

## ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

OF DURHAM AND NORTHUMBERLAND

Newsletter 7

spring 2007

**Programme  
2007**

All lectures will be held at Elvet Riverside, Room 141 New Elvet, Durham, at 2.30 pm (except where noted). Everyone is welcome to attend

- Thursday 15 March 7.15 pm **The Lucy Project Dr Fiona Coward** British Academy Researcher at Royal Holloway Examining the evolution of the early hominid brain in the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic Joint meeting with the University of Durham Archaeology Society, to be held at the Department of Archaeology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE Title and details to be confirmed
- Saturday 17 March **Vindolanda and the military community, expanding the knowledge of the Roman Frontier Andrew Birley** Vindolanda Trust This lecture will take place in CG85, in the Chemistry Department, at the Stockton Road entrance to the University Science Site
- Saturday 14 April **Linbriggs and Branshaw, a comparison of two marginal settlements in Northumberland Penny Middleton** Archaeo-Environment Ltd
- Saturday 19 May **AGM and launch of the Barnard Castle report** Lecture and tour by **Professor David Austin** in Barnard Castle
- Saturday 9 June **Industrial Heritage A future for the past and a past for the future? Ian Ayris** Historic Environment Manager, Newcastle City Council This lecture will take place in ER 201, which is in the building adjacent to our usual venue
- Saturday 15 September **Welcome to the cheap seats Cinemas, sex and landscape Shaun Richardson** Ed Dennison Archaeological Services
- Saturday 13 October **Cemetery of secrets A group of decapitated inhumation burials from the Roman cemetery on the Mount, York Katie Tucker** York Archaeological Trust **Professor Charlotte Roberts** Durham University
- Saturday 10 November **'Between the brine and the high ground' Reflections on Northumbrian roots Emeritus Professor Brian Roberts** Durham University
- Saturday 8 December **Members Meeting**
- Excursions**
- Saturday 14 July **Lumley Castle, Bywell and Bradley Hall** with Society member Erik Matthews
- Sunday 29 July **Archaeology on the Feldon Range** with MOD Archaeologists To be confirmed
- Saturday 11 August **Yeaving and Routin Lynn** with local archaeologist Roger Miket
- Saturday 22 September **A trip around some northern mills**

**Officers 2006–07****President Dr David Mason**

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**A bumper year for publications****Barnard Castle**

2007 looks set to be a year notable for the appearance of a number of important publications. Prominent amongst these is a two-volume report on David Austin's 1970s investigations within the medieval castle at Barnard Castle, the largest excavations ever to take place at a monument of this type. Along with a description of the remains of the nine structural phases encountered and a study of the surviving castle fabric, it also includes detailed assessments of the wealth of plant, mammal, bird, fish and mollusc remains recovered which provide a fascinating insight into the everyday life and diet of the inhabitants of a medieval castle. Entitled *Acts of Perception: a study of Barnard Castle in Teesdale*, the report will be published (with generous grant aid from English Heritage) as Report number 6 in the Society's Research Series and will be available around April or May 2007. Further details will follow.

**NERRF**

Another major work, published right at the end of 2006, is *Shared Visions: the North East Regional Research Framework for the historic environment* by David Petts with Christopher Gerrard. This rather formidably titled volume is the culmination of the English Heritage funded NERRF project, undertaken jointly by Durham County Council's Archaeology Section and the Archaeology Department of Durham University. Drawing upon knowledge and opinions from all parts of the region's historic environment sector who contributed to the project, it sets out a vision for the future of research into the archaeology and historic environment of the North East of England (County Durham, Northumberland, Teeside, and Tyne and Wear) over the next five years. The impetus for the project—funded by English Heritage—was the recognition that the ever-increasing volume of work in the sector needed a clear set of research priorities and objectives so that the often limited resources available could be deployed to the greatest effect. The first half of the book sets out the current state of knowledge, period by period, from the Paleolithic era right through to the twentieth century, and there is an additional section on scientific and environmental issues. This makes the book extremely useful as a readily accessible and comprehensive summary of current understanding incorporating recent discoveries and research. Following this Resource Assessment, there is an Agenda section which highlights



Barnard Castle in 1800, by Thomas Girtin

the strengths and weaknesses in the current state of knowledge and identifies key areas for future research. These are listed both by period and by theme. In the third and final section—the Strategy—suggestions are made for practical ways in which the environment for research could be improved. It makes recommendations regarding the organisation and support of research which could not only facilitate such activity in the future but which could also enhance its benefits and effectiveness.

