

President's letter



Dear Members, welcome to the Spring edition of our newsletter, and I hope that the enclosed articles and news of forthcoming lectures and planned trips during the warmer months ahead will help banish any winter blues from which you might be suffering!

As archaeologists, we are all aware of how quickly time can pass, and it is with some surprise that I find that my three year term as President comes to an end in May. It has been an honour to hold the post occupied by so many previous luminaries since the Society was founded in 1862, and I hope that the Society continues to prosper in the future. With an expanding membership of well over two hundred, numerous institutions who take our journal, and an active lecture, excursion and fieldwork programme, I feel that I can pronounce the Society in good heart. Much of this can be put down to an extremely able and dedicated committee, to whom I offer my thanks, while at the same time urging other members to consider standing for election in the future and bring further fresh ideas and developments.

Best wishes to you all, and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible during the coming year.

Niall Hammond President

Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland



Statue of St Paulinus at the Lady's Well, Holystone

Case work

As mentioned in previous newsletters, the Society is active in lobbying for the care of the region's historic buildings, archaeology and museum collections. We regularly receive for comment everything from specific planning applications to local authority development plans and frameworks, which include care of the historic environment as a criterion. Over the past few months, the Society has offered comment on a number of consultations, as follows.

- Durham County Council, regarding a collections policy for archaeology in County Durham
- Durham County Council proposed Mineral and Waste Development Framework
- Durham County Council Environment Strategy
- Sedgfield Borough Local Development Framework
- South Tyneside Council Local Development Framework
- City of Durham Local Development Framework

We were also asked by English Heritage for our opinion and support to identify a secure future for Sockburn Chapel. For those who do not know the site, it lies in what must be the most southerly point of the county, in a bend of the River Tees, south of Darlington. At present, the site is owned by the Diocese of Durham and there is no public access. The site has an amazing history as an Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical centre, and several exceptional carved stones of the period can be found amongst later medieval work on site. In the middle ages,

the land was owned by the Conyers family who, according to legend, slew a vicious wyrm, or dragon, here. The sword used, a falchion was, for many centuries, presented to each new Bishop of Durham on first entering his see at Sockburn, a ceremony now removed to Croft Bridge. The Chapel is, however, now largely a ruin and in need of capital works and consistent future management. English Heritage are currently undertaking stabilization work, and the Society has offered assistance in ensuring that a secure long-term future is found. We hope to arrange a Society outing to the site this summer, and will update you on progress in future newsletters.



Sockburn Chapel, County Durham. © English Heritage

The Sedgefield Archaeology Project

In 2005, the first season of work at East Park, Sedgefield, a joint project involving Durham County Council's Archaeology Section and ASUD, revealed much about this important and unusual site. It also successfully involved the community, with many members of the public and children on the Time Detectives summer scheme taking part, besides Archaeology students. First identified in the mid-1990s, the site was investigated in 2002 by Time Team, who found traces of a large Roman settlement, flanking a north-south road running parallel with the road between Hardwick Park and Sedgefield. A geophysical survey of the field between the village and the Park revealed a series of large enclosures defined by ditches (the dark lines in the illustration), with smaller roads leading towards modern Sedgefield. The settlement apparently extends under housing on the edge of the village, but not much further towards Hardwick Park, continuing into the fields to the north and south. A further survey in 2006 will aim to define its limits.

On finding a pottery kiln, The Time Team speculated that the area represented an 'industrial zone', with the settlement's houses buried beneath modern Sedgefield. But foundation trenches of a wooden building found elsewhere on the site could have belonged to a farm building or house, so perhaps the enclosures also contained agricultural and domestic structures. In an attempt to understand their purpose, it was decided to concentrate on one large enclosure by the main Roman road and to dig as much of it as possible. Its boundary was identified as a ditch about 1.5 metres wide and one metre deep, with a gap towards the road that marked an entrance.

