



The Swaledale Big Dig

A VALLEY AND ITS PEOPLE



The Swaledale Big Dig

Local people, rather than professional archaeologists or historians, discovered what you see in this booklet.



The Swaledale Big Dig is a community archaeology project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to discover the hidden history of Fremington, Grinton and Reeth. Over 160 people were involved over two years in digging 50 test pits. Each pit was a metre square hole into the past. We shifted and sieved over 70 cubic metres of soil

weighing around 90 tonnes. We found glass, clay pipes, animal bones and more than 4000 pieces of pottery weighing over 12kg. We also found a large amount of metal work including horseshoes, clog irons, tools, a medieval key and an early medieval lock.



We carried out documentary research, studied aerial photography and lidar images and carried out topographical and geophysical surveys. These helped us gain a deeper understanding of the development of the area.



We worked closely with the local schools. Over 90 children took part in digging test pits, surveying and other activities enabling them to learn more about their local heritage.



Geophysical Surveying

We ran 24 free courses and 11 free guided walks. Over 500 people joined in the Big Dig. These activities will leave a lasting legacy of skills and increased knowledge in the community.

In the pages which follow you will see that we have made a big contribution to our understanding of the heritage of Swaledale.



Old Gang Smelt Mill

Why did people choose to live in Swaledale?

The geology and geomorphology of the landscape influenced where people lived.

300 million years ago, when Swaledale lay South of the equator, beds of limestone, sandstone and shale were laid down in a warm, shallow sea and river delta. These rocks have varying degrees of hardness and resistance to erosion which gives the Dale its stepped valley profile.

Glaciations over the last three million years have created the glacial trough that is Swaledale today. River valleys flowing off the Pennine uplands were the natural routeways for both glaciers and people.

In the last Ice Age, the lateral moraines of two glaciers, ice from Stainmore flowing down Arkengarthdale and ice flowing east along the Swale Valley, coalesced at Reeth to form a medial moraine on which the village is sited. Fremington and Grinton owe their origins to a ford which later became a bridge over the Swale.

Swaledale in pre-history, was one of the main routes between the lowlands west and east of the Pennines as evidenced by finds from the Lake District and Scottish Highlands.



Rippled Sandstone



Crinoids in limestone

Early occupation occurred on the higher, lightly wooded limestone plateaux. Later settlements and farms developed downhill on the shale shelf areas. Water was a key feature for settlement: farms were sited on the spring-line.

The valley floor, prone to flooding but with rich lake-bed deposits, lacked settlement but has the best farm land in the Dale. Recessional moraines crossing the valley floor indicate the decay and retreat of the last glacier. These moraines

have been used as defensive sites in pre-history. A fine example of a defensive site can be seen cut into the Grinton recessional moraine.

The present day buildings and dry stone walls of the Dale are mostly made of sandstone because shale is too soft and crumbles and limestone is too hard and difficult to cut.



Prehistoric Swaledale

The prehistoric inhabitants of Swaledale did not leave written records, but their traces are everywhere: buildings, discarded tools and possessions, burial sites, forts, cairns.

Prehistory is the period from the first appearance of modern humans until the development of writing and of recorded history (about 43AD when the Romans arrived). It is divided into:

Palaeolithic ("Old Stone Age"):

12,000 years ago, as the last ice age retreated, hunter-gatherers roamed the Dales following migrating herds of horses, deer and wild cattle. Stone tools were developed and used.

Mesolithic ("Middle Stone Age"):

Around 10,000 BC the climate was milder than today. Oak, birch and grassland grew on the high Pennines with hazel and pine at lower levels. There is evidence that hunters made summer camps in the Dales, coming up from their permanent settlements on river terraces near the East coast.

Neolithic ("New Stone Age"):

About 3500 BC, farming practices began to develop. Herds of sheep and cattle were kept and early forms of cereal crops were cultivated. Today we can find evidence of burial mounds, cairns and henges as well as pottery, flint tools and stone axes.



A pre-historic arrowhead

The Bronze Age:

Around 2300 BC, bronze from smelting copper and tin ores began to be adopted. It was used in tools, weapons, decorations, and ornaments. Bronze Age burial sites occur in the Dales as do remains of houses and farmsteads. The co-axial field systems of Swaledale are thought to have originated in this period.



