

Coquetdale Community Archaeology - Research Agenda Overview

Introduction

Over the last couple of months members of CCA have been working on a research agenda for CCA with archaeologist Paul Frodsham, and we have come up with some initial proposals that are now being developed into more detailed programmes.

We obviously had to pick topics of archaeological merit and ones that we have the skills to handle. It's been important to keep an eye open for areas that might attract external funding, but above all we've sought to select projects that would be fun and that would attract many different people. So we've chosen topics that will appeal to a wide range of members, enabling people to participate in a range of research activities including survey, excavation, finds processing, fieldwalking, finds analysis, historic building recording, documentary survey, oral history, place name analysis, air photo analysis, and report writing.

The group has also been keen to ensure that while some of its aims will need external funding, it also undertakes much work that members can complete with only a minimum of external assistance and no external funding.

The five chosen themes under which the group would like to undertake research are as follows:

- 1 Alcohol in Upper Coquetdale.
- 2 Abandoned Places.
- 3 Mesolithic Archaeology.
- 4 20th century military archaeology.
- 5 The Archaeology of Clennell Street.

These themes are described in more detail in the rest of this document. They still need quite a lot more work to develop them into proper research proposals, but the information we already have should be enough to provide some insight into the various activities that CCA is planning.

What would you like to do?

We are distributing this in order to find out which projects elicit the most interest from our members - in other words, which of these would you like work on? We're not asking you to commit time and effort at this stage, but we would like feedback from as many as members as possible. As you will see, each research theme encompasses a wide range of activities, from field work through to desk analysis, so we've tried to cater for as many tastes as possible.

Accompanying this overview (the full version is on the CCA website) is a simple one page form asking for your views and your level of interest in these themes. It would be very helpful if you could take a couple of minutes to complete this and send it in. Thank you.

THEME 1. - Alcohol Production and Consumption in Upper Coquetdale.

Aims

To rediscover and record locales connected with the production and consumption of alcohol in Upper Coquetdale from the earliest times to the present, to inform the conservation of this resource and to provide further background in support of the local John Barleycorn Festival

What do we want to know?

What is the extent of existing knowledge?

Can we rediscover 'lost' sites of both drinking & production?

What raw materials were used and can we identify production sites and methods?

What were the economic benefits (and drawbacks) of alcohol to the region?

What can we say about the social history of drinking in the valley?

Where was alcohol consumed? How much and in what contexts?

What evidence is there for smuggling and tax avoidance?

How true are the many stories and myths relating to alcohol in the valley?

How are we going to find out?

Evaluate and synthesise existing published and unpublished sources.

Study historic records – directories, censuses, old newspapers, court records etc.

Consider the wider context of alcohol in Northumberland – impact of the railways.

Surveys of drink-related sites (archaeological sites and historic buildings).

Record and examine place names.

Collate and study old photos of pubs, hotels etc.

Liaise with bottle collectors and excavate old 'bottle banks'.

Excavate the site of the old 'Slimefoot' inn at Rowhope.

Survey and geophysics at the medieval 'drinking hovel' at Chew Green.

Detailed studies of structure and history of existing pubs (eg at Harbottle and Alwinton) and recent pubs (e.g. Holystone).

Experimental brewing or distilling of ancient brews and liquors.

Levels of funding and professional help required

Funding may be needed for copying of documents.

NEVAG could be invited to help record historic buildings and train local volunteers.

Local support will hopefully be available at no cost from NCC/NNPA to help with most aspects of the work.

If excavation is to go ahead then professional help (and funding) will be required

Possible funding sources: HLF 'Awards for All'. NNPA SDF and Action Area funds.

Sponsorship e.g, from Scottish & Newcastle Brewery. Small scale grants from local hotels/pubs.

Possible project outputs

Increased awareness and understanding of the subject amongst local people.

Informed conservation.

Provision of visitor information for tourist businesses and the John Barleycorn Festival

Travelling exhibition to tour the valley and other NE locations.

Themed walks linking sites – link to existing pubs. Trail leaflets.

Database and website.(and full project archive to be deposited at records office.)

Glossy booklet for sale and lots of public events.

Provisional project co-ordinators

Chris Butterworth

THEME 2 - Abandoned Places

Aims

To study all aspects of the deserted and shrunken medieval and post-medieval settlements of Upper Coquetdale, with reference to the group's excavations at Low Trehitt and Ovenstones.

What do we want to know?

Where are all the abandoned settlement sites?

In what form do these sites survive?

How do they relate to field systems and other sites?

When and why were they abandoned?

Are there common factors underlying the abandonment of different sites?

Can we identify a 'breaking point' at which settlements become unsustainable?

How are we going to find out?

Clarify state of existing knowledge by reference to County SMR/HER.

Reading documentary surveys/, estate records, church records, enclosure acts

Consulting old maps

Placename studies

Oral history

Detailed comparisons between sites

Earthwork surveys/geophysics

Locating and sampling ridge-and-furrow field systems.

Production of list of possible excavation sites, and maybe some small scale, carefully targeted excavations

Levels of funding and professional help required

Most work should be achievable by group members, with advice from NCC/NNPA archaeologists (hopefully at no cost) as appropriate.

Professional help may be necessary for geophysical survey and excavation, and also for finds analysis relating to sampling of ridge-and-furrow. Relatively small scale grants are available for this type of work from various sources (eg NNPA, HLF).

Possible project outputs

Increased awareness and understanding of the subject amongst local people.