Published by Durham County Council, Durham University and English Heritage, this publication can be purchased from County Durham Books, the County Council's publishing arm, at a price of £25.00 plus £3.50 p&p; by telephone (0191) 370 8714, or online via the Council's website [www.durham.gov.uk](http://www.durham.gov.uk)—follow the links to County Durham Books and Online Shop.

**Roman Piercebridge**

Later in 2007, it is hoped to have published the report on the excavations at Roman Piercebridge by the late Peter Scott and Dr Dennis Harding. Edited by Hilary Cool and David Mason, this may appear as Report No 7 in the Society's Research Series.

**County Durham archaeology**

Issue No. 2 of the County Council Archaeology Section's *Archaeology, County Durham* will be on sale from around 10th March, again through County Durham Books, as detailed above.

David Mason President

Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland

The Society website [www.communitate.co.uk/ne/aasdn](http://www.communitate.co.uk/ne/aasdn)

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## Thornborough henges: a landscape at risk

In January, the Society hosted a lecture by Jan Harding of Newcastle University, 'The Neolithic and Bronze Age monument complex of Thornborough, North Yorkshire'. Dr Harding described the extensive ritual landscape, the largest outside the Wessex chalk lands, with its three massive henge monuments, and speculated about the chronological development of the site, suggesting that the complex was probably built gradually as people visited the site over time. The earliest monument was the Neolithic cursus, at least 1.1 kilometres long and 44 metres wide, its rounded western terminal being aligned on a bend in the River Ure. It was suggested that the henges themselves were maintained over time, with evidence of the ditch of the central henge being cleaned out at a later date. The continual use of the landscape was attested by Early Bronze Age round barrows and a change in the Late Bronze Age from sacred use to domestic, with the field divisions orientated on the alignment of the henges.

The henges form part of a much wider complex, described as the earliest and largest planned religious landscape within the British Isles, with seven huge earth henges within the Vale, and the 'Devil's Arrows' standing stones near Boroughbridge. The wider importance of the landscape around the henges was evident in the division between sacred and secular occupation, revealed by the pattern of flints retrieved during fieldwalking. The henge monuments were not actually visible from the area of densest occupation, while the absence of flints or other finds from the henges themselves suggests that they were deliberately kept clean. The position of the cursus and henges in relation to the River Ure, seen as a major route-way in the Late Neolithic, suggests that the site may have played some role in the distribution and circulation of polished stone axes from Langdale, with Yorkshire flints travelling in the opposite direction. Just as Stonehenge is now seen as the central element in a much wider prehistoric landscape, the impressive henges of Thornborough are clearly part of a much wider picture of intense prehistoric activity over a considerable period of time.

Unfortunately, while the henges themselves are a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the surrounding landscape is unprotected. Deep ploughing has caused considerable damage over several years and, more



Aerial shot of the Thornborough henges from the south, courtesy of English Heritage.

recently, gravel quarrying has eaten away large areas surrounding the henges and continues to threaten the site. Tarmac, which owns much of the land in the area, argues that it is preferable to record archaeology, at the expense of the developer, prior to quarrying than to allow it to erode away through ploughing. Following the rejection of Tarmac's plan to extend the Ladybridge Farm quarry site in February 2006, a revised scheme was accepted in January 2007, despite opposition from local campaigners.

The Friends of Thornborough are calling on Tarmac to move its North Yorkshire sand and gravel extraction to a less sensitive location. English Heritage, which provided funding for Dr Harding's work, stated its firm opposition to any further gravel extraction from the Ladybridge Farm area until the archaeological value of the landscape is better understood. English Heritage favours a long-term management regime for the henges and their associated landscape as managed grassland, with improved public access to and interpretation of the landscape and monuments. An archaeological trail along the River Ure connecting Boroughbridge and the henges would provide a valuable resource for the public and local schools. It is suggested that the potential for tourism in the area would outweigh the losses incurred by stopping the quarrying, thereby preserving a unique landscape for posterity, while making it accessible to the public.

For information on the Friends of Thornborough, visit their website [www.friendsofthornborough.org.uk](http://www.friendsofthornborough.org.uk) or ring their press officer, Mike Saunders, on telephone (01609) 777 480.

## Surtees Society offer

Members of AASDN are entitled—indeed invited—to take advantage of a limited special offer from the Surtees Society. The latter, which has been publishing hardback editions of original historical documents from the North of England regularly since 1834, is drastically reducing the price of the forty-two volumes still available up to Volume 206 (2001). All volumes up to 202 are now £10 each instead of £25; later volumes are £15 each instead of £40; moreover, three can be bought for the price of two. There is no dispatch charge.