The remains of a pre-historic round house

The Iron Age: Around 700 BC iron, more robust, began to replace bronze. People continued to clear and shape the land and have left many prominent remains: house sites, hill forts and field systems. Maiden Castle in Swaledale is a striking Iron Age enclosure and it may have earlier origins as a ceremonial site.

Maiden Castle, Swaledale



©YDNPA

Swaledale under the Romans

There is good evidence of a Roman road from the fort at Bainbridge running through Swaledale and Arkengarthdale towards the road over Stainmore.

Unlike most other Yorkshire dales, Roman soldiers seem not to have been based in Swaledale, though it is hard to see why the Roman authorities would have left unguarded a valley down which rebellious tribes could have swept onto the fertile lowlands of the Vale of Mowbray with its roads, towns and forts.

A hoard of cavalry harness fittings was found on Reels Head above

Fremington, a 2nd century coin hoard above Grinton, and a lead pig, now lost, was said to have been found near Hurst dated to the Emperor Hadrian.

We know the Romans had a huge appetite for lead for construction and for wool for the famous British cloaks and blankets. They would have found both in Swaledale. The people here would also have been exposed to Roman commerce and



A Samian bowl



Coin of the Emperor Hadrian

the chance to acquire Roman material culture, perhaps via travelling merchants or on visits to markets such as Catterick to barter their products or sell them for coin to pay taxes.

The Big Dig has found two sherds of Roman pottery, probably thrown onto the fields when waste from middens (into which broken pots were thrown) was used to fertilize the fields. In excavations at the Hagg, East of Fremington, SWAAG have found significant quantities of 4th century pottery (some of it clearly for Roman-style dining), and Roman glass and jet jewellery. It is hard not to speculate that some Swaledale people were in close touch with the Roman system even at this late date.



Altar to the god Pan

Angles and Vikings

And in this year A.D. 787 came first three ships of the Northmen from the land of robbers, the first of the Danish men that sought the land of the English nation.

From the 500s, the arrival in the North of migrant Angles was followed by many battles for power with the native Britons. One around the year 600 was recorded as taking place at Catraeth, which most professional historians have interpreted and accepted as Catterick.

Controversially, others have argued that the word Catraeth could be interpreted as 'battle of Raeth' or even as 'the place below Raeth'. Both ideas raise the tantalising notion that the actual place of the battle could have been by Reeth in Swaledale. Some say that the Grinton-Fremington dykes might

have played a part in this conflict, although others assert they are much earlier in date.

From around 750 the elite Angles, who ruled what had become the kingdom of Deira (most of modern Yorkshire), started to make grants of land, known as 'tuns', to their most-favoured underlings as a means of cementing their loyalty. This gave rise to the place-name suffix '-ton', and probably provides a good guide to the earliest date for the place-names of Grinton and Fremington.

Power in Deira passed in 866 to Danish Vikings who established a larger kingdom, which they called Jorvik.



Photos: © British Museum Trustees



The Angles and Vikings of Jorvik seem to have assimilated. In 954 the kingdom of Jorvik was overthrown and absorbed into what became the first united kingdom of England, although regional power in what would become the shire of York remained with the local Anglo-Scandinavian elite.

By 1065, in the last days of the reign of King Edward, we are told in the later Domesday Book that the townships of Reeth and Grinton were under the lordship of one Torfin, undoubtedly a Scandinavian, while Fremington was held by one Crin.



© British Library



Normans, Bretons and Flemings

*In Ric. ad gtd. vi. carucate. 7 iii. car. possus. ee.
 Ibi hb Torfin maner. ne hb Bodin. 7 wast. e. locu
 .i. leu. lg. 7 .i. lat. I. h. l. uat. xiiii. sol.*

After the Harrying of the North in 1069, the North-West corner of the shire of York, including all of Swaledale, was handed to Count Alan Rufus, of Brittany. This huge estate was granted the high-status title of the Honour or Shire of Richmond. The Domesday Survey of 1086 recorded that Count Alan's half-brother Bodin was the tenant of all the land formerly held by Torfin, including Reeth and Grinton, while Fremington, formerly held by Crin, was not tenanted. No church was recorded in Swaledale.

