

Swaledale Big Dig

Newsletter no.5, August 2014

Once again I can report that a lot has happened since Newsletter 4.

This year's activities with the local schools concluded with two events. I took the Key Stage 2 pupils on a walk around Arkengarthdale to look at the local lead mining heritage. We visited the Booze Wood Level (not in!) and Crushing Mill and then walked up Sleil Gill to look at the geology and view the great hushes which tore their way down the hillside. The children were genuinely interested to learn more about what is all around them.



Arkengarthdale KS2 pupils drawing Booze Wood Crushing Mill

A few days later Sue Nicholson also visited Arkengarthdale School. The KS2 pupils did a timeline exercise going back to 1659 when Dr John Bathurst founded the original school, talked a bit about Cromwell and his Puritan ways (Bathurst was his Physician), then looked at various inspectors' reports through time and the threatened closure in 1968.

The children then read quotations from the headteacher's Log Books from 1875 to 1943 and talked about what has changed over the years. The biggest difference was that in its heyday there were up to 239 children at the school. They were also fascinated by the Pupil Teacher scheme, where 13 year olds could be apprenticed to a teacher (and help out with the teaching at a nominal rate). Lastly they had a very careful handling session of the original documents and some random readings. They were all very engaged and seemed to remember a lot of detail.

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

The July Big Dig weekend in Reeth

Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th July saw our 3rd Big Dig weekend take place in Reeth. This coincided with the Council for British Archaeology Festival of Archaeology. Despite the often heavy rain on Saturday in particular we managed to complete a further 6 test pits and the exhibition in the tent on the Green attracted 113 visitors, mostly on Sunday when the weather improved.



Brian Cherry's tent provided welcome shelter for those digging in his garden!

We take the test pits down in 10cm "spits", photographing the exposed surface. We include small white boards in each photo, showing the test pit and context number written on using a dry-wipe pen. Not such a good idea in the rain!

The photo below from <http://sbd.swaag.org/#!/album-43> shows an alternative approach to labelling the white board when the marker pen and board get wet and will not write; the novel form of "digital recording" is inspired!

For a full set of test pit images see <http://sbd.swaag.org/#!/home>



Digital recording - the 'digits' indicate context 4 !!

As usual, we recovered a large number of finds, mostly pottery. These will be analysed in due course by our pottery expert, Jenny Vaughan, and summarized in a later newsletter with a full report at our end of year event in November.

The photo below shows an interesting piece of pot, or rather two from the same piece. Provisionally identified as Northern Reduced Greenware, probably 16thC, this might have come from the medieval kiln at Healey, nr Masham, about 20 miles away.



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Above, Barney Charlton wonders how to get out of the pit in his garden! His mum says that Barney has now started his own little pit in the garden!!

Recently I completed a course with free on-line course with Leicester University entitled “The Life & Times of Richard III”. This was offered by Future Learn; see <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/upcoming> for a list of forthcoming courses which includes one on Hadrian’s Wall. Despite the title, my course was mainly about life in medieval times.

In medieval times people tended to drink beer or ale rather than water but nonetheless drank water if a clean supply was available. Apparently the provision of a clean “piped” water supply to a town or household was often a priority, sometimes seen as a public good. An amazing system of conduits conveyed clean water from out of town to the house of the London Greyfriars, for example, and a small 14th century conduit house which served the same purpose still survives in Southampton: see <http://www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/searchdetail.aspx?id=6336&crit=&cid=66>



The well-made stone lined culvert uncovered on the Green on one of the School days.

Maybe “our” culvert, above, was part of an early water supply system for Reeth. Unlikely perhaps but after all, electricity was here in Reeth before Middlesbrough. Speculation can be fun!

The Big Dig in the press

The July and August editions of the Reeth Gazette each carried an article referring to the Big Dig.

Forthcoming events

1. Big Dig Free Walks Programme:

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.

(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.

2. Roman Roads In Yorkshire and where we go from here.

A talk by Mike Haken, Webmaster of the Roman Antiquities Section (Yorkshire Archaeological Society) and Editor of their eNewsletter,

7pm, 9th September, Buck Hotel, Reeth.

An overview of our understanding of Roman roads in Yorkshire. Focusing mainly on the North West of Yorkshire and the Dales and summarising recent research and excavation, Mike will draw comparisons between what most archaeologists and Romanists think we know about the road network, what we know for certain and what may possibly have once existed. He will conclude by suggesting specific areas of research and fieldwork which may help to reconcile

those differences and further our understanding. The evening is open to all and there is no charge.

For any further info contact david@swaag.org

3. Also on the 9th September we will be digging a small number of test pits in Reeth. Our test pit programme has gone very well thanks to the support of the SWAAG members, those like you who have an interest in the project and the general public. We have completed 25 pits so far with a further 10 or so to do in Reeth followed by perhaps 20 in Fremington & Grinton next year.

We plan to do a further 2 or 3 on Tuesday 9th September in order to reduce the number for next year. It would be great if you are able to help in any way on that day; please let me know if you can. alan@swaag.org

4. Interpreting Aerial Photographs and Lidar images

A short course of two x two hour sessions on Thursday 4th September and Thursday 18th September, both sessions in Reeth Memorial Hall, 7pm-9pm, led by Robert White, Senior Conservation Officer of the the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. Free. To join contact alan@swaag.org

5. Delving into archives

A short course of four x two sessions on Thursday evenings, 25th September to 16th October inclusive, 7pm-9pm, Reeth Memorial Hall. Marion Moverley aims to cover Ecclesiastical, Fiscal, Feudal and Estate records all of which are very relevant to investigating the history of our settlements. This course is virtually full but we might be able to offer a repeat later; if interested contact alan@swaag.org

6. Coming up ...

- (i) Towards the end of September we hope to begin surveying and geophysics in Fremington and Grinton. We will email when dates and venues are confirmed.
- (ii) We also hope to have a Finds Handling and Identification day, focusing mainly on pottery, some time in October or November; again we will email when confirmed.
- (iii) Our end of year one event will take the same form as the launch event in March with presentations on the evening of Friday 28th November and an Open day on Saturday 29th November, in Reeth Memorial Hall. Further details later.
- (iv) In the Spring we will offer a follow-up to Roger Martlew's popular short course on British Archaeology.
- (v) Finally, our Big Dig weekends for 2015 are provisionally set for 16th/17th May, 20th/21st June, 18th/19th July.

Summary

Thanks to the support of a large number of people and organisations we are making excellent progress with interest in the project exceeding expectations. We have a considerable number of finds to classify which will tell us a lot about the development of the area. We look forward to sharing this with you in November in particular.

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 : 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) !



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



Thank you for your interest and support.

Best wishes

Alan Mills

16th August 2014