

Swaledale Big Dig

Newsletter #4 June/July 2014

Once again I can report that a lot has happened since the last Newsletter earlier this month.

We aim to engage as many people as possible in uncovering the history and development of the area; to help achieve this we are offering a programme of free walks addressing a wide range of history-linked walks. This got underway on Tuesday 27th May during the Swaledale Festival when 16 people subscribed to the free walk led on behalf of the Big Dig by Peter Denison-Edson. This walk was designed to be accessible for people of limited mobility or energy, and consisted of standing outside Reeth School and discussing everything one can see in the landscape from a fixed point. The location is accessible to people who can only walk a short distance, and to Mobility scooters, and the Community bus brought those who could not manage unaided.

Our work continued on Friday 6th June when we dug another test pit on Reeth Green also as part of the Swaledale Festival. The displays in our newly acquired tent attracted a large number of visitors, particularly as it was a Friday, Reeth Market day.



The Swaledale Festival pit

The Swaledale & Arkengarthdale Archaeology Group is a Registered Charity No. 1155775

Two members also led Festival walks on that day and brought the groups over to the pit and the tent to see what was going on and view the displays. Once again we were blessed with the weather; the day was great success not only in terms of visitor engagement but also with the wide range of finds uncovered.



Our work with local schools continued in early June. On 9th & 12th June 27 children from Reeth/Gunnerside School, 17 from Arkengarthdale and 6 from Richmond Methodist School took part in a range of activities including digging further test pits on Reeth Green, investigating the history of the area in Reeth Museum, learning about the geology of the area and exploring the social history of Reeth and its development.

Left: Judith with a group on the “Buildings tell stories” walk studying vernacular buildings.



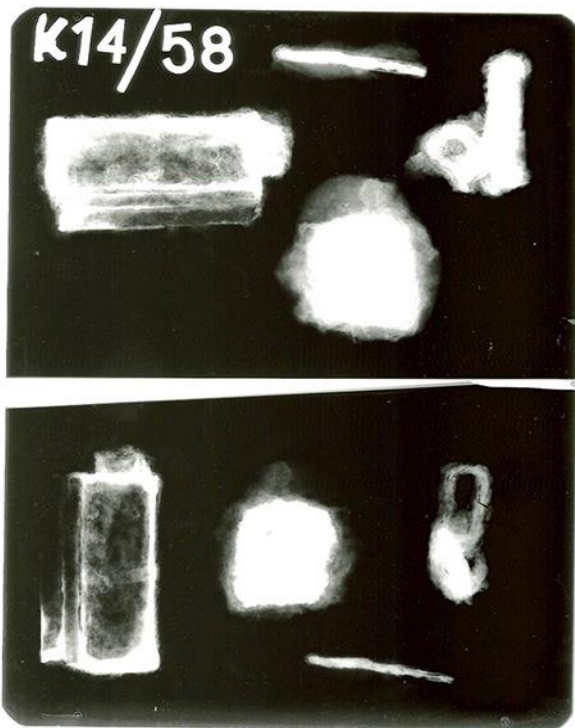
The School assembles on Reeth Green ready to attack the test pit!

The second of our Big Dig weekends took place in Reeth on 21st/22nd June. Over the weekend we dug six pits, once again in glorious weather, and over 200 people visited the tent and the pit on the Green. All of the test pits yielded interesting finds; even the one with only two pieces of pot did not disappoint since one was medieval, around 13th/14th C whilst the other piece of grey ware has been identified as probably Roman! Perhaps the first pre-Conquest find for the Big Dig!



Local resident Ann Bain and Philip Bastow begin work on the pit in Anvil Square.
Sunday 22nd June

Some recent finds



In the last Newsletter we reported that a medieval barrel lock had been found in one of the pits in the centre of Reeth. In the same context were three other pieces of heavily corroded metal. These four finds have all been x-rayed; see image to left.

The x-ray confirms the barrel lock which will now be conserved. The other finds are a nail, a piece of iron slag, possibly suggesting metal working on the site, and a section of chain. The latter will be conserved too.

