

ALTOGETHER ARCHAEOLOGY



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Newsletter

EDITOR'S UPDATE

Dear Members,

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Altogether Archaeology Newsletter. The year is nearly half over and what a busy time it has been!

We were treated to a couple of talks at the start of the year – Stephen Woolford gave an interesting account of the Imperial War Museum at Duxford where he was tasked to reconstruct the former RAF operations room as it would have been in WW2, and Derek Simms, a trustee and volunteer at the Fitzhugh Library, Middleton-in-Teesdale, explained about the origins of the library and its current use.

In March we held the usual AGM which was followed by three speakers: Rebecca Cadbury-Simmons on an *Introduction to the Land of Lead and Silver* project, Greg Finch giving a talk based on his new book, *'The Making of the Hexamshire Landscape'* and Perry Gardner informing us about *Prehistoric Boundaries, Trackways and Land Systems around Gueswick Hills*.

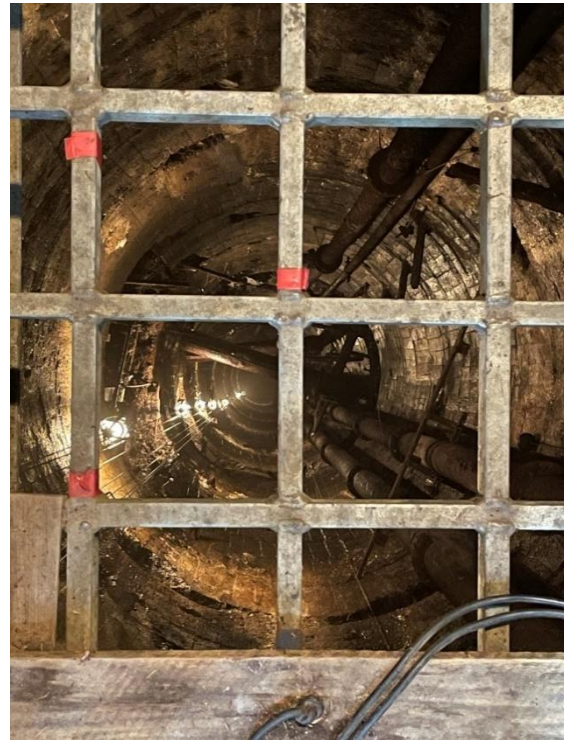
At the end of March, some willing members attended a 2-day event at the Wynch Bridge End Cottage, Bowlees Visitor Centre. The public were invited to join AA on a 4-mile-long guided walk of local archaeological features of interest, including a bronze-age settlement and the site of a former medieval longhouse. A daily talk gave the public an extra insight into AA activities.

The Nenthead mine visit in April proved very popular with members (figs: a-g). Pete Jackson gave an introductory talk before members were able to go underground into the actual mine to see first-hand what conditions would have been like. A good time was had by all.

In early May, Perry Gardner, Professor Karen Milak, and students from Durham University gave members a fascinating experience using scientific techniques to analyse different soil samples taken from the dig at Holwick (figs: h-j). It showed members how useful a tool these techniques can be in interpreting samples.



Fig: a



Figs: b-g
Nenthead
Lead Mine
(Photos: Tony
Metcalf)

Also in May, we had a triple-header of talks at St. John's Chapel. Pete Jackson talked about the evidence for lead mining in the North Pennines followed by Rob Pearson who gave us an update on the 2022 excavation at Kirkhaugh. Finally, Tony Metcalfe updated us about the excavations at Plover Hall, Gilmonby and the Gueswick Hills near Cotherstone.

Phew! So much has been happening! And if you are interested in knowing what future events and activities are taking place then visit the website for more information at: <https://altogetherarchaeology.org>

And finally, I hope you enjoy reading the articles in this edition!

