

Swaledale Big Dig

Newsletter #3 June 2014

This is the third in a series of occasional Swaledale Big Dig Newsletters which are intended to be produced at roughly monthly intervals.

A lot has taken place since the last newsletter.

In late April, all the preliminary work with local schools by members of the Big Dig team, led by Sue Nicholson, began to come to fruition. Working in particular with Clare Bastow of Reeth & Gunnerside Schools and Anna Brown of Arkengarthdale School, the forty-three Key Stage 2 children were introduced to geophysics and test pitting through two hands-on days at Gunnerside.



Mike Walton demonstrating the geophys kit

Afterwards Sue said *“All the children were engaged, enthusiastic and well-behaved; a real pleasure to teach ... the training activities all went well and the children have learned how to dig a test pit safely (the main objective of the day) as well as honing their History Detective skills.”*



Philip Bastow talking with the children at Gunnerside

One of the teachers said "We all had a fantastic day today and I haven't stopped talking about it since I got home! I'm really looking forward to the discussions with the children tomorrow Many thanks for this wonderful opportunity."

For further information about the activities with the schools and more photos visit the SWAAG home page www.swaag.org and follow the Big Dig links.

Our free British Archaeology course, lasting five weeks, began in late April, finishing on 29th May. Thirty-six people registered an interest and attended at least once; the average weekly attendance being twenty-six. The course, "The Revolutionary Archaeology of Britain", was delivered by Dr Roger Martlew. His fascinating and innovative approach consisted of five sessions covering "Revolutions in ... 1. interpreting the past; 2. what our ancestors made; 3. how our ancestors survived; 4. what our ancestors believed; 5. our ancestors' identity. The course was a great success and ended with much enthusiasm for a follow-on. We will invite Roger back for a further five sessions probably at a similar time next year.



The first session of the British Archaeology course

The first of three weekends of test-pitting in Reeth planned for 2014 got underway in earnest on 17th / 18th May in glorious weather.



Councillors Richard Beal and David Allinson beginning the dig on Reeth Green

Over the weekend we dug eight test pits in all, seven in private gardens and one on the Green. There were several interesting finds including a number of pieces of medieval pot (13th – 14th C) and a medieval barrel lock which will be x-rayed and possibly conserved. The pit on the Green showed that the cobbles extend under the now grassed area, as Philip Bastow suspected. A piece of clay tobacco pipe, thought to be 17thC, was found on the exposed cobbles and a piece of medieval pot below, nicely bracketing the date of the cobbles. Perhaps these were laid at or about the time of the Market Charter, 1694/5?

There will be more detail about the finds in the next newsletter.



Mike Cooke filming the digging of a test pit

Mike Cooke and Nicki Oliver of Border Collie Rescue and CollieWood Films have been filming throughout the project. The resulting videos will form both an educational resource and an archive. The first two of their excellent films are “How to get involved ..” and “What test pits can tell you”, both featuring Dr Carezza Lewis.

They are available via the SWAAG website at

<http://www.swaag.org/HLF/BigDigVideos.htm>

Recent articles about the Big Dig in the press:

Article in the Dalesman April 2014 p59 – 61 “Digging for History”

Northern Echo 24th April

http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11171006.Youngsters_get_a_taste_of_the_work_of_an_archaeologist_as_they_take_part_in_a_big_dig_project/?ref=var_0

Reeth Gazette, June 2014; Swaledale Big Dig Begins p20, also
Dales pupils searched for the past under their School field p20

Forthcoming events

Friday 6th June – a one day dig on Reeth Green during the Swaledale Festival

Saturday 21st June & Sunday 22nd June the 2nd Big Dig weekend in Reeth. At the moment we will be digging six pits but could do a couple more. If you are able to help with digging, sieving, recording etc on one or both days then please get in touch bigdig@swaag.org

Saturday 19th July & Sunday 20th July, the 3rd Big Dig weekend, again in Reeth as part of the CBA Festival of Archaeology.

We will contact all those who kindly offered space to dig regarding what we propose, who will do it and how, and when is convenient to you.

