sup>th</sup> century – was constructed on the footprint of an earlier site.

Further upstream there's another, smaller, rectangular structure by the burn. With a clear entrance (on the right in the picture), it is divided into two rooms or compartments, with

what may be a doorway between them. There's visible stonework in the walls, and there's also another wall leading away from it that *may* be part of an enclosure.



The temptation is to say that it's residential, but there's no visible sign of a hearth or other evidence of habitation, and the only way to tell will be through excavation.

The dig will run from Thursday July 16<sup>th</sup> to Sunday July 26<sup>th</sup> inclusive with, as usual, a rest day on Tuesday July 21<sup>st</sup>. If you would like to dig (or draw, or log finds, or photograph etc.) please contact David Jones (01669 620436 or [domj49@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:domj49@yahoo.co.uk)) and let him know the dates you would like to come. Work will start at around 10am each day and finish between 4pm and 5pm depending on weather, progress and the number of bacon rolls consumed at lunchtime. Do come for as many or as few days as you would like.

### Membership Secretary

We are looking for someone to take on the role of Membership Secretary. The job involves maintaining a list of CCA members (currently about 100), issuing new members with joining material, keeping track of when subscriptions are due, issuing reminders (almost all by e-mail) and passing subscriptions to the Treasurer. If you're interested or would like more information, please contact Chris Butterworth (01669 621955 and [c.butterworth@btinternet.com](mailto:c.butterworth@btinternet.com)) or Janice Henney (01669 650228 and [j.henney@homecall.co.uk](mailto:j.henney@homecall.co.uk)).

## CCA on the Web

We have not had an active web site for some time, but we're in the process of putting that right. The new site is at [www.coquetdalearchaeology.org/](http://www.coquetdalearchaeology.org/). We're still putting the final touches to it, but maintaining it should be easier than it was for the previous one, and we hope that it will become a useful way for people to find out what we're doing and to contact the group.

## Border Roads Update

We've now had two walks for people who want to get involved in walking the roads. It's clear that the use of Google Earth, the HER database and OS maps of varying ages will be helpful in determining what's of interest along the routes. Walkers are getting together on May 8<sup>th</sup> to discuss next steps.

In a similar vein, archive researchers are using the web and records at Woodhorn and elsewhere to uncover some of the history behind the Border Roads – who lived at which farms, what schools and churches did they go to, who owned the farms and so on.

And we've started work on designing the web site for the project. While in the fullness of time the book and the walking guides will carry the key information about the Roads, it's likely that the web site will be the ultimate repository for everything we find.

## Holystone Priory

It's always been known that there was an Augustinian priory at Holystone. It may have been founded as early as the 12th century; it was initially a wealthy organisation, owning land locally as far afield as Newcastle and Roxburgh, but by the time it was dissolved in 1536 there were only 8 nuns left.

Stones from the abandoned priory were clearly used locally; some can be seen in buildings in Holystone itself, while others may have been used in one of the periodic rebuilds of Harbottle Castle. The only visible remnant of the structure itself was the building that became the parish church, and even this was, to put it mildly, extensively restored in the 1840s.



Although medieval grave covers were incorporated in the church's walls (see above) and traces of other walls have been found in the graveyard, north of the church, the precise position of the priory and its layout were lost.

In 2005 and 2007, geophysics surveys organised by the Holystone History and Archaeology Group (HHAG) showed nothing really tangible, but the remains of walls kept showing up in new graves, and in 2014 HHAG was generously offered access to a ground penetrating radar system; this showed some interesting features on the south side of the church – a wall and possibly some cobbling.

Permission to dig was granted, and with the help of a grant from the National Park and financial support from CCA a team was assembled, largely of Holystone residents. Directed by Richard Carlton, they dug for 5 days in March, opening (and closing) by hand three substantial trenches that revealed a complex history.

The first trench, at the south-west corner of the church, uncovered a masonry doorpost abutting the external wall and at least two different floor levels at a depth of over one metre – substantially below that of the current building. Bolt-holes in the wall showed where the door had been, and how it was related to the current church structure.



A second trench, this time leading away from the central part of the church and opposite the remains of a blocked-up doorway, revealed walls and a large cross slab grave cover, the biggest yet found in the church yard at over two metres long. This was lying directly in front of the old door, and some of its decoration, including the head of the cross (at the bottom of the picture), had been worn away, probably through the wear and tear of people walking over it.



The trench also uncovered a drain or cundy running parallel with the church. It was well preserved and still fairly clear in places, especially towards the east. It wasn't obvious if it was contemporary with the priory or of later construction, but it seemed to be quite well integrated with the walls.

