

## Swaledale Big Dig

### Newsletter no. 12 – October 2015

The Big Dig is now winding down towards our final presentation and displays in April next year. Nonetheless there is still quite a lot of recent activity to report on and events to look forward to.

August was a quiet month but September started with our free walks programme. Nearly 40 people joined the three walks. The first, explored the extensive remains of the lead mining industry in and around Sleil Gill, Arkengarthdale. This was followed by our popular “Stationary Walk”, an exploration of the history of Swaledale as seen from the parking area near Reeth School. The short programme finished with a six mile walk exploring the geology and human settlement activity between Muker and Gunnerside.

Our final geophys training took place over the weekend of 12<sup>th</sup> / 13<sup>th</sup> September. Under the guidance of Mary Saunders of Bradford University, six volunteers carried out a geophysical survey of the deserted medieval settlement in the fields to the East of Grinton. Mary then taught another six volunteers how to analyse the results using the Terra Surveyor software. As a result we can now be confident that we have the necessary skills to carry out further surveys for not only our own projects but also to support other similar groups.



Geophys surveying in Grinton



Sleil Gill, Arkengarthdale



At the end of September 20 volunteers took part in a three day dig on the western-most dyke of the Grinton-Fremington dyke system. There is some uncertainty as to the date of the initial construction of this system; were the dykes some sort of defensive system from pre-Roman times, later 'Dark Ages' boundaries of local kingdoms, perhaps even Neolithic or something completely different? We hope that radio-carbon dating of charcoal from the bank will help resolve this and give us a better understanding of how the local villages developed.

In early October we held a Pie & Peas Supper in the Buck Hotel, Reeth to celebrate the contribution of the pit diggers and owners without whom the Big Dig could not have succeeded. Forty-eight people had a very enjoyable evening and joined in a quiz.

Over the winter we will continue the analysis and interpretation of our finds but can make some preliminary comments.

We have not found any real evidence of Roman or Romano-British occupation in the villages apart from a couple of sherds suggesting cultivation; neither have we found any evidence of Anglo-Saxon settlement but then we didn't really expect to. There is of course good evidence of Roman or Romano-British occupation at our nearby dig at the Hagg, Fremington – note the talk on this, details below.

We can say with certainty that there was a medieval settlement in Fremington, now abandoned in the fields opposite Fremington Mill farm and extending up into the fields above. This was previously unknown. Similarly we have confirmed the existence of an extensive medieval settlement, again abandoned, in fields to the East of the Grinton - Leyburn Rd.

The distribution of finds by time period shows that Swaledale suffered heavily in the 14th / 15th C presumably as a result of the Great Famine in the early 14thC, the Scots raids following their victory at Bannockburn and later, the Black Death. Interestingly, medieval tax returns suggest that Reeth and Upper Swaledale suffered less than nearby Marrick, Marske & Richmond.

The pottery finds also raise the possibility that present day Reeth with its large central green was planned following the granting of its market charter in 1694/5; prior to that the medieval village might well have been more a collection of small farmsteads.

There is much more work to do over the winter, culminating in our closing presentations on Friday 15th April 2016 and Open Day on Saturday 16th; once again Carenza Lewis will be our keynote speaker.



Mike Cooke filming at the Dyke Dig

Mike and partner Nicki Oliver are making a video record of the Big Dig.

## **Forthcoming events**

### **1. Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November**

Philip Bastow and Peter Denison-Edson will talk about  
“Roman influences in 4th century Swaledale: Fremington’s Hagg Farm settlement”  
At the Buck Hotel, Reeth, 7pm. All welcome, no charge.

### **2. Thursday 5th November**

The Swaledale & Arkengarthdale Local History Group regular meeting.  
At the Buck Hotel, Reeth, 4.15pm. If you are interested in any aspect of local history then do come along. No charge.

### **3. Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November**

Peter Denison-Edson and I will give an update on the Big Dig, covering what we set out to achieve, how we went about it, what we found, what it tells us and the legacy that the project will leave.  
At the Middleham Key Centre 2pm; free to Middleham & Dales Local History Group members, visitors £3

### **4. Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> November**

The last field activity for the Big Dig is to complete a topographical survey of two areas in Grinton where there is good evidence of Grinton’s medieval tofts and crofts. We have already completed a geophysical survey of the areas and have dug test pits. Before we embark on the survey, we propose to hold a training course as a refresher for those who have some

experience of surveying and as in introduction for those who have no experience. This course will be held at the Grinton Smelt Mill complex adjacent to Cogden Gill. Details of the activity are:

(i) Training course: 19th November, 2015. Meet 9.30am at the parking area on the Grinton/Leyburn Road. Grid ref: SE 049 969 (map OL30).

(ii) Grinton Survey: 20th and 21st November, 2015, starting 9.30am each day. Further details from Dave Brooks – dave@swaag.org

No experience is required for any of the activity and if you are unable to make the training course but would still like to help with the survey at Grinton, please do not hesitate to come along.

There is no charge for participation in the activity and all equipment will be provided. Please bring a packed lunch, wear warm clothing and sturdy, waterproof footwear.

If you would like to join the activity or any part of it, please contact Dave Brooks: dave@swaag.org

5. Tuesday 1st December:

A presentation by Jenny Proctor of PreConstruct Archaeology. She will talk about the excavations PCA carried out along the Bedale bypass and discuss the Roman Villa and the Iron Age defended settlement.

At the Buck Hotel, Reeth, 7pm. All welcome, no charge.

6. Friday April 15<sup>th</sup> 2016

Our final presentation of the results of the Big Dig with keynote speaker Professor Carezza Lewis; Reeth Memorial Hall, 7.30pm. All welcome, no charge.

7. Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2016

The final Big Dig Open day, with displays illustrating what we set out to achieve, how we went about it, what we found, what it tells us and the legacy that the project will leave.

Reeth Memorial Hall, 10am – 4pm. All welcome, no charge.

### **How you can get involved with the Big Dig**

There are still opportunities for all to become involved as the work of the Big Dig will be carried forward by SWAAG. 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** 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)!



Quizzing at the Pie & Peas Supper in the Buck



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](http://www.swaag.org)



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

Best wishes

Alan Mills