Informed conservation.

Detailed agenda for further research/excavation.

Comparisons with problems of rural depopulation today.

Development of maps showing changing settlement patterns through time.

Attractively presented information on the website.

Guided walks and waymarked trails.

Events/exhibitions.

Provisional project co-ordinators

Jo Catling

David Jones

THEME 3 - After the Ice: the First People of Upper Coquetdale.

Aims

To clarify the nature of the earliest post-glacial communities in Upper Coquetdale through fieldwork and the analysis of existing knowledge.

What do we want to know?

When did people first come to Upper Coquetdale after the end of the Ice Age?

Where and how did these people live?

How did life change over the millennia leading up to the introduction of farming?

Where did Mesolithic people get their flint from?

What materials did they use in addition to flint?

How are we going to find out?

Clarify existing knowledge base.

Clarify locations, extents and nature of all known sites.

Clarify nature of all Mesolithic flintwork from the region in local museums

Planned campaign of fieldwalking at various locations throughout the valley.

Predictive modelling of site locations.

Follow up fieldwork at Low Trehitt, possibly test-pitting and trial trenching.

Palaeoenvironmental analysis of upland peat deposits.

Attempt possible interpretations of Mesolithic life in Upper Coquetdale based on the local archaeological record combined with wider ethnographic studies.

Levels of funding and professional help required

Fieldwalking can be done by the group with no professional help, but expertise is needed to help with analysis of finds (and remember that fieldwalking will also recover material from later periods which must also be analysed and catalogued).

Kristian Pedersen has a developing interest in the Mesolithic of Upper Coquetdale and wishes to be closely involved – if the group's work is designed to tie in with Kristian's research then his expertise may be available to the group

Possible involvement of Bradford University to be explored by Dave Brummitt with Kristian Pedersen. This may enable excavations involving undergraduate students as well as local volunteers.

The possibility of undertaking palaeoenvironmental work in partnership with the geography departments at Newcastle and Durham Univs must be explored. This would be of benefit to other projects as well as this one.

Possible project outputs

This project the group can play a major role in academic research - the work already done at Low Trehitt suggests there may be a need to rewrite the textbooks on the Mesolithic of northern England

Disseminate knowledge through displays of finds and website articles.

Establish trails around Mesolithic sites, even though no above-ground remains survive.

Attempt reconstruction sketches of what Mesolithic settlements may have looked like in the valley.

Provisional project co-ordinators

Dave Brummitt

Janice Henney.

THEME 4 - Twentieth Century Military Archaeology.

Aims

To identify and publicise the role played by Upper Coquetdale in military training and the defence of the realm in the twentieth century'.

What do we want to know?

How much military training has taken place in the valley?

What form has this training taken and how has it developed over time?

What military structures were constructed in the valley and how many of these survive today? In what form do they survive?

What impact has military activity had on society in general in Upper Coquetdale?

How are we going to find out?

Collate and synthesise existing published and unpublished sources.

Pillbox surveys (individual sites and distribution map).

Surveys of practice-trenches and shooting ranges.

Studies of POW camps, and links with descendants of POWs.

Surveys of military camps (OTA since 1911) – note results of Redesdale Camp survey prior to demolition of structures in 1990s.

Investigate the role of Armstrong/Craggside.

Studies into WWII evacuees in the valley.

Studies of civil defence.

Surveys of Royal Observer Corps posts (eg Harbottle Castle)

Surveys of air raid shelters.

Investigate impact of OTA on local economy/community.

Interviews with local people (oral history).

Form links with existing groups who have carried out work locally

Levels of funding and professional help required.

A lot of the suggested work consists of documentary research and oral history – this can be done with minimal professional help.

MoD may be able to help with small grants for community initiatives on/adjacent to OTA.

MoD may also have access to certain historic records

Advice on general project development and specific work should be available from NCC/NNPA.

Possible project outputs

Booklet in association with MoD/OTA.

Information on website.

Events (in association with Otterburn (OTA)).

Provisional project co-ordinators

David Bradbrook

Chris Butterworth

THEME 5 - Clennell Street: Coquettdale's Ancient Upland Highway

Aims

To establish the prehistoric and historic significance of Clennell Street as a transport and communication route.

What do we want to know?

What geological processes gave rise to the ridge used by Clennell Street?

When was Clennell Street first established as a major routeway?

How long was it in use as a major routeway, and how did its use change over time?

What kind of sites are associated with the route?

Where does Clennell Street start/finish?

Why did it not develop into a modern road?

What is the social/economic impact of Clennell Street on Alwinton and other places?

What role did Clennell Street play in Border Reiver times?

How was it used in Roman times, in relation to Dere Street?

What is the origin of the name 'Clennell Street'?

How are we going to find out?

Clarify existing resource – maps, archaeological sites, general records.

Walkover survey/air photo analysis to record all earthwork remains.

Detailed topographic survey of earthwork sites. Geophysics.

Clarify how much of the ancient route still survives as roads/tracks today.

Excavation of sites, in association with current Durham University project.

Possible project outputs

Self-guided heritage trail from Alwinton, either up Clennell St and back again, or possibly a circular walk if a suitable route can be found.

Display/exhibition, maybe within the pub at Alwinton.

Information on website, maybe including artists' reconstructions of different sites through time and distribution maps of sites along Clennell Street

Events.

Provisional project co-ordinators

Janice Henney

Ian Filtness

Graham Taylor