*In Grinton ad gtd. i. car. 7 i. car. poss. ee.
 Ibi hb Crin maner. ne hb. a. com. 7 wast. e.
 loc. .i. leu. lg. 7 dim. lat. I. h. l. uat. v. sol.*

In the early 1100s the whole of Swaledale, from Grinton and Reeth westwards, which by then was designated a hunting forest, was granted by Count Alan's successor, his younger brother Count Stephen,

Domesday Book images : <http://opendomesday.org>

as a wedding gift to his son-in-law Walter de Gant. Gant was the son of a Flemish baron. He had a vast estate in Lincolnshire, and a large one at Bridlington, which he gave in 1113 to found an Augustinian priory.

*In Grinton ad gtd. i. caruc. 7 i. car. poss. ee.
 Ibi hb Torfin maner. ne hb Bodin. 7 wast. e.
 loc. .i. leu. lg. 7 dim. lat. I. h. l. uat. v. sol.*

Among the many endowments he showered upon the priory was the Lordship of the township of Grinton and its 'church of St Andrew of Swaledale'. Today the most notable surviving feature of the original Norman nave is the arched west window.

A later head of the Gant family granted a large chunk of the upper Dale (the future Manor of Muker) to Rievaulx Abbey. Premature deaths and power struggles involving the Gants resulted in other parts of Swaledale reverting to the Honour of Richmond and the Crown.



Richmond Castle

By the 1200s the Gant holding in the Dale was restricted almost entirely to the North bank of the river. In subsequent documents this reduced estate was called the Manor of Swaledale, or the Manor of Reeth, and later the Manor of Healaugh, probably because Healaugh Park became the manorial seat.



© British Library

Medieval Dales

Now in that year [1316] there was such a mortality of men in England and Scotland through famine and pestilence as had not been heard of in our time.

This was a turbulent time for the Upper Dales communities.

In the 14th century, the Scots were raiding the North of England after their success at the battle of Bannockburn, there was much bad weather, and the plague had brought death and disease. These events together with the Great Famine resulted in privation across the land.

As they recovered from these threats to their community, the reduced population of the Upper Dales was not isolated. The finds recovered from our test pits show that the pottery being used at this time was coming from Teesside and also more locally from kilns such as that at Healey near Masham. The associated trade no doubt brought social links as well.

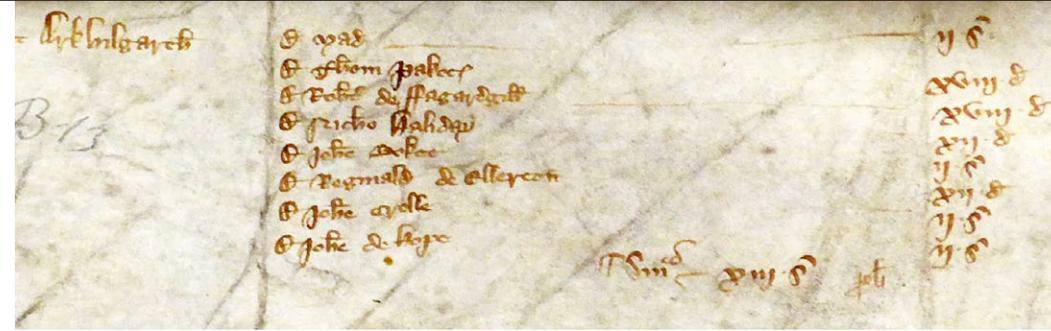


At this time, large amounts of land were in religious ownership and the Augustinian monks of Bridlington Priory were major local landowners.

After Henry VIII instigated his dramatic attack on the religious houses of the region, large tracts of land changed hands. Rather than returning to the local people, with the associated boost to the economy from sheep farming and wool sales, the ownership was transferred to Henry's friends and henchmen and the Dales people suffered once again.



Images © British Library



Medieval Tax Return © The National Archives

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, new employment opportunities arrived in the Upper Dales as the lead and coal mining industries became established.

In time, the benefits of the sheep and wool industry would also return and the local economy and population would start to grow again.

Despite these improvements, the life and working conditions for the people of the Upper Dales, in the mines and on the farms, remained harsh for many generations.



Terracing at Reeth



17/18th Century

In the medieval period Grinton with its Church was the focus of Swaledale. During the 18th century Reeth replaced Grinton as the main market town in Swaledale.



