

Swaledale Big Dig

Newsletter no.8 - March 2015

Welcome to the second year of the Big Dig. We hope this year will be as successful as last!

The previous Newsletter was in December and despite there being no digging during the winter there has nonetheless been a lot going on.

In early January nineteen brave souls spent several days surveying at the potential medieval settlement in the fields at Fremington. We completed a magnetometer survey and a topographic survey comprising a full GPS survey and a line and offset survey of several of the key areas. Several pieces of medieval pot were recovered from the molehills, supporting, or at least not contradicting, our hypothesis that this was the site of a medieval settlement. We hope to dig there later in the year, possibly at the June digging weekend (see later) or maybe in September. More details in a future Newsletter.



Surveying at Fremington – January 2015 – later it snowed!

In early February a small number of us braved the elements and went looking for the putative Roman road thought to run over the Stang in Arkengarthdale on its way from the Roman fort at Bainbridge in Wensleydale to Barnard Castle in Teesdale, and/or the Roman Forts at Bowes and Greta Bridge.

The Roman road is thought to mainly follow the existing route over the Stang with small divergences. Snow can often help highlight archaeological features and the photos below, together with those on the website at https://www.swaag.org/DB_VIEW_Specific%20Record%20Number2.php?swaagrec=848 show that the existing route does indeed seem to overlay an earlier road with what is believed to be the Roman agger (the central element of the Roman road see <http://www.brrp.bham.ac.uk/construction/construction.html> for example) clearly visible to the south-east of Shaw Farm. It will be necessary to re-visit the area later in the year to investigate further.



Left: either side of the line of the agger is marked in red
Right: Peter Denison-Edson standing on the agger

In late February twenty-six people attended the free “Interpreting Geophysics” course led by Mary Saunders of Bradford University. We can now distinguish our nano-teslas from tomography, understand the principles of magnetometry and earth resistance, and no longer call the latter resistivity although “res” will do! Towards the end of the session Mary looked at our surveys of Grinton and came to the view that the levels of the magnetometry readings suggest that there might have been some industrial activity in what the aerial photography and Lidar images suggest was a medieval settlement. This is intriguing as we do not know of any industrial activity there from the 19th century on. We will investigate this further and hope to put some test pits in the area later this year.

Saturday 14th March was a busy day. Judith Mills and Dave Brooks represented SWAAG / Big Dig / our Local History Group in Harrogate at the “Local and family history day 2015” organised by the North Yorkshire County Records Office. The photo below illustrates our comprehensive display which attracted a good number of visitors.



Judith with some of the visitors to our display at the Local & Family History Day

On the same day we had the second run of our Finds Identification day with fifteen participants in Reeth Memorial Hall. This was led as before by Jenny Vaughan and John Nolan of Northern Counties Archaeological Services. We learnt about a wide range of potential finds – pottery from prehistoric through to modern, glass from the Roman period on and metal objects of several periods. Many found 'spout-man' rather cute !



Left: finds identification



Right: 'Spout man' Scarborough ware 13th/14th C

As mentioned previously, interest in the Big Dig has led to the creation of a Local History Group. Members of the group, working with the North Yorkshire County Records Office, have begun transcribing Swaledale Tithe Apportionments; they have completed Grinton Township which is now fully searchable and accessible to all via the SWAAG website; go to www.swaag.org and in the Swaledale Big Dig section click on the tab "Archival Info and Docs".

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

As part of our research a member of the group has been through the Bridlington Priory and Rievaulx Abbey Chartularies and also the Lanercost Chronicle extracting all references to Swaledale, settlements and people. This is available as a pdf on the website via the Big Dig section on the front page, in the same tab, "Archival Info and Docs", as the tithe data.

Other topics which the Local History Group is working on include making the Healaugh and Muker Manor books searchable, Roman roads, particularly the probable road over the Stang in Arkengarthdale (see above), the medieval history of Fremington, Grinton and Reeth, medicine and health in the past, the history of the local schools and an oral history project. If you would like to get involved please contact Judith at judith@swaag.org

Forthcoming events

- (i) Our next free course is a follow-up to Roger Martlew's popular short course last year on British Archaeology. This is free and scheduled for 5 weeks from Thursday 16th April 2015 to Thursday 14th May inclusive, 7pm-9pm, Reeth Memorial Hall. You do not need to have attended last year to come on this one. This course is filling up fast so let me know asap if you wish to come: alan@swaag.org
- (ii) Peter Denison-Edson and Alan Mills will be speaking at the Yorkshire Dales Historic Environment Day on Saturday 18th April in Grassington; "The Swaledale Big Dig: Answers and Questions".
- (iii) The test pit programme will re-commence over Easter with one day digging in Reeth. We are looking for help on Wednesday 1st April with a back-up date of Friday 10th if the weather isn't kind. Remember it's not all digging; there's recording, sieving and finds washing to be done. Please let Rob know if you can help rob@swaag.org
- (iv) Our main Big Dig weekends for 2015 are 16th/17th May, 20th/21st June, 18th/19th July in Reeth, Fremington and Grinton respectively. We will shortly be contacting landowners and those who have volunteered their gardens to agree details. We will be sending out emails before these weekends later, asking for volunteers, but if you know when you'll be attending please let Rob know now. rob@swaag.org
- (v) In addition, as last year, there will be activities for local schools and a pit on Reeth Green (29th May) during the Swaledale Festival, coinciding with our Social History walk. The tent will also be in use again this year with Big Dig displays for visitors.

The Big Dig in the press

The Northern Echo, 29th November 2014, carried an article "Swaledale Big Dig reveals Reeth's medieval past"; see http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11633378.Swaledale_Big_Dig_reveals_Reeth_s_medieval_past/

The Darlington and Stockton Times, 20th February 2015, carried an article "Free class on offer for all budding geophysicists"; not available on the website.

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 / 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 Jim & Jackie at the Buck Hotel, Reeth www.buckhotel.co.uk for their support and for making a meeting room available to us free of charge; we wish them every success in their new careers.



Spring at last! Swaledale lambs – March 2015

Best wishes

Alan Mills