

## Teesdale u3a Monthly Meeting Report

The Durham University Museum of Archaeology was initially housed in the Old Fulling Mill on the River Wear below the Cathedral. It was opened in 1833, only a year after the University itself was established. After several accommodation changes, in 2014 the Museum was moved to Palace Green, where it is still situated and where it now houses its own collection, built up over the years.

Gemma Lewis, the Curator of Durham Castle and the Museum of Archaeology, was the speaker at the November meeting and she described the history of the Museum and some of its important collections. William Proctor, the first Curator, and George Townsend Fox were prominent in helping to establish the Museum.

The collection includes many prehistoric, Roman and Anglo Saxon items from the area as well as some transferred from other parts of the country. There are fascinating photographs from a 1906 excavation of a cist in Witton Gilbert, showing a Beaker burial with skeletal remains. There is a rare Roman, almost complete, lead naval diploma from Lanchester in the name of Tigono, describing his career.

Excavations in Sadler Street produced everyday items from the tenth century including ice skates, lots of leather goods and a beautiful beer mug showing hunting dogs. Apparently in Anglo Saxon times, we were exporting hunting dogs to Europe.

There is a small-scale reproduction of the Roman bridge in Piercebridge where there is evidence of 3 Roman bridges. In addition, divers have discovered thousands of items in the riverbed, including figurines and some luxury or high status items. There are also many coins some of which are fakes or have been tampered with.

The Museum has now become a centre for the storage of horse equipment and houses the biggest collection in Britain. Gemma's favourite item is a beautifully decorated, miniature soldier's leg from the knee down, complete with trendy socks and sandals which could be the handle of an everyday item.

This was an excellent talk, clear and comprehensive and delivered with a touch of humour.

The vote of thanks was given by Tim Meacham. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 27th January when Tim Meacham will be speaking on 'Where there's muck....'. For more information about u3a visit the website [www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk](http://www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk)

Ian Reid