In addition, four very small pieces of gold leaf, about 1.5mm square were also found. These might have come from decoration on some other as yet unfound item.



17th C green glaze redware
Anvil Square



Above, 17th C pot or cup handle
Anvil Square



13th/14th C Tees Valley ware
Buck Hotel

We plan to have the all the finds identified and dated after we have completed this season's digging of test pits. We will then have a presentation in Reeth of what we have found so far, probably in late October or November.

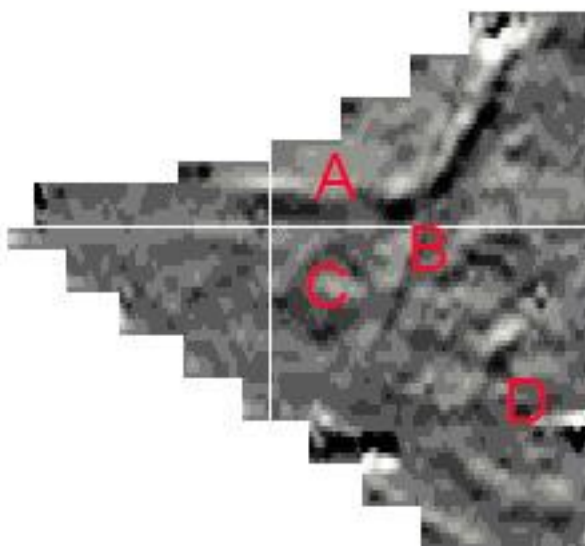
We will also have a finds training day at around the same time. Details later.

Geophysics

On Wednesday 18th June we carried a resistivity survey of part of Reeth Green. The 'raw' data is shown below. The line of high resistance "B" is perhaps the track shown on the 1912 OS map, appearing to run across the Green from the water pump in the bottom left of the image to the pump (not shown) in the top right. The linear feature "A" might perhaps be a stone water course or maybe the remains of a wall? "C" & "D" are clearer on the processed relief image below.



< 30m >



The image to the left has been produced with the geophys processing software Snuffler (yes, it really is called that!). It has been interpolated, de-spiked, clipped and turned into a relief image to highlight features. One of our archaeologists suggests that this is reminiscent of an Iron Age landscape. "A" might be a boundary wall whilst "C" might be small paddock about 8m square and "D" might be a larger enclosure. At this stage we are simply speculating. Hopefully one day we will find out!

nb the 30m scale applies to both images.

Forthcoming events

Saturday 19th July & Sunday 20th July, the 3rd Big Dig weekend, again in Reeth as part of the CBA Festival of Archaeology. Do join in!

We will contact all those who kindly offered space to dig regarding what we propose, who will do it and how, and when is convenient to you.

Big Dig Free Walks Programme:

(i) 26th August 2014 Explore Swaledale's Geology

A three to four hour moderate walk along the upper Swale valley and Swinner Gill to Swinner Gill Kirk and Hind Hole. The walk will focus on the geology of the Dales and how, over time, that geology had led to the scenery that we see today. We will see and examine examples of the differing rock types, strata, faults, and fossils. Contact david@swaag.org Meet 0945am Keld Car Park.

(ii) 27th August 2014 Explore Swaledale's History and Archaeology

A day long walk exploring the history and archaeology of Swaledale. The walk will visit Maiden Castle and explore the Iron Age and Bronze Age landscape of Harkerside. The walk is in part moderately difficult. Contact peter@swaag.org Meet 0945am, Bus shelter, north end of Reeth Green.

(iii) 28th August 2014 Discover Swaledale's Historic Environment

A day long walk exploring the history and archaeology of Swaledale. The walk will climb Fremington Edge from where there are spectacular views of the Dale, and take in as it goes the archaeology of the Dale. We will pass the enigmatic Jabz Cave, the Fremington - Grinton Dykes and visit the abandoned chert quarries. The walk is moderate to difficult. Contact david@swaag.org Meet 0945am, bus shelter north end of Reeth Green.