Tuesday 9th September, 7pm, The Buck Inn, Reeth.

The first fruit of the roads and bridges sub-group of the Documentary Research team will be a talk about the Roman road network in Yorkshire, by Mike Haken, Webmaster for the Roman Antiquities Section (RAS) of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society (YAS). He is working with Hugh Toller, a leading expert on identifying Roman roads through LIDAR, to catalogue the Roman roads of Yorkshire, and has begun work with SWAAG members on the putative road from Bainbridge across Swaledale.

There will also be further School-based activities in June. The nature of these means that participation is limited to a small number of members.

Later in the year we will begin work in Fremington and Grinton. We aim to begin geophysical surveys in these two villages later this year with test-pitting in 2015.

Also later in the year we will continue with our programme of free courses.

The “Interpreting aerial photographs and Lidar images” course will run as 2 x 2 hour evening sessions, probably in early September in Reeth.

We are also planning a further course in undertaking documentary research which will address how to find documents, how to interpret them, what information is in different categories of documents and reading old hand writing. This will probably be 4 x 2hr afternoon or evening sessions beginning in late September.

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, Stephen Eastmead : stephen@swaag.org

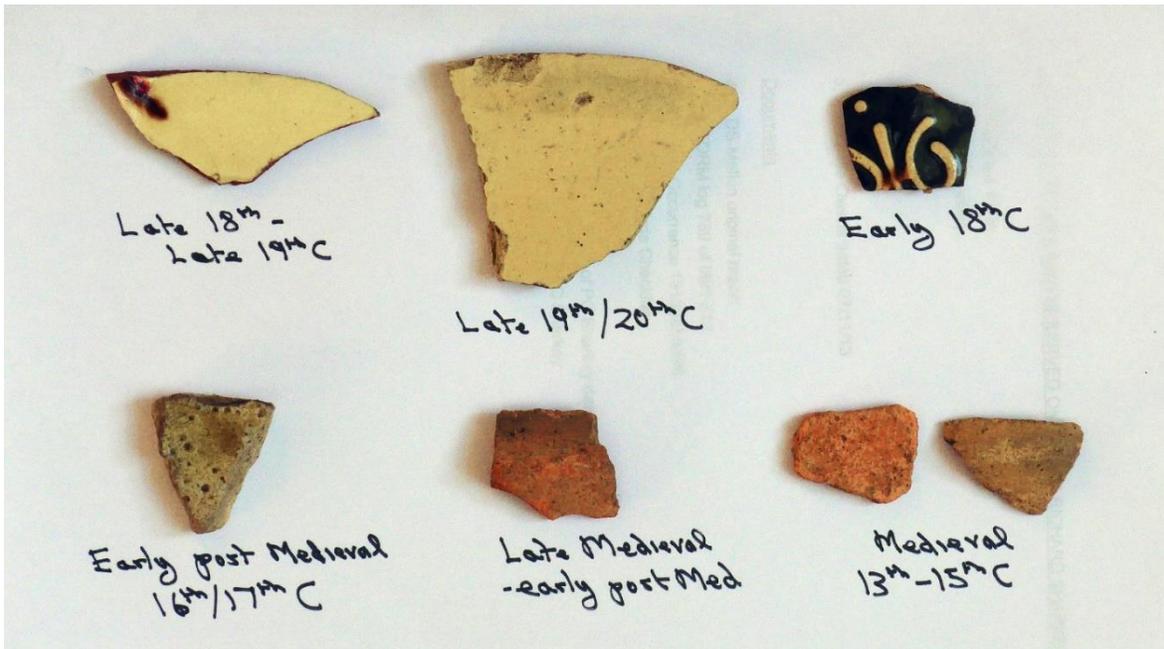
or Mike Walton: mike@swaag.org

Documentary research Ann Russell: ann@swaag.org

or Judith Mills: judith@swaag.org

General enquiries to bigdig@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) !



Typical of the pot sherds we have been finding

Postscript: those of you interested in old maps might like to use the new 6 inch 1st edition OS viewer now available free from National Library of Scotland see <http://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch-england-and-wales/index.html>

All the best

Alan Mills