

Dates for your diary

Tuesday 8th October 7:30pm Venue TBA. Barry Mead will describe the excavations and clearance work at the old Bedlington Iron Works, which closed in 1857 but whose remains can still be seen around the River Blyth.

Sunday 20th October 2:30pm Rothbury Jubilee Hall. Paul Frodsham will give the 2013 David Dippie Dixon lectures. Many of you will know Paul for his help in defining the CCA research agenda. Going even further back, it was his talk to the History Society some 10 years ago on the centenary of the publication of *Upper Coquetdale* that instigated the National Park project that eventually became CCA. Paul is now with the North Pennines AONB, running a project called Altogether Archaeology which brings together professionals and volunteers to investigate the area's archaeological heritage.

Wednesday 13th November 7:30pm Thropton Memorial Hall (small hall). Peter Rowley-Conwy will talk on Mesolithic sites in the Western Isles. Peter is an anthropologist, and is Professor of Archaeology at Durham University.

The Hadrian's Wall Trust

In June, Nigel Mills, the World Heritage & Access Director at the Hadrian's Wall Trust, came and gave us a fascinating talk on the challenges faced in managing the Wall.

Not only is it a World Heritage site in its own right, but it's part of the Frontiers of Roman Empire World Heritage Site as well – a grouping that includes the Antonine Wall and the *limes* barriers – which predominantly remain in modern Germany, but which were also built in places like Dacia, Romania and Moldavia.

The scale of Hadrian's Wall is substantial. Over 100 miles long (from South Shields to Ravenglass) a band 10 miles on either side of it takes in a million residents, one National Park, two Special Landscapes, 12 local authorities, 300 landowners and 11 sites and museums. This area, known as Hadrian's Wall Country, gets 3.5 million overnight visitors a year, with an annual

spend of something like £900 million. The main sites attract a million visitors a year, and activity is growing steeply.

Clearly, this is a major economic driver for the area, but one that needs to be managed very carefully. The Trust's goals include not only the protection of the site, but promoting the understanding of it and developing it in a sustainable fashion.



This means spreading the visitor load by ensuring that different sites have different themes and tell different parts of the story – so the Roman Army Museum is different from Vindolanda, which is different from Segundum – and so on.

And as well as the specific visitor attractions, the trail itself is a visitor magnet; 12,000 people walk it from end to end every year, weaving their way through the casual walkers, who make about 500,000 outings. Volunteers continually monitor the condition of the track, and the Trust tries to spread the load as much as possible – by, for example, mowing wide sections so that people don't walk along a narrow strip.



Nigel gave us a really interesting insight into an often unappreciated aspect of Hadrian's Wall.

Barrowburn 2013

The complaint about the weather this year was that it was too hot – with 11 days of constant sun, and the river as low as it's been for several years. We packed over 150 days of work into the 10 days of the dig – and thanks go to everyone who braved the heat and the flies.

The Mill

At the mill site, with Tom Mason's help, we opened up a larger trench than in 2012. Measuring 9m x 6m, the main extensions were upstream and away from the river – and both bore fruit.

Upstream, as hoped, we found a wall to match the downstream one uncovered last year. This one, however, was much longer; it extended for the whole 6m of the trench, with a short return at the end away from the river, and a possible upstream return at the river end.



For much of its length, only one course is still standing, although there are two or three nearer the river. There was, however, a lot of tumble just downstream from the wall – as if it had fallen in that direction or been pushed over.

It's possible that this was not the wall of a mill building. It's not very robust, and if the short length of wall we found downstream last year is part of the other wall, then the building would have been about 8 x 6 metres – which is very large. It may be that these were in fact perimeter walls, built to keep stock away from the fulling machinery, which might have been in the open air or inside some smaller lightweight structure of which no trace remains.

The second discovery was that of a revetment along what was probably an old riverbank.



We had seen parts of the top of this last year. It's clearly artificial, and while obviously not of the same quality as the wheel pit, it seems to have done its job of supporting the old bank and protecting the working area below.

It's an important find because its position gives us a strong clue about the configuration of the fulling machinery. The return on the left of the picture is about 0.6m upstream from where we calculate the wheel shaft was positioned, so the fulling stocks and hammers must have been positioned downstream from the shaft. This is how they are sometimes shown in post-medieval pictures of fulling mills, but we know of no illustration of any mill as early as Barrowburn.

It's also worth pointing out that although we found the base of the revetment, there was no floor at that level, which is where you might expect it to be. With all the water involved in fulling, a stone floor of some sort would probably be desirable, so perhaps it was taken up when the mill was abandoned, or stolen later.

As well as these structures in the pit, we found quite a lot of mostly medieval pottery. Perhaps the most striking example is this piece of a handle from a jug. Initially dated as 14th century, it may be contemporary with the established mill, and at 12cm long certainly came from a large vessel.



Another interesting find was that of a medieval copper alloy key. Some time ago, unaware of the mill, BT laid a conduit through what became the roadside part of our trench. It cuts through the wall described earlier, and this key was found in the soil between the two plastic tubes that shield the communications lines.

Coming from quite near where we found two coins last year, it seems likely that the key was hidden in the spoil when BT cut their trench – and then went back into it as backfill.



About 10cm long, it's in pretty good condition with just some slight damage at the end of the hollow shaft; the bit is quite complicated. Rob Collins from the Portable Antiquities Scheme has confirmed that it's medieval, but without a real context he can only say that it probably dates from between 1200 AD and 1500 AD.