Particulars of the available volumes are on the Society's website (see below), but the whole set of volumes may also be readily consulted in the Local

Collection in the University Library, Palace Green, Durham. The ones on offer range from medieval and early modern wills and inventories, letters, accounts, surveys and other documents of the vast church administrations in Durham and elsewhere, and estate, commercial, legal and personal records of leading Northern families and institutions, to local diaries and correspondence, and less-expected material, such as song collections and a 17th-century flora.

Apply for details of the volumes on offer and an order form to the Surtees Society, 43 North Bailey, Durham DH1 3EX, or e-mail [Surtees.Society@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Surtees.Society@durham.ac.uk)

## English Heritage survey at Sockburn Hall and All Saints' Church

Sockburn parish occupies a pendulous loop of the River Tees at the southern limit of the historic county of Durham. It is an intriguing place, almost an island, made all the more mysterious by the presence of an exceptional number of Viking Age sculpted stones. All Saints' Church, the one currently-roofed section of which contains the Viking stones, is being reclaimed from the undergrowth by local volunteers from the Middleton St George Society, allowing the ruins to be consolidated through a programme of works led by English Heritage and the Durham Diocese. This work is much needed, but so too is new research to better understand and appreciate the significance of the ruins and the Viking stones in their wider archaeological setting. A team from English Heritage is presently at work analysing the adjacent scheduled earthworks and, with new geophysical and aerial evidence, we expect to throw fresh light on the long history of settlement associated with the church and, perhaps, with the earlier relicts it contains.

The significance of Sockburn as an Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic site, and the implications of the Viking stones, with their curious fusion of pagan and Christian imagery, have already been noted (newsletter 6). Symeon of Durham tells us that Snaculf gave lands at Soccebury to the monks of Durham around 1000, about the time that the earliest phases of the present church were constructed. The Conyers family held the manor of Sockburn from the time of the Norman Conquest until the 17th century,



The ruined church of All Saints, Sockburn. © English Heritage

## Fieldwork

The Gainford Hall earthwork survey is finally finished! Thanks to all of those who put in so much time and effort over the past few months. The work has included geophysical investigation (kindly conducted by Penny Wilson of Durham University), plane table and Total Station survey. The field team are now quite adept at setting up and using the plane table and operating within a controlled survey network, skills we hope to employ on new projects in the future.

A second skeleton-washing session was run at Northern Archaeological Associates offices in Barnard Castle in November. This always proves a very popular event and was well attended. Another session is planned sometime in the spring and I also hope to arrange an opportunity to wash and process small finds and pottery,



Sockburn from the air. © English Heritage NMR 20629/051

investing in a chantry chapel for the church and a number of substantial houses, suggested by documentary evidence and by patterns of earthworks. The last Conyers' house, an elaborate 17th-century mansion set within formal gardens, lay immediately south of the church but, in 1823, the historian Surtees lamented that 'not one stone is now left on another'. The Conyers' successors, the family of the newly-created baronet, Sir William Blackett, may have used this house for a while, but their main interests lay elsewhere, in Northumberland. A less elaborate building served as the manor house for a short period. Either this building or the nearby manor farm was home to Mary Hutchinson, the future wife of William Wordsworth, whom he visited, with his fellow poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in 1799–1800.

The present day Sockburn Hall, a grand neo-Jacobean building in mellow stone to the north of the church, was built for Henry Collingwood Blackett in 1834. In creating a fashionable setting for this new hall, much of the land to the south was converted to parkland, which has preserved the earthwork remains we see today; but, at the same time, the ancient parish church was largely demolished to create a romantic ruin.

David Went . Marcus Jecock

Archaeological Survey and Investigation . English Heritage

The Society has an ongoing interest in the preservation and recording of the site of Sockburn. English Heritage has kindly offered to organise a weekend of training for AASDN members in the near future. This is a unique opportunity for Society members to become involved in fieldwork while finding out more about this fascinating site. Anyone who would like to take part should contact the Society Secretary, Belinda Burke, if they have not already done so, and she will then contact all those who have expressed an interest as soon as further details become available.

Penny Middleton Society Fieldwork Officer [penny@aenvironment.co.uk](mailto:penny@aenvironment.co.uk)

with someone on hand to identify finds and explain how they help in interpreting a site. While nothing is confirmed as yet, the Society may be involved in a small excavation in early May or June (still very much in the early stages of discussion). As usual, there will be several community digs throughout the summer; I shall post details of these as soon as I have further information. We hope to join forces with NEVAG for the annual joint buildings recording day.

If anyone has any ideas for future fieldwork, or if there is a particular aspect of archaeology which you have always wanted to 'have a go at', then please do drop me a line. In particular, we are looking for sites to fieldwalk, either this season or next autumn/winter. Please note that my e-mail address has changed.