

Swaledale Big Dig

Newsletter no. 11 – July 2015

The weekend of 18th / 19th July was a landmark for the Big Dig as we finished our test-pit programme across Fremington, Grinton and Reeth with a further six test pits in Grinton and one more in each of Fremington and Reeth. We have now dug 50 test-pits over three years; two trial pits in 2013 before the Big Dig won Heritage Lottery Fund approval, twenty-five in 2014 and twenty-three this year. The finds from this year's digs are in the process of being examined by our pottery expert, Jenny Vaughan of Northern Counties Archaeological Services. At first sight, it looks as if our most recent finds from Fremington and Grinton will confirm that both villages had significant medieval settlements which were abandoned around the late 14th or early 15th century, possibly following the mini ice-age in the early 14th, the Scots raids around the same time, and the Black Death later in the century. We will report more in future newsletters and in detail at our closing event later this year or early next.



Tristen Brown & Shelagh Standen enjoying washing finds from the pit in Tristen's garden

The test pit programme has been tremendously successful due to the participation of so many people and organisations that I could not possibly list them all here, but a big 'thank you' to all who have helped in whatever way : local landowners, house holders who let us dig in their gardens, the local councils, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the local schools, Carenza Lewis, the Wensleydale Young Archaeologists and all those members of SWAAG and the local community, not forgetting those who came from afar, such as West Sussex, to help in a variety of ways. Thank you all so much!

As I have mentioned previously another successful outcome of the Big Dig has been the creation of a Local History Group. At the recent meeting we had presentations on three on-going projects. One investigating whether medieval tax returns might help further understand population change in medieval Swaledale, a second of the tithe transcription project – see <https://www.swaag.org/HistoricDocuments.htm> and a third most interesting presentation on research into education in the Dales, highlighting how different school was in the 19th century compared with now. The next meeting of the group is Thursday 17th September, 4pm, Buck Hotel, Reeth. If you would like to get involved please contact Judith at judith@swaag.org

Forthcoming events

Following on from a piece in a previous Big Dig newsletter about the Aiskew villa exhibition in Bedale and the clash with the June Big Dig weekend, I'm pleased to say that Jenny Proctor from PCA has agreed to come and talk to us about her work on the Aiskew site and the exciting finds there; Tuesday 8th September in the Buck Hotel, Reeth - 7pm. Entry is free.

In September we will continue our free walks programme, with three walks exploring different aspects of our local historic heritage.

(i) Thursday 3rd September, 2015 - Explore Swaledale's Mining Heritage

A moderate 4 mile walk of approximately 3 hours exploring the extensive remains of the lead mining industry in and around Sleil Gill, Arkengarthdale. Leader Alan Mills. Meet at the RDC, public car park (charge payable) just south of Langthwaite, 10am.

(ii) Saturday 5th September – A Stationary Walk: A Historical Panorama of Swaledale

An exploration of the history of Swaledale as seen from the parking area across the road from the Reeth School. Leader Peter Denison-Edson. Walking not required. Meet across the road from the Reeth School 10.30am for this hour long activity.

(iii) Sunday 6th September – The Geology of Swaledale

A circular walk, led by geologist John Russell, to explore geology and human settlement activity between Muker and Gunnerside. Approximately 6 miles and around 5 hours on back roads and grass, largely flat with some moderate ascents. Meet outside the Farmer Arms in Muker at 10.00am.

For the Thursday and Sunday walks please wear stout shoes or boots, bring rainwear and drinks. Bring food on the Geology walk. No dogs please.

For further information please email bigdig@swaag.org or call 01969 623658

The Big Dig in the press

The July 2015 Reeth Gazette carried an article promoting the Big Dig.

Bits & pieces ...

(i) At the end of last year, Peter Denison-Edson and I wrote a paper on the Big Dig for the CBA Yorkshire Forum Journal. This was published recently in Volume 3 2014 (65-76)

You can view this at

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/lgrvymwtdb24uq9/Swaledale%20Big%20Dig%20FORUM%20paper%20Dec%2014%20FINAL%20watermarked.pdf?dl=0>

(ii) As a result of the experience gained and resources acquired during the Big Dig we have been able to help the St Andrew's Church, Grinton, Graveyard Memorials' survey which is part of the Grinton Conservation Project. See <http://www.grinton.org/memorials/index.html>

How you can get involved with the Big Dig

There are still 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:

Surveying incl geophys : Mike Walton: mike@swaag.org

Documentary research / Local History : Judith Mills: judith@swaag.org

General enquiries or for more info on courses etc: bigdig@swaag.org or alan@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



Finally, many thanks to Roy and Julie at the Buck Hotel, Reeth www.buckhotel.co.uk for their support and for making a meeting room available to us free of charge.

Now some more photos from the final test pit weekend ...

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



Best wishes

Alan Mills

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