

SIZERGH: DIG IN THE PARK, 2013

FIRST TRAINING DAY 22 JUNE 2013

Levens Local History Group's [LLHG] 2013 project got off to a wet and windy but memorable start, with the first of two training days held in and around the Great Barn on the National Trust's [NT] Sizergh Estate on Saturday. 58 volunteers, plus speakers and helpers attended; a total of 67.

Stephen Read, secretary LLHG, welcomed the participants to the start of a project, which was almost two years in the making, and although it was an LLHG project was now, essentially, a co-operative event hosted by LLHG, in partnership with NT, on NT land, with expertise provided by Oxford Archaeology North [OAN] the professional archaeologists. The project was now coming to its exciting culmination. He gave an introduction to the speakers, the first of whom was Jamie Lund, NT's Regional Archaeologist.

Jamie provided an *Introduction to the Dig in the Park Project*, explaining that it flowed on from a detailed 2010 landscape survey of the whole of the Sizergh Estate that had been carried out by NT volunteers, LLHG and OAN. He gave an overview of the history of Sizergh Castle and the Sizergh Estate in general, the areas of existing archaeological interest, the areas to be excavated and surveyed; being a putative 'burnt mound', a landscape feature that may be associated with the mediaeval deer park boundary, the Great Barn itself and the parkland to the south of the house, and the hoped for benefits and results from the project. His talk was illustrated with many slides of the house and grounds, the landscape survey in progress, the specific areas to be investigated, all with additional maps and diagrams to emphasise the points being made.

Jeremy Bradley of OAN spoke upon *Excavation Theory and Finds Processing*, an introduction to the many techniques and skills to be learnt and used by the volunteers



over the course of the project, illustrating his talk with technical information as well as images showing the techniques being described being used on other OAN projects.

His photographs of flooded sites were very apt given the heavy rain at the time of his talk.

Jamie Quartermaine of OAN, who has been the OAN contact throughout the planning of the project and will be the OAN site manager for the first week of the Dig, presented a talk upon *Topographical Survey*. Essentially, Jamie gave an introduction to the skills to be learnt in the afternoon during his practical, hands-on, demonstration of the equipment shown. The computer manipulated imagery that was shown was truly astounding, and during a ten minute period within his talk, his colleague, Karl Taylor, produced on screen a computer generated 3d image of the interior dimensions of the barn taken from the measurements he was simultaneously making using a total station. It was a feat of skill on his part, and homage to the power of computer programmes, and was most impressive.

The final talk of the morning was given by Denise Druce, again of OAN. Denise introduced us to the skills of *Palaeobotany and the Stratigraphic Survey*, which will be of especial importance in assessing organic material from the putative burnt mound and the coring of the park land. Her slides not merely illustrated the techniques to be utilised, but also gave an indication of the workshop to be led by her in the afternoon as they included many illustrations of pollens, seeds and other botany as seen through high powered microscopes.

The morning talks were all very well received, and after a lunch break, in which we were additionally fortified by tea, coffee, biscuits and cakes from the NT's Ashbank kitchen, we divided into three groups for the afternoon practical sessions. Each group would spend forty-five minutes on a particular discipline before rotating to the next. We were fortunate that the rain had ceased, and so the topographical surveying course could be held outside. This group was further split into three sub groups; one to be shown the use of the plane table by Jamie Lund, which took place in the Courtyard



and over the course of the afternoon produced a working map of the northern foundation of the Great Barn; one to be shown the use of the total station by Karl Taylor, which took place at the foot of the ramp to the Great Barn; and the other to be

shown aerial photography skills, including the manipulation of the images using



computer software, by Jamie Quartermaine, which took place inside the Great Barn as, sadly, at the start of the sessions, the wind speed was too high to have a flight to demonstrate the use of Jamie's model helicopter for photographing sites. Each of these sessions gave the volunteers the opportunity to gain hands on experience of the surveying equipment, and the computer manipulation of aerial images was a greatly exciting revelation.

The second group joined Jeremy Bradley who produced a large number of examples of pottery finds from all periods in order to show the development of ceramics from the prehistoric period through to the present. Jeremy shared his immense knowledge of ceramics and sites with enthusiasm, dealing with questions as he went along, whilst encouraging the volunteers to handle the finds he produced.



The comparative skills of the ancient potters as revealed by the difference in texture between 'Grittyware', Roman period and more modern ceramics, was truly educational.



The third group joined Denise Druce and Elizabeth Huckerby, together with others from OAN, who demonstrated the process of analysing palaeobotanic samples, starting from a bucket of organic material typically obtained during excavation [the material used was from a recent OAN project in Derby], which was then washed and sieved to produce material [seeds, other organics and bones fragments] to be further studied. Material was then studied under microscopes to be identified against Denise's library slides of known pollens, seeds and other botany. Each volunteer was able to use the microscope and view the wonderfully detailed and colourful library slides.

However, the afternoon weather improved, and so, after the closing remarks, questions and applause, Jamie Quartermaine was able to demonstrate his skill in flying the aerial photography helicopter.



It was a rare treat and a suitably dramatic end to a wonderfully fascinating and enjoyable day. Thank you to all involved.
Stephen Read