

Report on August 2023 Historic Environment Visit

We were very fortunate to visit the Altogether Archaeology Gueswick dig about halfway through their brief 2023 excavation period. Twenty-three Teesdale u3a members were shown round in two groups led by Tony Metcalfe and Rob Pearson. All of us were, I think, surprised and excited by the nature and scale of the current excavations. This huge artificial mound was largely unknown before Altogether Archaeology took an interest after viewing it from a separate venture across the valley in 2018. Quite why such a prominent hill had escaped previous serious study is difficult to understand but after successful negotiations with the Lambs of Doe Park, a small trial trench was excavated in 2019 before ... enter Covid. Resuming in 2021, and returning the following year, tantalising hints of a long-term substantial township began to appear. Magnetometry soundings suggested that a large area on top of the 'hill' had been surrounded by a trench and palisade, sample digging confirmed this, and a series of supportive experts looked at the finds of pottery, fish and animal bones etc. before coming up with some real surprises. At the bottom of a trench were remains datable to 1260 BC, while more generally this year's finds are pointing to genuine Romano-British contact here in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Perhaps best of all we were able to pass round a recently discovered fourth-century style Roman spearhead. Also this year a paved floor has been revealed right where the previous years' digs suggested a settlement may have existed. This 'town' (jumping the gun rather but non-experts can be allowed flights of fancy) may well have been occupied right up until the 4th century departure of Roman troops from Britain, yet relatively little excavation has been possible so far, and so much remains guesswork, although the 18 or so volunteer diggers are increasing understanding daily. As Rob took us to a small sub-excavation and told us there were hopes that an old trench might be revealed there, one digger barely looked up as she told us they had indeed found this this very morning.

Rob will be addressing our October meeting with an end-of-season update. I and all who joined us for the morning at the dig will be very interested to hear what emerges in the second half of this season. With the continuing good will of Doe Park it looks almost certain that these excavations will continue in future years; dare we hope that before long before a major Romano-British settlement will be confirmed within the boundaries of Cotherstone? In the meantime we offer our most grateful thanks to Tony and Rob for an inspiring visit, and eagerly await Rob's update in October. For details check the Teesdale u3a website or contact Tim Meacham at simontimothymeacham@gmail.com.