Sue Goldsborough (Editor)



Figs: h-j

Top photos: AA members learning techniques in soil analysis

Bottom photo: Professor Karen Milak (Durham University) interpreting a soil sample taken from Holwick which had been thin sectioned onto a slide

(Photos: Sue Goldsborough)

CHURCH CORNER

THE MISCELLANEOUS STONES

'a museum of rock-types'

(Geologist W.J. Arkell on Brixworth Church)

The visitor to stone churches, whether the expert or the merely curious, will first be confronted with the great mass of stones shaping the architectural style. Once having taken in the overall composition of a typical design of tower, nave and chancel, the visitor will observe the windows with perhaps a variety of tracery denoting their stylistic origins. How many will then go directly through the porch and into the nave without taking notice of the stones that comprise the main fabric? It may be understandable if the stones are of one type and colour as is the case, for example, in virtually all Victorian churches. Medieval churches are more likely to display a mix of stone types in their makeup, especially in areas where access to stone depends on the convenience of quarry location, local geology or where the use of 'ready-made' stone such as unknapped flint is available, as can be seen in the medieval churches of East Anglia.



Fig.1: view of All Saints church, Brixworth, Northamptonshire

A very good example of the study of the miscellany of stones forming a church is contained in '*The Anglo-Saxon Church of All Saints Brixworth Northamptonshire – survey, excavation and analysis 1972-2010*'. The church core is a major Anglo-Saxon phased construction of between the late 8th–11th century (figs.1 and 2). The study includes the investigation of the petrological detail, stone by stone, of the many different stone types in the fabric; many varieties of which come from outside the county, notably from Leicestershire, despite there being plenty local building stone at hand.



Fig.2: A large section of the nave south wall

Among the stones in the fabric are what appear to be Roman bricks and the study suggests that the bricks may have come from the Roman Jewry wall site in Leicester. The bricks can be seen in fig.3 of a section of the south wall (formerly forming an arcade pillar) taken on my visit to the church. My photograph is based on a section of the drawing in the study of the main south elevation that shows the colour-coded stones and refer to their identity thus:

Brick, pink sandstone, igneous diorite, Lincolnshire limestone, slate, and banded tuff among others categorised as unspecified; however, the complete survey lists many more varieties.



Fig.3: A detailed section of the nave south wall

These archaeological and geological studies are a great help to the understanding of our histories using sophisticated scientific methodology as well as the trowel etc. Yet whenever I visit a church and when having my sandwiches in the churchyard, my first thoughts are to the workers who raised the building and to those who, perhaps through the centuries, used the church for many reasons; this leads me to thoughts of the church poets who find their expression in, for example:

'...flint-congested walls...'

'...a stack of granite harvested...'

'...clunch crumbled...' etc.

Alan Newham

(Photos: A. Newham)

OUT and ABOUT

A Visit to Blue Craggs Defended Settlement

On Thursday 2 February 2023 myself, Martin Green and Andy Willis braved the less than accurate weather forecast to walk up from the village of Colwell, in Northumberland, to have a good look at the defended settlement at Blue Craggs plus the other interesting features at Green Craggs, Dunn Craggs and the open pasture of Brecken Hills.

Blue Craggs itself is an official schedule monument, lying on a wedge-shaped outlier of the Whin Sill at 170 metres OD. As I had been before and Andy and Martin had not, I said on the way there that they had a treat in store and we were not let down.

Fig.1 taken from the 1st Edition OS map published 1866 shows the area well.