High Row, Reeth

The 17th century was a stable and prosperous time in Swaledale, allowing the area to recover from the hardships of the 14th – 16th centuries. Lead mining expanded to become the dominant industry of the area, eclipsing agriculture. Men and boys were employed not just as miners, but as smelters, stonemasons, blacksmiths, carters and farriers. Women and girls worked preparing the lead for smelting. Many and varied shops supported the needs of this vibrant community as did the many ale houses!

The local economy grew leading to a call for Reeth to have its own market rather than sharing Grinton's. The charter allowing the creation of Reeth Market was granted in 1694/5. This, together with what became known as 'The Great Rebuilding' led to the creation of Reeth Green. The earlier small single storey houses and isolated farmsteads were replaced by the two and three storey stone-built Georgian houses which we still see around Reeth Green today.

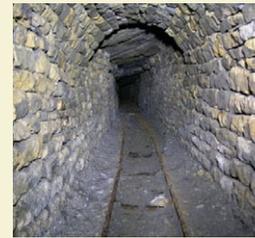


Reeth Market Charter (Latin)

Lead mining developed from a cottage industry into a substantial business. Easily mined ore was mostly gone. The mines had to go deeper and deeper. Levels replaced shallow shafts. These tunnels into the hillsides are found all over the area.



Turf Moor Hush



Left: Surrender Bridge smelt mill
Far left: Inside a mine



Around 1540 John Leland described Grinton as a small market town, supplying "corn and linen cloth" to Swaledale. Reeth market must have hit Grinton hard and its relative decline accelerated in 1701 when a flood "the like was never but once seen in the memory of man poured down from the hills with such force and rapidity that carried several houses away".

17/18th Century

Growing wealth led to a demand for finer pottery. Creamware, introduced in the 18thC and found in several of our pits, was the sought-after tableware before the introduction of porcelain.



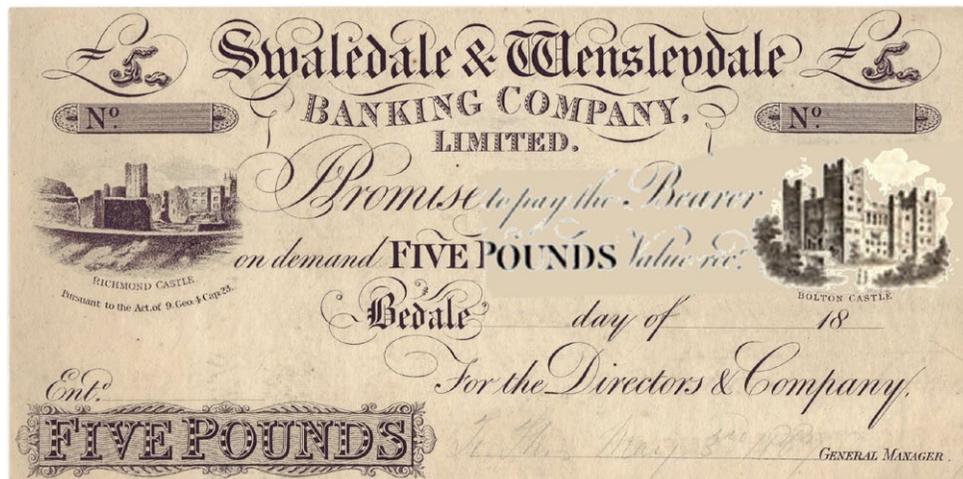
The 19th and 20th Centuries

Lead mining continued to dominate the economy in the early 19th century.

The Industrial Revolution largely passed Swaledale by, although it finished off the local hand-knitting industry. Population peaked in 1821 at 8,279 and declined to 6,214 by 1851. But Reeth, the market town of the Dale, remained a thriving community with grocers, drapers, smithies, butchers, tailors, saddlers, shoemakers, weavers, carters and carriers, as well as miners, smelters, ore-dressers and stonemasons associated with mining, and at least seven public houses, three of which survive today.

In 1836 the Richmond-Reeth turnpike road provided a through route from Brough to Richmond avoiding the steep inclines over Reels Head. Grinton Bridge was widened to accommodate two-way traffic.

