

## Appleby Archaeology September 2010

Appleby Archaeology Group welcomed Matthew Town as their first speaker of the autumn season. Matt, a project officer with North Pennines Archaeology (NPA) spoke on the *Excavations of The Pot House, St George's, Quay Lancaster.*

The pottery made at the pot house was delftware, an opaque tin or lead glazed earthenware. Patterns were painted on in metal oxides such as cobalt which gave the ware its typical blue colouring. Earthenware pots are porous, when unglazed, and are fired at low temperatures and as they are soft and easily damaged the pots have to be kept separate during firings. In this country delftware production was started by Flemish potters in Norwich in the sixteenth century and by 1754 there were three main centres in England in Liverpool, Bristol and London.

In 2007 NPA was commissioned to excavate the site prior to development. An extensive documentary search, which included the examination of freemen rolls, maps, insurance policies, copies of The Cumberland Pacquet and photographs, revealed much of the history of the site. In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Lancaster was one of the busiest ports in England with fortunes being made in the sugar, rum and slave trades. In exchange merchants needed to export goods such as pottery to the Caribbean and American colonies

The need for buildings and skilled labour meant that financial investment was required to set up the industry. In 1754 an enterprising merchant, John Beakbank, went into partnership with other merchants from Lancaster to build the pottery on marshland on the south bank of the river Lune. They recruited experienced delftware potters from Liverpool and by 1757 nine skilled potters were listed.

The manufacture of pottery in Lancaster was short-lived and ceased around 1786. The Lune had begun to silt up and by the 1780s navigation had become difficult and at the same time creamware from the Staffordshire potteries was surpassing delftware.

The site was taken over by the Lancaster Gas Light Company in 1826. The pothouse was still

standing in 1895 and some of the pottery buildings were visible around the gasometer in 1920. The site, much of which was by then occupied by slum dwellings, was earmarked for demolition in the 1930s as it was considered unsanitary. At that time there were thirty seven tenements with eleven individuals living in one of them. The pothouse was finally demolished around 1940 and the gasworks closed in 1958.

Substantial foundations remained and were excavated in 2007 to reveal a plan of the pottery and details of the kiln as well as evidence of the subsequent activity on the site such as walls, floors, cobbled yards and chimney boxes. Nothing was found in the remains of any of the buildings but there was a vast amount of demolition debris.

The pottery, built on marshland, had been a substantial three storey building with a 50 meter frontage on the quay. The foundations were deep and excavated to a depth of 2 metres but there was more to go. The main kiln, the oven in which pots were fired, was probably demolished in 1785. It had been square with sandstone walls to the outside and brick within. It would have been wood fired with the fuel put in at ground level. A series of coffin shaped flues were identified which would have provided heat to the building. Large voids were found which may have been water tanks. On the floor of the kiln, the archaeologists found bricks showing evidence of heat and standing one on top of the other. A deep layer was found containing the remains of kiln furniture that is to say the shelves, posts, stilts and saggars (clay boxes) used in the kiln to support or protect the pots as they were being fired.

Waste heaps of pottery were found all over the site but no date sequence could be established. Among the vast number of shards, discarded as waste, were some which had fragments of lists on them as though they had been used as scrap paper. Many appeared well fired and have helped in the painstaking task of matching them up to identify patterns. The pottery made at Lancaster was everyday ware, such as plates, tankards and chamber pots. So far there is little evidence of non essentials such as teapots, vases or inkwells.

Matt showed a series of slides to demonstrate the variety of patterns and colours used by the Lancaster potters. This was the first time that the group's new projector, funded by

Neighbourhood Forum, Eden Community Unit, was used and everyone appreciated the brightness and clarity of Matt's slides.

He drew the group's attention to a flat bottomed dish that had vertical sides and which was used to contain potted chard from Windermere. Previously it was thought that these pots were only made in Liverpool. The shards found at the site show that some delftware, which was previously thought to have been made at Liverpool and other British potteries, may need to be reattributed to Lancaster. There may be more surprises as many tons waste material were removed from the site and await washing and examination.

Matt conclude by emphasising the importance of this site. It had provided a unique opportunity to study pottery production in Lancaster, an industry which very few were aware of until NPA started the excavation. It appears to be the first time a delftware kiln has been excavated in this country.

The group asked a number of questions before warmly thanking Matt for his interesting and informative talk,

The next talk will be on Tuesday 12th October at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall when Sheena Gemmel will talk on *The impact and legacy of the arrival of the Scot in Dalriada in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.*