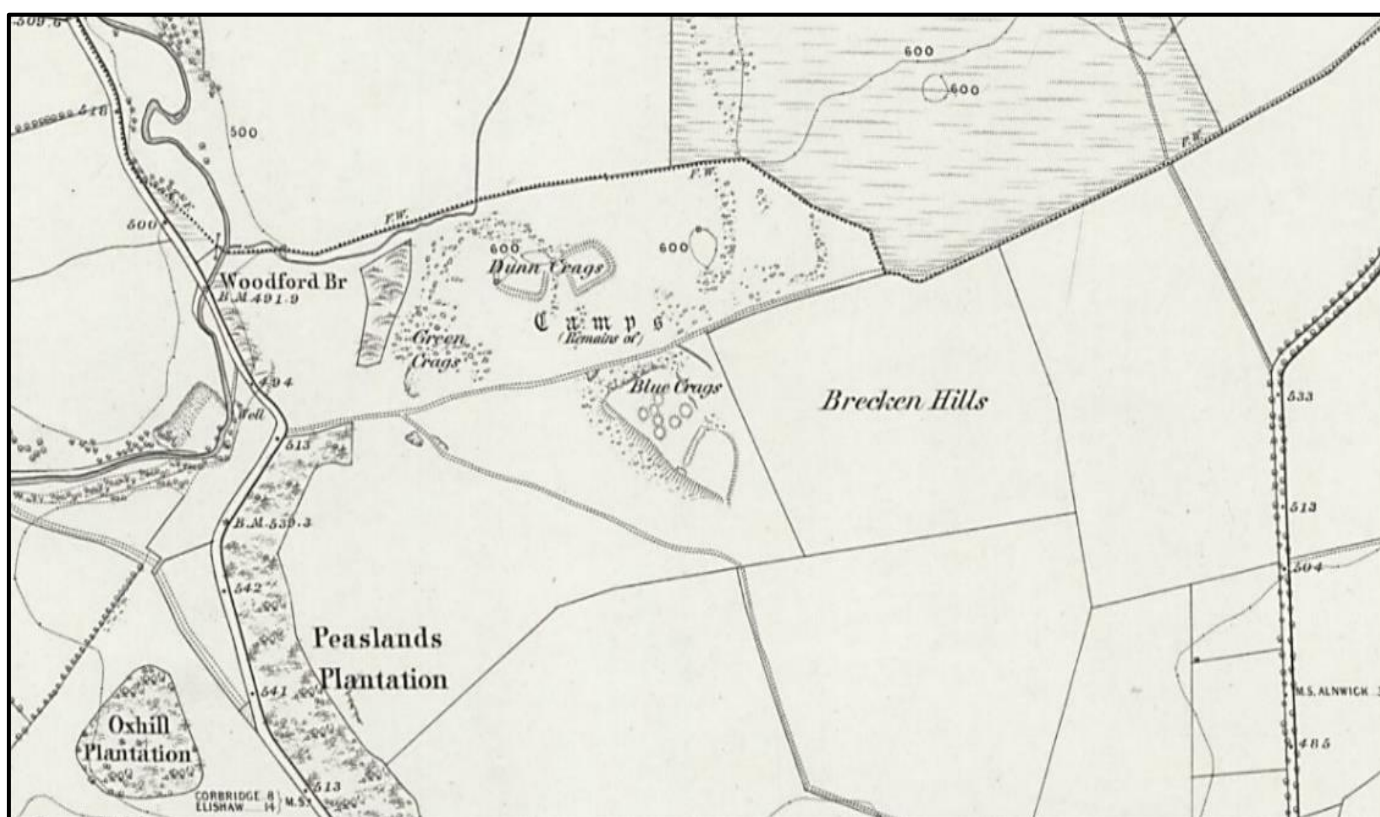


Fig.1: Blue Craggs Defended Settlement OS Map 1866 (reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland). It is worth noting that the surveyors show 6 hut circles on Blue Crag which they rarely bothered to illustrate

I have reproduced a description of the Blue Crag settlement from the *Oxford Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland* (on-line version), which states:

“The enclosure measures 192m NW-SE by 70m transversely. An earth and stone rampart 5m wide and 1m high borders the outcrop on all sides, but has now been lost in the N to quarrying. No ditches. A simple gap entrance lies in the SW angle of the ramparts. Two substantial natural outcrops at the foot of the Crag and in the E and W would have provided additional defence. Internally a double stone wall divided the larger enclosure into two compartments with the one in the NW approximately 0.64ha and in the SE 0.31ha. Within the larger NW compartment, 12 stone founded hut circles 6.5m in diameter survive up to 0.5m high. The SE appears to have been uninhabited and has been interpreted as a stock enclosure (annex). Excavations of nine of the huts in 1924-5 (Ball 1927) produced quern stones, whetstones, a cup marked stone and a piece of medieval pottery. The site is recorded on 1856-65 OS mapping. RCHME field investigations were carried out in 1961 and 1967 and the site is scheduled.”

I also show a picture from Google Earth (fig.2) which clearly shows up the Defended Settlement plus a few other features which are referred to below.