Some of the excavation's most impressive finds came from the top of the ditch, including two carved bone toggles and a complete small pot from the ditch terminal at the entrance. A bronze jug of fine workmanship, the metal being less than 2 millimetres thick and carefully crafted into the smooth curves of the vessel, has a very silvery and reflective surface, owing to an unusually high tin content in the alloy. The handle is heavy and richly decorated; a pair of bird or animal heads grasp the jug's rim and ribbed decoration along its length ends in a possible Medusa's head. Parallels include vessels from a site near St Albans, from near Welshpool on the Welsh border, from Newstead Roman fort in southern Scotland and, further afield, from Pompeii, all thought to date to the first century AD. Intriguingly, this jug was deliberately gashed, probably just before deposition, as pieces of metal had fallen inside it. Moreover, the completeness of both vessels and their placing in the top of the ditch suggest deliberate deposition as votive offerings, possibly signifying the end of the settlement's occupation. This illustrates the importance of excavating artefacts in their original contexts on archaeological sites; such information is not recoverable from objects found in plough soil.

There was evidence for various activities within the enclosure. In one corner was a massive circular pit, visible as a large black dot on the geophysics plot. It was one of several across the field, similarly positioned on the



corner of enclosures by the road and possibly used to extract sand and gravel, or as watering-holes for cattle. A fence-line ran down the centre of the enclosure. The area nearest the road was featureless, possibly used to corral animals. To the northeast, however, there were traces of two rectangular wooden buildings, one replacing the other. The earlier was relatively small, with long narrow construction trenches, associated daub suggesting wattle-and-daub construction. Over this, parallel lines of widely-spaced post-holes indicated a larger aisled building. Both could have been agricultural or possibly low-status domestic structures. To the northwest were the remains of six clay and stone ovens, including a clay oven built around a wattle framework, set into a foundation trench cut into the natural subsoil. Parts of two stone flues and foundation cuts for several other ovens were found, probably representing small-scale industrial activity. In the corner of the trench, another series of post-holes and curving gullies would have supported wooden walls, possibly separating the oven area from other activities or, alternatively, were associated with small buildings.

The enclosures were probably occupied by family groups conducting low-key trade or craft activities, rather than being fields or animal pens. Possibly, the local population was attracted to the Roman road and the commercial possibilities presented by its traffic. The regularity of many enclosures indicates, however, that the settlement was planned. The only other large-scale Roman settlements in the region are directly associated with Roman forts, so perhaps a fort or higher status site, such as a villa, will be discovered nearby. In future seasons, we hope to establish the nature of this enigmatic site and to learn more about the Roman Empire in the North.



Paul Johnson (NAA), discussing a fragment of bone with volunteers during the January skeleton-washing day.

Fieldwork

The interest in fieldwork has been gradually increasing over the past year, and I am now pleased to say that we have a small, core group of members who are keen to venture forth with wellingtons and tape measure at the ready. Last year, there was a varied programme, starting off with a tour of the Durham Record Office, kindly arranged especially for the Society by David Butler. David showed us the wide range of resources available for researching both archaeological and historic projects, and provided an insight into how these records are stored and preserved.

In February, a fieldwalking trip was planned for Brancepeth which was, unfortunately, called off because of bad weather; a pattern which seems to have repeated itself this year! We remained at Brancepeth for the next few months, recording a series of rather enigmatic earthworks which were identified by Dr Cousins during his research into the landscape surrounding the Castle. This work is now nearing completion and the results will hopefully appear in the next newsletter. During the summer, some members attended the volunteer excavation at Sedgfield East Park being run by Durham County Council. This gave members the opportunity to take part in some 'hands on' excavation and was an extremely welcome addition to the archaeological events calendar.

This year's programme is already well underway and should provide the opportunity to get involved with a varied range of archaeological fieldwork. In January, there was a large turn-out for a session of skeleton-washing, organized by Northern Archaeology Associates. Members kindly helped process a selection of material from an important Anglo-Saxon cemetery site, with archaeologists on hand to help identify the various bones and illustrate obvious wear or impact damage. A follow-up session is being planned for later in the year for anyone interested in finding out more.

The Society is about to embark on a new community project being run by Dr David Petts and the Gainford



Surveying at Brancepeth

Local History Group. Some members might remember David's talk on Gainford at the Christmas lecture. The project is very much in its early stages, but we hope to do some plane table earthwork survey in the spring or early summer. This exciting new project will hopefully look at a number of aspects of this important early medieval settlement. As well as the work at Gainford, we will also be joining forces, once again, for an annual NEVAG/AASDN recording day of a building in Stanhope. During this session, I hope to run a workshop on photographing historic buildings, so do bring your camera along.