We don't know, of course, if it was directly linked with the mill, or dropped by a visitor or passing traveler.

Finally, on the finds front, some pieces of wood were retrieved from the river – opposite the large baulk in the bank above the entry to the pit, but nearly 2 metres out into the river from it. One piece was a length of cut and shaped oak about 20cm long, while another was what looks like a small fastening peg. This may also be oak; Jacqui Huntley from English Heritage will tell us.



Again, we don't know what these were for – they could be the remains of a control gate across the mouth of the pit, or else part of a leat that fed water into it.

Like last year, we continued to find charcoal-rich areas, mainly around the line of the wheel shaft. The fragments are mainly very small, but thanks to English Heritage last year's finds have been identified as predominantly the remains of young hazel and birch. This means that C14 dating will give us a good idea of when any burning occurred, and a candidate sample of 5 year old hazel has been identified. Incineration could be the result of the mill's destruction, from later campfires, or even from a fire heating water for fulling. The fact that we're finding no oak charcoal and only a few fragments of ash may imply that the mill machinery itself was not burnt; we'll keep you posted on developments.

The three years at the mill have been very productive; we've been working on one of the best-preserved medieval fulling mill sites in the country. But as with almost every archaeological project there are still questions to be answered. We need to do more work to characterise the ends of the wall we found this year. And just upstream from it we found the beginnings of another paved area. Further investigations are probably needed around the line of the wheel shaft, where we found metal fragments last year. It's not clear when we'll be able to do this, but we may be able to manage at least some of it with smaller excavations.

Hepden Burn

This site grows in complexity every time work is done on it. It now seems likely that there has been activity here for hundreds of years.

Most recently, perhaps even in the 19th or early 20th century, there was quarrying in the hillside above the site – perhaps for material for roads or for infilling dry-stone walls. There's quarry debris along one side of the structure we're investigating, and this sort of activity might account for the large horseshoe found last year, as well as the curved track down to the site.

Before that, the structure clearly went through several phases. The area that has had most attention – the end nearest Barrowburn farm – shows further evidence for late 17th or early 18th century activity associated with the dry-stone walled structure discovered last year, with an unusually high number of dateable clay tobacco pipe fragments. Some are by Gateshead pipemakers, and one could be Scottish - possibly from Edinburgh. These may have been sold by, or even smoked at the site, by pedlars or other itinerants. Definitely a site rich in social activity, this year we even found a fragment of a 17th century glass drinking vessel.

Several unexplained discontinuities mean that further investigation will be needed to find out what happened at the site after that. The clay tobacco pipes and other finds suggest re-use and perhaps re-modelling in the later 17th century.



Reinforcing this conclusion, a piece of possibly earlier clay pipe was found actually underlying the dry-stone wall.

There are signs, however, that any repairs or developments that took place at this stage may have been to a building that was already old. Last year diggers found traces of another, earlier, wall underlying the one now known to date from the late 17th century. This year, further work revealed a well-laid paved floor which appears to be bounded on the south by that earlier wall, and on the west by another running north-south and again underlying the late 17th century structure.

Here's a picture of the floor emerging



and here's a close up of part of it



It's quite likely that this is of sufficiently high quality to be residential, and given the chequered history of the area it's possible to make some guesses about how old it is.

We know that in 1542 Sir Robert Bowes and Sir Ralph Elleker surveyed the area and described Kidland as '*great waste ground*', and said that no-one lived there permanently, even though they could have the land for free, because the dangers were '*so great and manyfest*'. This condition probably continued until James I succeeded to the English crown in 1603. It doesn't sound like an environment in which someone would have incentives to put down a nice piece of flooring – so it could either be very early 17th century or have its origins in the late medieval period, before the Anglo-Scottish troubles really took hold. We won't know until future investigation turns up something that can be dated.

The Hauxley Alp...

...or Rescued from the Sea.

This is a dig you should go and see before it closes down in around the third week of August – partly because of its scale (the main spoil heap is 50 feet high) and there is room for several tennis courts in the main trench but mostly because of the richness of what's being found.



With its main focus as a rescue dig on a Bronze Age cairn that was being eroded by the sea – with burials emerging from the cliff by the beach and being destroyed, the project is also helping paint a picture of the landscape through the ages.

As well as the cairn itself, there are the remains of a Romano-British house with several hearths around it, and a paved area or yard. It's tempting to think that this was built as somewhere to enjoy the sea view – but its real function was probably more mundane.

Down on the foreshore there are over 100 human and animal footprints in a peat deposit that may well be Mesolithic. There are also dozens of puzzling rectangular pits cut into the sandstone on the beach; excavation of one of them indicates it was probably a medieval coal pit, opened up when the sea level was slightly lower. A worker who cut through the stone has even carved an 'X' in the side of one of the pits.

In the low cliffs at the back of the beach you can see the deposits that describe the history of the area from the end of the last glaciation. There are layers that yield Mesolithic and Neolithic flints, but perhaps most striking is a thick deposit of debris that may well be the signature of the Storegga event – a massive landslide off the Norwegian coast just over 8000 years ago that resulted in a tsunami several metres high hitting the coast of Scotland and Northern England.

You get to the site by parking at the Hauxley Nature Reserve and walking south for about 10 minutes. Just look for the mountain.