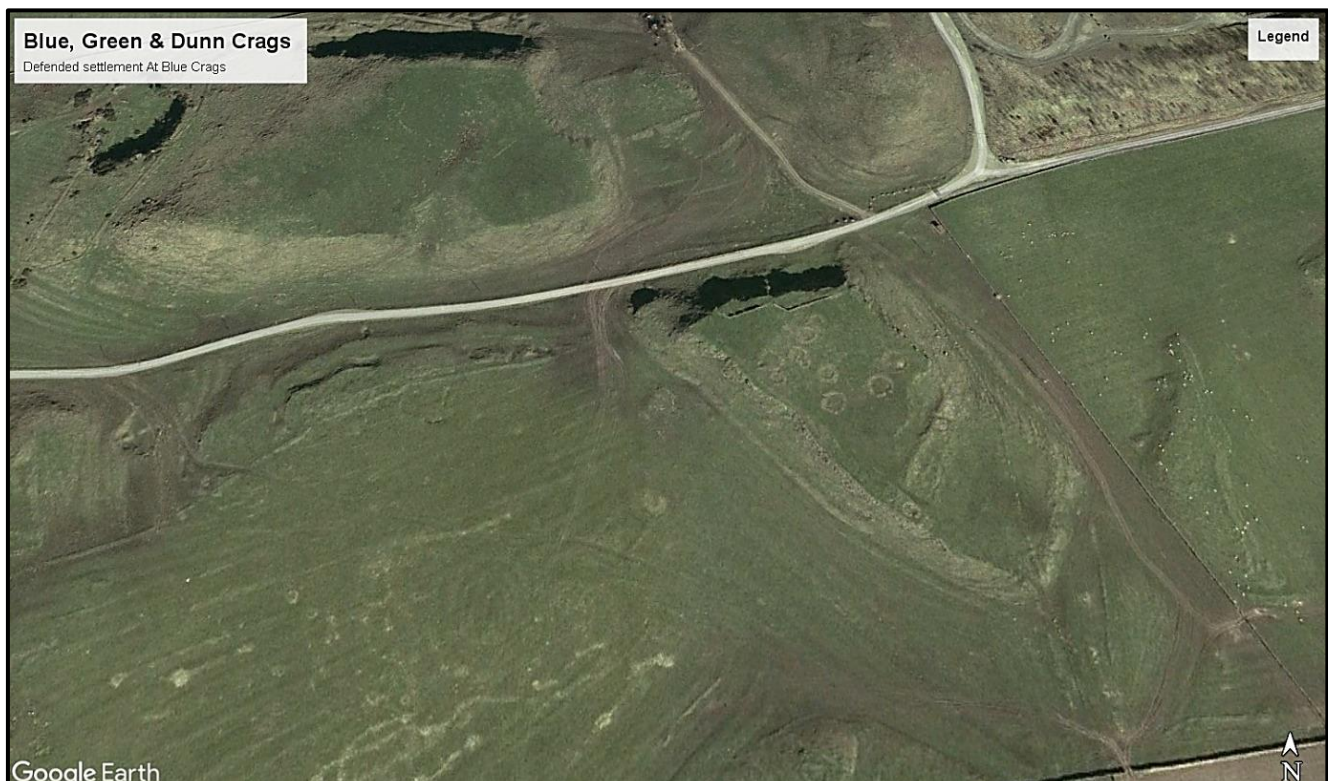


Fig.2: Image of Blue Crag taken from Google Earth. The hut circles are clearly visible.

The description goes on to state that the finds suggested an Iron Age and / or Romano British date for this site, whilst the cup marked stone indicates it was of some significance before that. Cup marked stones may be attributed to a period of the Bronze Age which would tie in with the record of a Bronze Age round house below Green Craggs on the north side of the modern quarry road leading from the A68 to Swinburne Whinstone Quarry (still in use today). At the north end of Blue Craggs there are the remains of a well-built dry-stone wall, probably of 19th century date, which was likely to have been built to stop grazing animals falling over the edge of an old quarry face. Interestingly, this old quarry must pre-date 1862 because the cut off area at the north end of Blue Craggs is shown on that map but it is not described as a quarry, which would have been the case if it was in use at the date of the Ordnance Survey.

As we walked around the site it was noticeable that some of the well-preserved hut circles were considerably larger than others and on a few there appeared to be small annexes or additions with 'doorways' leading into the main house. Martin suggested that one, at least, could possibly be a corn drying oven. Without doubt, these are the best-preserved hut circles any of us had ever seen. The defensive ramparts on the west and east side of this settlement are also well pronounced.