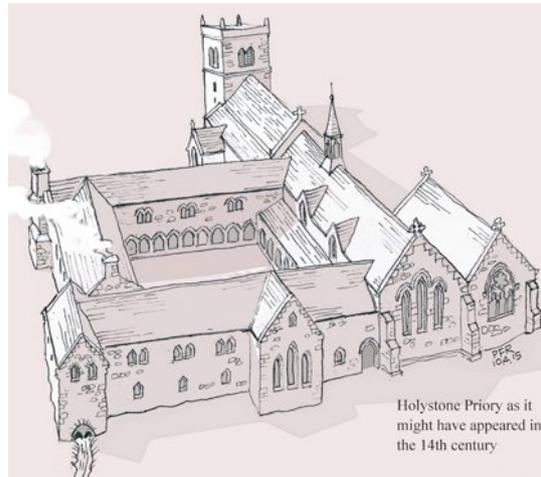


Inspection (a polite way of saying the dig director stuck his head into it) showed that it extended at least as far as the third trench, which was opened up at the south-east corner of the church, and which revealed yet further systems of walls. As the picture below shows, these were very substantial and seemed in places to contain the remains of at least one window opening.



It's clear that HHAG has discovered the remains of a substantial building close to and almost certainly integrated with the medieval (now rebuilt) structure that became the current parish church. Apart from a lot of bone fragments, mostly human and already disturbed, there were very few small finds, indicating that the remains may have been part of a religious structure – perhaps a cloister – rather than a busy residential one. It is possible that the living area was further to the south and nearer the burn, maybe under an overgrown area that covers the site of a row of farm cottages that are shown on the 1866 Ordnance Survey map but which seem to have almost completely vanished by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although at least one photograph of them survives.

No signs of burning were found, which suggests that the priory may not have been destroyed, but rather abandoned to robbery and decay. But as a contrast, Peter Ryder has reconstructed what it may have looked like in its heyday



Holystone Priory as it might have appeared in the 14th century

## Derwentcote Forge Cottages

In April, Rob Young of English Heritage gave us an excellent overview of recent archaeological work carried out in the former workers' cottages near Derwentcote Steel Furnace in County Durham. Our forge correspondent, John Herbert, writes:

The site was surveyed in the 1980s by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments and some excavation work was carried out by Time Team in association with Wessex Archaeology in 2010 (the report is available online at [http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/system/files/74157\\_Derwentcote.pdf](http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/system/files/74157_Derwentcote.pdf)). The present excavation started in 2013 and is being led by Jane Webster of Newcastle University as a student training exercise in association with English Heritage.

Derwentcote Furnace itself is a long-standing English Heritage-conserved site, being one of the earliest blister steel furnaces in Europe.



First mentioned in 1569, in an early example of industrial espionage the site was recorded in a report by the Swedish spy Henry Kalmeter in 1719. (The Swedes were prone to a bit of spying in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; in the 1750s Reinhold Angerstein was paid by the Swedish Association of Iron Masters for precisely this purpose. He visited England to report on developing technology, and was reportedly driven out of Sheffield for being too nose-y).

Over time, the furnace gradually became surrounded by a millpond, millrace, workers' cottages and coalmines, and was rebuilt several times with the present structure dating to between 1719 and 1742. The workers' cottages were occupied until 1947, initially by forge workers and later by colliers. There are considerable standing remains although much of the structure has collapsed, with one section of wall having fallen outwards in a single section, complete with an intact sash window.

The cottages form a multi-period site. They probably started life as a stone-built open-fronted agricultural building; later brick infill eventually converted this into four cottages, of which three have been excavated so far. Later

lean-to extensions at the rear of the structure appear to have been used principally for storage, with items found including stocks of bagged cement, pantiles and sash weights. Outside the building, neatly laid paths of concrete and of reused brick remain, with a 16<sup>th</sup> century coin from the fill adjacent to one of the paths being one of the few small finds. The remains of vegetable gardens are also apparent amongst the trees nearby but have not been investigated.



The three cottages have distinctly different characters, possibly reflecting the activities of different occupants. The first (end) cottage is entered by a door cut through the original stonework. The fallen rubble contained much of the pantiled roof (matching those on the steel furnace), overlaying a mortared floor. Removal of the rubble led to the discovery of a nearly-intact *Pantheon* hob grate fireplace (dated to 1779-1803) inserted into the earlier outside wall. Its 12" flue is also consistent with a late 18<sup>th</sup> century date. Within the mortar of the floor, a drain was identified, whose covering "stones" included reused crucible lids and roof tiles.

The second cottage appeared to have been built to a slightly higher standard with stone roof tiles identified in the rubble. In this case, some if not all of the interior walls were plastered and the floor was made of neatly laid good quality quarry tiles. The large fireplace originally built onto the earlier stone wall had quite obviously been infilled in stages with colliery bricks; this appears to coincide with the construction of a thin brick partition wall, which subdivided the room into two to create the third cell.

Excavation of this third cell is not complete at this point but removal of rubble and pantiles has exposed a round oven of a type common in 19<sup>th</sup> century pit cottages. Oddly, only a small portion of the floor appears to have been surfaced with the remainder being of bare earth. On the other hand, this is the only unit where the remains of ceiling plaster, with lath marks still in place, was found and is unclear why this is the case.

Work on this site is expected to continue during 2015 and the site is open for the public to visit.