(iv) 29th August 2014 Explore Grinton's Mining Heritage

A half-day walk exploring aspects of the historic mining landscape in the Grinton Moor area including medieval bales, hushes, levels, the well preserved smelt mill and its flue. A leisurely walk of approximately 4 miles; allow 3 hours. Contact alan@swaag.org Meet 10am in the layby at NGR SE04895 96872 to the east of the narrow bridge over Cogden Beck on the Grinton/Leyburn Road.

For all walks: Participants should bring drinks and snacks, wear suitably stout footwear and carry clothing to suit all weathers. Free. No dogs please.

9th September at the Buck Hotel, Reeth, 7pm

Mike Harken, a member of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society will visit us and give a presentation on his work cataloguing the Roman roads of Yorkshire. He has begun work with SWAAG members as part of the Big Dig Project to investigate the putative road from Bainbridge across Swaledale. The evening is open to all and there is no charge. Note that the meeting will be held in the large downstairs room at the Buck. Contact david@swaag.org



Isabel Lundberg and Ellen Atkinson taking part in the Arkengarthdale Sports Day, fancy dress competition.

Later in the year we will begin work in Fremington and Grinton. We aim to begin geophysical surveys in these two villages later this year with test-pitting in 2015.

Also later in the year we will continue with our programme of free courses.

The “Interpreting aerial photographs and Lidar images” course will run as 2 x 2 hour evening sessions, probably on 4th & 18th September in Reeth.

We are also planning a further course in undertaking documentary research which will address how to find documents, how to interpret them, what information is in different categories of documents and reading old hand writing. The course will address Ecclesiastical, Fiscal, Feudal and Estate records all of which are very relevant to investigating the history of our settlements. This will be 4 x 2hr evening sessions probably beginning in late September.

Further details of these two courses to follow when dates are confirmed with both speakers.

Summary.

The project is progressing very well indeed.

So far we have dug 19 test pits in Reeth, including last year's two trial pits, with a large number of interesting finds. We have yet to date the bulk of the finds but it already seems that we are finding very little from the Late Medieval period, 14th - 16thC. This might suggest that the area was hard hit by the Black Death; we will be able to say more when we have dated more finds.

Our work with the Schools has been a great success and very enjoyable. We look forward to working with Richmond Methodist Primary next year.

The project has stimulated a large amount of interest, particularly since we bought the new tent and used it to house displays on the Green. We logged over 170 visitors to the tent over last weekend with others visiting the test pit in Anvil Square; over 200 in total.

We do have a number of pits still to dig in Reeth and could do with more people to help including for the 19th/20th July weekend. If you are able to help in any way, not just digging (which is less strenuous than it sounds) but also in sieving, recording, moving buckets etc then please do get in touch.

How you can get involved

There are many opportunities for all to become involved in the Big Dig. If you are interested and able to participate in any of the following activities please contact the person shown:

Test-pitting, Rob Nicholson: rob@swaag.org

or Philip Bastow: philip@swaag.org

Surveying incl geophys, Stephen Eastmead : stephen@swaag.org

or Mike Walton: mike@swaag.org

Documentary research Ann Russell: ann@swaag.org

or Judith Mills: judith@swaag.org

General enquiries to bigdig@swaag.org

If you are interested in some other aspect of history (eg family history, vernacular buildings etc) then we can put you in touch with relevant groups; if you are interested in archaeology generally then please join SWAAG (see the website) !



Pupils from Reeth/Gunnerside School on their dig day

All the photos from the School Days and Dig Days are available on the SWAAG website at <http://sbd.swaag.org>



This is the QR code for the photo album website. Use an app such as QR droid on your smartphone to take you straight there.

You can follow the progress of the Swaledale Big Dig on Twitter @SwaledaleDig

If you do not use Twitter then the Twitter feeds are displayed on the SWAAG website and also on the Reeth Memorial Hall site at <http://www.reethmemorialhall.co.uk/> under the Regular Users tab.

This is the QR code for the SWAAG website www.swaag.org



Best wishes

Alan Mills
25th June 2014