For anyone who has not visited this settlement it is well worth taking a walk there. But if you look at the Google Earth image (fig.2), just after passing through the field gate on the public footpath, you can see roughly 100 metres to the west along the line of the field wall there is another possible hut circle site. There is certainly the appearance of occupation here and possibly some smaller defensive banks around it, and the rig and furrow ploughing of the main field stops below these. Unfortunately, some of this feature on its south side may have been destroyed to the south of the wall line by modern ploughing.

We next walked across the quarry road westwards to the possible hut circle below Green Craggs. This too is a scheduled site. Historic England states:

“The monument includes a stone hut circle of Bronze Age date, situated in a sheltered position at the foot of Green Craggs. The hut circle is visible as the roughly circular foundations of a building, comprising a bank 1.6m wide and 0.4m high, composed of large stones set on end. The interior of the building measures 4m in diameter. It is not obvious where the original entrance was but this is normally found in the south-eastern corner.”

After looking at this area we progressed up onto Dunn Craggs where remains of old field boundaries are faintly visible on the Google Earth image (fig.2). Of greater interest is the remains of a mediaeval settlement or farmstead, again a scheduled site. Historic England tells us:

“The monument includes a well-preserved farmstead of medieval date situated in a sheltered position on a south-facing slope between two hills, now on the edge of a roadstone quarry. A main rectangular enclosure measuring 48m east to west by 43m north to south lies within strong stone and earth banks 4m across and 0.6m high. An entrance leads into the enclosure at the centre of the south wall where there are clear foundations of several rectangular buildings, the most prominent of which measures 10m by 14m. Attached to the south-eastern corner of the large enclosure is a rectangular annexe measuring 26m by 25m with walls of similar proportions to the main enclosure. An entrance lies in the centre of the south wall and within the annexe there are platforms of rectangular buildings. A length of bank 22m long is attached to the south-western corner of the large enclosure. Immediately to the south of the farmstead are two strip lynchets formed by cultivation of the sloping ground.”

Having explored this with reference to the DSM Lidar image that Martin brought with him (fig.3) we moved up to look at the top of the most easterly hill which lies east of the recorded medieval settlement and east of the more modern farm track. The top of this hill at NY 94674 76277, shows some evidence of occupation with an ancient trackway curving around from its bottom left-hand side and leading upwards to the hilltop. On the top are the remains of a somewhat enigmatic small stone structure no more than a metre wide and perhaps two or so in length. At the eastern end were a couple of not very large stones, whilst the other stones appeared to form a roughly rectangular feature. To hazard a guess, if this is a man-made structure, it may have been a robbed-out burial mound.



Fig: 3: LIDAR image of Blue Crag defended settlements showing clearly a series of hut circles

Finally, we headed off back down this hill and south along a wall line to enter the pastures called Brecken Hills (shown on the map above). In this field there are several cairns dotted about on the sides of raised areas of land with evidence of rig and furrow ploughing alongside these raised areas, which appeared to have occasional bedrock showing through. The *Keys to the Past* website suggest that these may have been Bronze Age burial cairns (N9203) or clearance cairns. It looked to us to be far more likely that they are field clearance cairns and there were quite several of them of varying sizes.

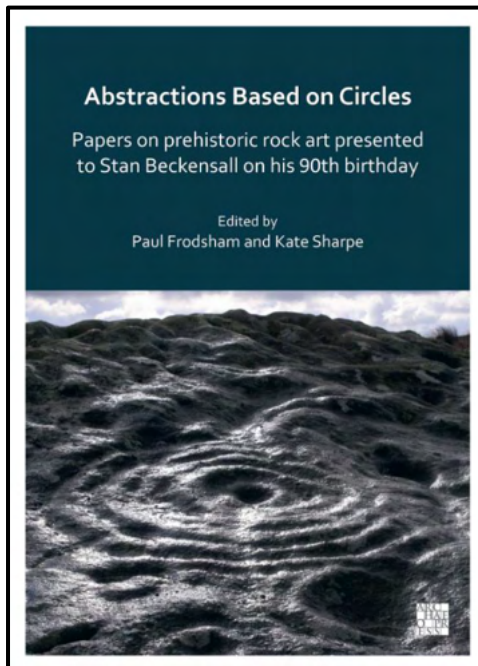
After this we headed back to the cars a Colwell and down the A68 to well-deserved cups of coffee and nibbles at the Errington Coffee House at the Portgate roundabout.

