

Historical Environment Report April 2023

For our first outdoors visit of 2023 we were fortunate to be offered a second walk around Bowes. In July 2017 the late Cliff Brown led one of our first ever group visits there with a main focus on the village's schools in the Dickensian era. Nearly six years later our new vicar David Tomlinson took up the reins by offering a second visit; by chance there was little cross-over between the two events which very much complemented each other.

We met David at the village hall car park as storm clouds threatened overhead. Light drizzle was falling as we moved along the main street, once the busy A66 but now comparatively quiet. David pointed out unusual features: early cottages built with rough stone; a bus stop constructed from Roman stones – a first for me; two buildings sporting plaques to show their affiliation to the national cycling association; the last blacksmith's shop which remained in business into the 1960s. The inevitable stop at Dotheboys Hall was accompanied by anxious glances heavenwards, but we made it to the church in the dry; in fact while David was showing us the two ancient fonts and fine Roman relics within, the weather outside was brightening up considerably. The one problem with the riches on display was that accessibility was difficult: a fine inscription relating to the Emperor Septimius Severus is tucked away behind a table. David explained that the Bowes Heritage Group is working on a project to convert a section of the church to ensure that these important objects can be properly displayed. Our group signed a letter of support for this.

90 minutes were speeding past as we moved on to examine the castle remains before crossing the cemetery, where David had recently conducted two interments, and viewing the remains of what had once been a fine Roman bathhouse in the field behind. Listening to David's very informative commentary, it was hard to remember that he has been in post for less than a year. Fittingly he has recently been in touch with Molly, the widow of our previous guide, Cliff. Both these walks were a pleasure to take part in and many of us will be revisiting the village soon for a further, more leisurely look. Hopefully this will not be David's last contribution to our u3a and his determination to improve signage and facilities in Bowes is to be applauded.



Tim Meacham.