

Monthly Meeting – March 2026

Dr Beverley Still was the speaker at the March monthly meeting. Beverley has been leading archaeological excavations into prehistoric settlements and burial sites in the Teesdale area for several years and this talk covered life in the Bronze Age, roughly 3300 to 1200 BCE, when there was extensive use of bronze, the copper/tin alloy. Her team is composed of students of various nationalities who have been 'trained on the job', together with volunteers from Altogether Archaeology.

The excavations were in an area where the largest Bronze Age hoard in the north had been discovered in 1980, there being thousands of hoards discovered throughout Britain. Several burnt mounds have been identified. These are usually kidney or oval shaped and their size can be roughly 10m x 2m x 1.5m high. They are made of piles of stones which would be heated and then dunked into water which might then be used e.g. for saunas, cooking, leather working or brewing beer. In addition, several new hoards were discovered which contained bronze arrowheads and spearheads, or fragments of, together with flints and cherts, cherts being like flints but softer. It is likely that the hoards were collected for possible reuse at some stage. The remains of hazel and alder were also found but no oak. Hazel and alder are much more pliable and durable than oak and alder is particularly useful in wet and marshy conditions.

The finds suggest that there was considerable trade and travelling taking place and there is evidence that these sites were in use for about 500 years, perhaps from time to time, as people moved around. On the Gilmonby site, among the discoveries were stake holes, a food hearth, a paved entrance and perhaps a stone building of some kind. There may also have been reuse of the site at a later period.

These excavations are continuing in July 2026, through funding from the Royal Archaeological Institute and the Society of Ancient Antiquities, but excavations beyond July will depend on the availability of funding. No remains of round houses have yet been found but the team are hopeful and still looking.

The next meeting is on Thursday 23rd April, when Max Adams is speaking on 'The making of Anglo Saxon England'.

Ian Reid