A good day out!

Malcolm McCallum

BOOK REVIEW

1. *Abstractions Based on Circles: Papers on prehistoric rock art*



Paul Frodsham, Kate Sharpe (Eds.) *Abstractions Based on Circles: Papers on prehistoric rock art presented to Stan Beckensall on his 90th birthday*. Archaeopress (2022)

192 pages, 155 figures (colour throughout)

ISBN: Paperback: 9781803273167 **£30**

Or available as an Open Access PDF download

This collection of papers in honour of Stan Beckensall of Hexham, who has diligently recorded rock art over recent decades, has been brought together by our very own Paul Frodsham and Kate

Sharpe of Durham. While much of Stan's work discovering, recording, and interpreting Atlantic rock art ('cup-and-ring marks') has been in Northumberland, the fifteen papers in this volume range much more widely (fig.1).

It includes suggestions for future work, and appreciations from those who have taken inspiration from Stan's work, including by Phil Bowyer and Andy Curtis, who will be known to many of our members. The book is beautifully illustrated and should be of enduring value to students of prehistoric Britain and Ireland, and anyone with an interest in rock art.

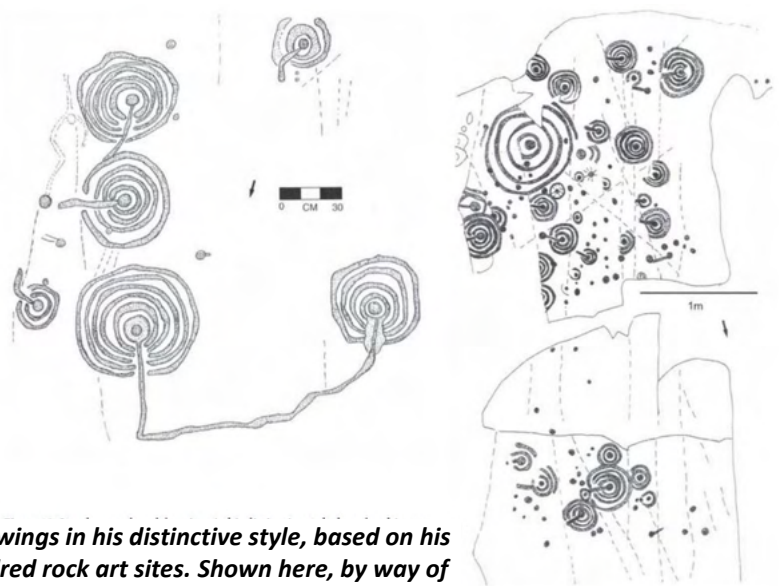


Fig: 1: Stan has produced drawings in his distinctive style, based on his wax rubbings, of several hundred rock art sites. Shown here, by way of example, are panels at Weetwood Moor, Northumberland (left), and Poltalloch, Kilamrtin (right).

2. Roman Frontier Archaeology – In Britain and Beyond

Nick Hodgson and Bill Griffiths (Eds.) *Roman Frontier Archaeology – in Britain and Beyond; Papers in honour of Paul Bidwell presented on the occasion of the 30th annual conference of the Arbeia Society*. Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 92, (2022)