There are no plans for any sessions in the summer months, as there are ample community projects going on this year to keep people busy.

Durham County Council are, again, running the Sedgfield East Park Project from late June into July. Please contact David Mason, e-mail david.mason@durham.gov.uk for details.

I am not sure if Bollilhope is running this year, but contact Rob Young, e-mail robert.young@nnpa.org.uk for further details.

There may also be excavation projects being run at Coquetdale, as part of the community program; contact Elanor Johnson, e-mail ejohnson@nnpa.org.uk.

I shall e-mail the fieldwork group as soon as I have any further information on any of the above. If you would like to be involved in any of these projects, or if you would like to be included in the mailing group for future information and updates on fieldwork, then please contact me at e-mail pm@naa.gb.com. Anyone is welcome to take part and no experience is necessary. I would like to thank all those who have taken part in the various events over the last year, either participating or organizing, and I look forward to seeing both new and old faces over the coming months.

Fieldwork programme

Saturday 22 April	Plane table survey at Gainford to be confirmed
Saturday 6 May	AASDN-NEVAG recording day at Stanhope, Weardale
Saturday 24 June	Further survey at Gainford to be confirmed
Saturday 1 April	NEVAG recording day at Northumberland
Saturday 1 July	NEVAG recording day at Cleveland

For the NEVAG events, please contact Martin Roberts, e-mail martin@fleece.wanadoo.co.uk

County Durham archaeology publication

County Durham Archaeology is now available from the Durham County Council Marketing Department.

This is a new publication by the County Council's Archaeology Section. Aimed at those with a general interest in archaeology, it contains articles about excavations, discoveries and research over the last twelve months, throughout the county.

For your copies, please contact County Durham Books, telephone (0191) 383 4479. Price £3.75 plus postage and packing.

Call for papers

Border and identity The Solway Basin, England and Scotland c 1500–2000

30 September to 1 October 2006

To be held at Dumfries

This conference is jointly organized by the Society for Post-medieval Archaeology and the Dumfries and Galloway Archaeology and Natural History Society. Papers may relate to the regional archaeology of Cumbria and Dumfries and Galloway

(together or separately), or to broader issues of Anglo-Scottish archaeology.

Offers of papers, with abstract, should be sent, preferably as Word attachments, to David Cranstone, 267 Kells Lane, Low Fell, Gateshead Tyne and Wear NE9 5HU; e-mail cranconsult@btinternet.com

Programme 2006–07

All lectures will be held at Elvet Riverside, Room 141 New Elvet, Durham, at 2.30 pm (except where noted). Everyone is welcome to attend

- Wednesday 5 April 7.15 pm **Recreating Avalon** The symbolic landscape of Dunstanburgh Castle **Alistair Oswald** English Heritage
- Saturday 13 May **AGM**
- Saturday 10 June **From Hope-Taylor to the Heritage Lottery Fund** Recent excavations at Bamburgh **Sarah Groves** Bamburgh Research Project
- Saturday 9 September **The pleasures and possibilities of house history** **Tony Nicholson** Teesside University
- Saturday 14 October **Archaeology in the Yorkshire Dales National Park** **Robert White** Archaeologist for the Yorkshire Dales National Park
- Saturday 11 November **Treasures of a Saxon king of Essex** The princely burial of Prittlewell **Ian Blair** Museum of London
- Saturday 9 December **Members' meeting** For details, please contact the Secretary
- Saturday 13 January **The Neolithic and Bronze Age monument complex of Thornborough, North Yorkshire** **Jan Harding** Newcastle University

Excursions

- Sunday 18 June **A walk on Gayles Moor** With rock art specialist **Tim Laurie**
- Sunday 2 July **Excursion to Sockburn Chapel** With Emeritus Professor **Rosemary Cramp**
- Sunday 27 August **Tour of the Warcop Range** With **Philip Abramson** and **Niall Hammond** Archaeologists, Defence Estates

For further information on any of the above events, please contact the Society Secretary

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