Committee news

The new editorial team of David Petts, Sarah Semple and David Mason, with assistance from Ben Edwards, is now working hard on Volume 18 of Durham Archaeological Journal, with a view to publication by the end of this year.

Regrettably, David Petts will be leaving the post of Fieldwork Officer at the end of the year, owing to other commitments and a desire to concentrate his efforts for the Society on editing the Journal. So we are urgently seeking to fill this post, with David offering the new recruit any support that he can provide.

Meanwhile, if anyone has any projects in mind, and would like to lead a fieldwork session, please let us know. The Society has the use of some surveying equipment.

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Windestone Hall An opportunity under threat?

Windestone Hall, situated roughly halfway between Sedgefield and Bishop Auckland, is one of the most significant country houses in County Durham. The current house dates from around 1634 and was reportedly built by Ignatius Bonomi for Sir Robert Johnson Eden, although there are records to suggest there has been a house on the site since at least the 16th century. The house is Grade II* listed and sits within a designed landscape park which includes numerous other listed buildings and structures such as a clock tower, stables and entrance lodges. The house was the home of the Eden family for some four hundred years, whose most famous son was Sir Anthony Eden, British Prime Minister at the time of the Suez Crisis in 1956. The Hall has, since the 1960s, been in the ownership of Durham County Council (DCC) and been used as a special school.

The use as a school – while ensuring the building’s continued future in the post-War period at a time when many other notable houses in Durham, such as Coxhoe Hall and Streatlam Castle, were abandoned and demolished – has, however, resulted in many modern functional but unsympathetic additions. All this may now be about to change, the school has closed and the DCC are putting the house and estate up for sale.

The Society has expressed concerns regarding both the building’s safety while it stands empty, and also in ensuring that a sympathetic new owner is found who will fully understand the costs and requirements of finding a new use while caring for the Hall and estate into the future. To this end, we have entered into correspondence with both Councillor Simon Henig, the leader of DCC, and Sedgefield Borough Council. Both have responded positively to reassure the Society that the building is being cared for in the short-term, and that a detailed planning brief will be enforced on any new owner to ensure care in the long term.

Members who are interested are encouraged to write to both the county and district councils and can access the excellent planning documents prepared by Sedgefield BC either in person through the Forward Planning Team at the Council Offices in Spennymoor, or on their website at http://www.sedgefield.gov.uk/ (and search on ‘Windestone Hall SPD’).

Niall Hammond Vice President AASDN

Hardwick Park and East Park excavations

Towards the end of June, the Society revisited Hardwick Park with Catherine Greer and Tony Smith. The transformation since our AGM in 2005 was remarkable; water now flows down the cascade, the Temple of Minerva, nearly completed, provides an elegant focal point on the far side of the lake, with colourful beds of perennials in keeping with 18th-century taste flanking its point on the far side of the lake, and Neptune has returned to the Serpentine River, overlooked by the Gothic Ruin. This romantic ‘castle’ has been restored with the aid of a Heritage Lottery Grant to straighten its leaning tower so it could be reconstructed to its original height.

Forthcoming exhibitions at the Old Fulling Mill Museum, Durham

Treasures from the Attic 29 September 2008 to 25 January 2009 An in-house exhibition based on the story of the Old Fulling Mill and the University’s archaeological collections

All Gellan 50 years on February to March 2009 English Heritage sponsored exhibition

For a programme of regular weekend workshops for children at the Old Fulling Mill, see www.dur.ac.uk/fulling.mill/events
Trip to Birdoswald and Spadeadam

Thirty members went on a trip to the Roman fort of Birdoswald by Hadrians Wall and into Northumberland to visit RAF Spadeadam under the direction of Phil Abrahamson. Some of us having attended a couple of courses on the Romans taught by Phil, we anticipated a very instructive and fun day out – and we certainly weren’t disappointed. Phil’s sense of humour and vast knowledge of the Romans meant we learnt a lot about Birdoswald. The section of wall alongside the fort is a wonder to see and to some of us it was an unknown ‘gem’ – being so well preserved. We had fun striding along some of the wall looking for the inscriptions left by the Roman builders and seeking out their customary ‘phallic’ carvings on the building stones.

AGM at Piercebridge

Our AGM this year was to Piercebridge and we were blessed with a lovely sunny day. Lovely food at the local farm shop but, best of all, an extremely interesting, informative tour around the site. We started off the day by looking at the remains of the original bridge and were able to understand the importance of this crossing over the River Tees. Dere Street was the main supply route from York to Hadrian’s Wall and connected all the forts in between. It was interesting to observe how much the river had changed its course. During our visit we watched the divers in the river looking for artefacts – they have spent many years excavating the river and have found many exciting finds. We then had a brief tour around the parts of the excavated fort which lie at the back of the settlement of Piercebridge – the majority of the village is built over the layout of the fort. We were then able to explore the site at our leisure.

Our AGM took place in the local village hall and was followed by a lovely tea supplied by the Piercebridge medieval wall and Roman bathhouse. Despite our AGM taking place in the local village hall and was followed by a lovely tea supplied by the Piercebridge bathhouse, we were blessed with a lovely sunny day, lovely food at the local farm shop but, best of all, an extremely interesting, informative tour around the site. We started off the day by looking at the remains of the original bridge and were able to understand the importance of this crossing over the River Tees. Dere Street was the main supply route from York to Hadrian’s Wall and connected all the forts in between. It was interesting to observe how much the river had changed its course. During our visit we watched the divers in the river looking for artefacts – they have spent many years excavating the river and have found many exciting finds. We then had a brief tour around the parts of the excavated fort which lie at the back of the settlement of Piercebridge – the majority of the village is built over the layout of the fort. We were then able to explore the site at our leisure.

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