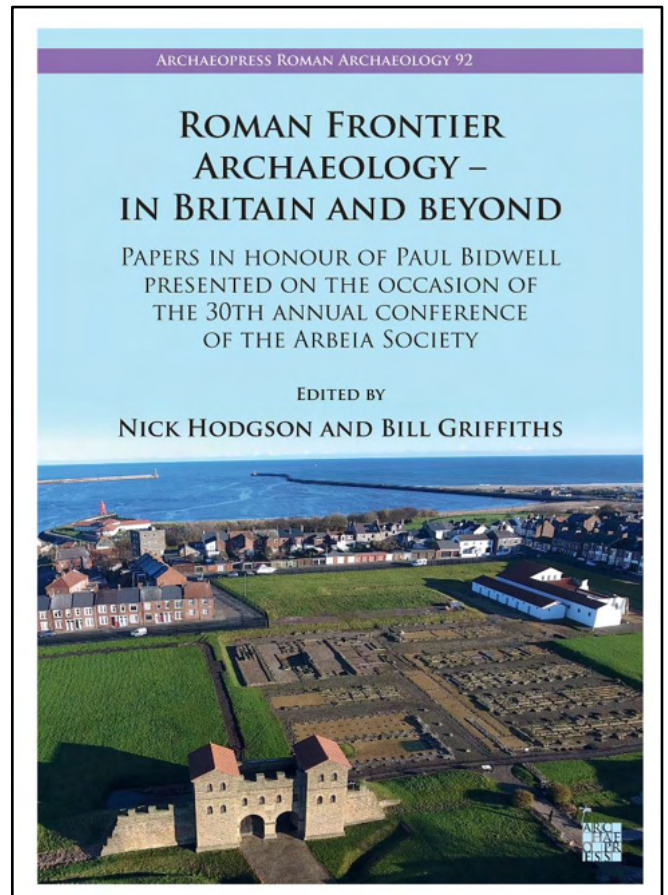
371 pages, 166 figures, 20 tables,

ISBN: Paperback 978-1-80327-344-0, **£60** or available as an Open Access PDF download

Contributions have been gathered here by Hodgson and Griffiths, leading Roman archaeologists from our region, from 30 archaeologists and historians in honour of Paul Bidwell, who sadly died soon after being presented with this book by friends and colleagues late last year. The chapters

reflect the wide range of Paul Bidwell's interests, from Devon to Hadrian's Wall, but also extend beyond Britannia to Rome's Eastern, Danube and North African frontiers. AA members might be particularly interested in John Poulter's use of the latest lidar imagery to consider the route taken by Roman Stanegate to bridge the Tyne west from Corbridge, not far from 'our' Roman road excavated southwest from Hexham in 2016, Lindsay Allason-Jones' review of the use of pinecones in Romano-British sculpture, and Rob Collins' thoughts on changing Roman command structures in the 4th and 5th centuries. Dave Heslop's survey of late Bronze Age and early Iron Age settlement in our region could be of value to our ongoing work at Gueswick even though it concentrates on the lowland North-East closer to the coast. There is much else besides in this substantial book on other aspects of Roman archaeology, from roads to pottery, agriculture to forts, conflict, and military tactics.

This is a short notice of two recently published books that are likely to be of interest to Altogether Archaeology members, both produced by Archaeopress in high quality A4 format.



Greg Finch

Still to Come...



'SUMMER DIGGING'

1 July - 23 July: Plover Hall near Gilmonby

Excavation of a Bronze Age settlement

12 August - 8 September: Gueswick Hills near Cotherstone

Excavation of a Romano British/Iron Age settlement

Book your place at: altogetherarchaeology@gmail.com

Contribute to the Newsletter...

We are always on the lookout for contributions, and welcome submissions of general archaeological interest as well as those about AA activities, so please let us know what you have been up to!

If you would like to contribute an article or photographs for the next edition (December), contact the Newsletter Editor, Sue Goldsborough at:

sgoldsborough2002@yahoo.co.uk

QUIZ

Name the objects.

a)



b)



c)



d)



e)



f)



g)



h)



(Compiled by Sue Goldsborough. Answers page 17)



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Quiz Answers:

- a. Roman bronze arm purse
- b. Olmec head of Mexico – one of 17 giant stone heads sculptured from large basalt boulders
- c. Cruciform brooch – late 6th century
- d. Middleham Jewel – late 15th century gold pendant
- e. Medieval lead cloth seals– a mark of quality, identification, and taxation?
- f. Coppergate Helmet – 8th century Anglo-Saxon helmet found in York
- g. Shoulder clasp from the Sutton Hoo ship-burial c.625AD
- h. Egyptian canopic jars - containers in which the separately mummified organs would be placed

Many thanks to the following AA members for this edition's contributions:

Alan Newham

Malcolm McCallum

Greg Finch

Tony Metcalfe