

Appleby Archaeology November 2010

Ian Miller Senior Project Officer, Oxford Archaeology North, attracted a large audience to the November meeting of Appleby Archaeology when he spoke on the *Excavations at Brougham in 2008 - The Long Way to Publication*. Ian explained his title by emphasising that excavation was only part of the investigation of a site and that the work of data gathering, and interpretation is a long process and publishing the results takes time.

He began by reviewing the information about the site prior to the 2008 excavation.

The Romans probably arrived in the area around 60 AD and built a fort at what appears to have been a strategic position. The site lies south of the confluences of the rivers Eamont and Lowther and at the intersection of two Roman roads. The medieval castle was built in the north east corner of the fort and the fort, now a scheduled monument, has never been excavated. Observations made by antiquarians suggested the presence of a vicus or civilian settlement in the vicinity of the fort.

In 1967/68 a rescue dig in advance of the straitening of the A66 revealed the largest area of cemetery associated with a fort, that had been excavated in the north at that time. Two hundred and ninety three funerary features were recovered. The finds were puzzling and it is only recently that advances in scientific and statistical techniques have led to their re-examination. In 2004 a report was published and we now know that this is a third century cemetery which was probably the burial place for the whole community. Men, women and children were cremated and buried there as were cavalry from the garrison. Evidence suggests that the cavalry may have come from the Danubian frontier and intriguingly two women were burnt with horses and military equipment on their pyres. Following the publication of this report Penrith Museum hosted an exhibition titled *Into the Hands of the Shades* in autumn 2005.

In 1991 prior to the installation of a gas pipeline, excavations at Fremington just to the east of the fort found the first evidence in Cumbria of sixth to seventh centuries Anglo Saxon sunken featured buildings. Many of the finds associated with these buildings were Roman. Around the same time surveys in fields north of the A66 at Frenchfields recorded possible evidence of the vicus. A number of features were noted including roads, buildings, cobbled yards and ditches which could have been field boundaries.

In 2007 United Utilities asked Oxford Archaeology North to evaluate the proposed route of the

Hackthorpe-Penrith waste water pipeline as this would lie close to the fort and cemetery site and it was important to determine the route that would least damage the archaeology. In very wet weather during the summer of 2008 a 10m wide corridor was excavated along the agreed route.

At the eastern end of the site two cremation burials were found possibly indicating the edge of the cemetery found in the 1960s. A pit, which may be another sunken dwelling, was noted and indicates occupation of the area after the Romans left. There was evidence showing that the Romans cultivated the fields to the west of the fort. Ditches, track ways leading to the fields and watering holes for animals have all been identified. Pollen analysis has found charred grains of wheat, oats and barley, and the presence of alder and heather which may have been used for bedding. Results of further environmental analysis and carbon dating are awaited.

Evidence found directly south of the fort suggests that the vicus extended both north and south along the Roman road from Ribchester to Carlisle. The excavation revealed a road leading to the southern entrance of the fort with roads branching off and buildings lining them. The buildings appear to have been timber built on stone foundations and to have been rebuilt over time. One had been reconstructed in stone, which is unusual and suggests that it was an important building.

The artefacts found on the site begin to give us a picture of the life of the people who lived in the vicus. They would have been traders and craftsman along with the unofficial wives and children of soldiers garrisoned in the nearby fort. The vicus is thought to date back to the first century AD.

Over a thousand shards of pottery were found including Samian ware, a red glazed pottery produced as table ware from the first to the third centuries. This pottery usually bears the name of the potter or workshop and can be dated. No Samian ware was found from the second or third centuries, but there were shards of pottery, imported from Germany, which were dated to the third and fourth centuries. Much of the pottery is still being examined by experts. Pottery gaming counters and the remains of drinking vessels suggest that gambling and drinking were enjoyed.

Finds of copper and alloy buckles, of brooches and of jet and pewter buttons give some clues as to how clothes were worn. Other finds included third century silver dinarii and jewellery. The glass and jade beads hint at necklaces and along with a jet pendant and ring suggest that the women who wore the jewellery were of some status. An indication of the less wealthy is found in the spindle whorls made from broken pieces of pottery.

Ian summed up by saying there was still data to be interpreted and samples to be analysed and dated. But the information already known about the fort, the civilian settlement and cemetery at Brougham has shed light on the life and times of the Roman occupation in the north of England and that these findings are of national significance.

A useful discussion followed before Ian was thanked and enthusiastically applauded for an informative and beautifully illustrated presentation.

The next talk will be on Tuesday 14th December at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall when Martin Railton, North Pennines Archaeology, will speak on the *2009 Excavation Boroughgate Appleby*.