During the century, lead mining's decline accelerated, undercut by the cost of pumping water from deep mines and competition from cheaper lead from Spain and South America. By 1901 most of the mines had closed and the population had declined to 2,346, 28% of its 1821 peak.



Photos from the J. L. Barker Collection

Lead mining finished in 1914. A small number of men quarried chert until the early 1950s, but the Swaledale economy returned to agriculture which became less labour intensive. Craft industries lost out to mass production. Around 23 shops in the 1950s included a fish & chip shop, bakers, butchers, grocers, drapers, haberdashers, photographers, electrical shop, hardware store, bank and post office. By 2015 Reeth had six shops, including the post office, and three public houses.



Swaledale's population decline finally halted with the rise of tourism, second home ownership and an influx of "active retired" residents from the 1970s. Grinton and Fremington have no shops. Grinton Post office, the interior preserved in the Richmondshire Museum, closed in the 1980s. The 2011 census showed 1,230 people in Reeth and Arkengarthdale which includes Grinton and Fremington, and a further 1,000 in the rest of Swaledale.

Miners' cottages at Hurst, as they would have been in 18thC



The History of Schools in the Two Dales

Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the world

Nelson Mandela



Arkengarthdale School can trace its original foundation back to 1659 and Dr John Bathurst, physician to Oliver Cromwell. In 1814 a new, one-room school was built on its current site by the Lord of the Manor, George Brown. When school became compulsory in 1880, the number on roll rose to 210; it must have been very crowded!

Reeth Friends' School was originally founded in 1787 on endowments by Quaker brothers George and Leonard Raw. Situated on Back Lane, it measured just 35ft by 20ft. and could cater for up to 60 children. In 1855 John Raw of Hintlesham left an endowment to the school of £5,000, which equates to £293,000 today. A new trust was established and a splendid new school building was planned; the same school we see today.

*(19.5.1879)
(Arkengarthdale)
Admitted 13 children.
Four children, the
Slack family, have
been withdrawn...
gone to America*

*(24.7.1882)
(Reeth) Five large
families have left the
Dale this week for
Lancashire*

- 1393 Richmond Grammar
- 1614 Marske
- 1632 Comenius champions universal education
- 1643 Fremington
- 1659 Arkengarthdale
- 1678 Muker
- 1765 Crackpot
- 1775 Industrial Revolution under way
- 1787 Reeth Friends'
- 1800 Keld
- 1811 National Society aims to provide schools in every parish
- 1823 Brompton-on-Swale
- 1826 Downholme
- 1831 Low Row
- 1835 Marrick
- 1835 Marske
- 1840 Grammar Schools Act
- 1846 Pupil Teacher Scheme
- 1842 Angram
- 1855 Gunnerside
- 1862 Healaugh
- 1870 Elementary Education Act
- 1881 Education compulsory 5-13
- 1890 Free Elementary Education
- 1902 Local Education Authorities established



Conclusion & Acknowledgements

Overall, we have made a big contribution to our understanding of the heritage of Swaledale. More than 500 people participated in one way or another leaving a lasting legacy of skills and increased knowledge in the community.

What have we found?

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.

We found a medieval settlement in Fremington, now abandoned in the fields opposite Fremington Mill Farm. We confirmed the existence of another extensive medieval

settlement, again abandoned, in fields to the East of the Grinton - Leyburn Rd.

Our finds show that Swaledale suffered heavily in the 14th - 15th centuries as a result of the Great Famine in the early 14th century, 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.

Minc'd Pyes.
*Shred a pound of neats tongue parboild wth two pound of beef Suet 5 Pippins & a green Lemon Peel: Season it wth an Ounce of Sweet Spice, a pound of Sugar; 2 pound of Currants, ½ a pint of Sack, a little Orange flower water; the juyce of 3 Lemons, a quarter of a pound of Citron Lemon and Orange peel: mix these together & fill your pyes
Sweet Spice is Cloves, Mace, Nutmeg, Cinnamon, Sugar & Salt.*

Although the Big Dig is over, its work investigating the history of Swaledale will continue through the Swaledale & Arkengarthdale Archaeology Group (SWAAG) and the associated Local History Group.

SWAAG, founded in 2009, is a group of enthusiasts in the northernmost Yorkshire dales who contribute to the knowledge base of the history of our dales through archaeological and related activity.
www.swaag.org





Acknowledgements

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