



NORTHERN ARCHAEOLOGY

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Editors

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THE NORTHUMBERLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

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Editorial

Late again! This time we can only peripherally blame production difficulties. It is true that, having adopted the 'glossy' double column format first seen in the last issue, there is a lot more production work demanded from your editors in preparing typescripts for computer typesetting; also that having the production divided between Newcastle and Edinburgh is more time consuming, at least in these early stages, than doing it all on Tyneside. A more serious cause of delay, however, has been continuing problems with contributors: promised papers that fail to appear, are late incoming, or drag out the production process for a variety of reasons. This last problem the Editors can and will do something about. The difficulty of actually attracting contributions to *Northern Archaeology* may also have been overcome. There is now a substantial amount of material in the pipeline, so much so that work on the next issue has already begun – this will be a large issue containing two parts that will help bring us up-to-date.

We are staying with the new format rather than our old, simple style, despite the extra work involved because it is more attractive to potential contributors. The last issue drew much favourable comment in quarters we might look to for future contributors; but we need to show over several issues that we can produce this standard regularly. We have not forgotten contributions from NAG members, and shall continue to bully and exhort so that these keep coming. We are therefore particularly pleased to include in this issue the first fruits of the activities of NAG's survey group: its work on the hillfort at Shaftoe Crags. Not that this is the first survey to be produced and published by NAG members. Those who have been around since the early days will remember long summer evenings (did the sun really shine all the time?) grappling with the enigmatic enclosure at Ewesley Station, Northumberland, in 1977 (*NagNews*, I(i)). This impressive earthwork has the old station sitting in its midst, and is bisected by a deep cutting that caused the surveyors not a little trouble. After Shaftoe a new series of members' contributions is promised. NAG members, in their guise of students of Newcastle University's Continuing Education Department, have been working for two years on intensive surveys of various parts of the North-East. Their first efforts should be ready to appear in the next issue along with contributions of an altogether more exotic nature.

Mention of Ewesley Station reminds us that the interior of this well-preserved site has now been deep-ploughed, and all trace of the fine Mediaeval plough rigs it enclosed destroyed. The threat to our landscape is still gathering momentum, and we cannot stress too often that the unique aspect of Britain's heritage, the one thing that no other country has, is its preserved ancient landscapes on marginal lands, of all periods from the Neolithic onwards. They survive in fragments in other parts of Europe, but nowhere is there anything approaching in extent and remarkable preservation, sites such as the Neolithic landscapes of many parts of Ireland, or the Bronze Age landscapes of Dartmoor. The North-East and the Borders may have nothing to rival those in single period terms but where they do excel is in the unrivalled variety of preserved landscapes: everything from Early Bronze Age to post-Mediaeval, often in close proximity, and surviving in remarkable detail. Where else in the world can one stand and look at a row of four thousand year old houses and byres, fronting on to farmyards and fields, then walk a short distance and come across Romano-British and Mediaeval farmsteads standing amidst their fields and tracks?

Some would argue that these ancient landscapes are more important in world heritage terms than Durham Cathedral or Hadrian's Wall: they certainly have a greater rarity

value and pose a more urgent problem for us. For no one would dream of knocking down a cathedral or bulldozing the Wall, yet our ancient landscapes are being destroyed every day. We are not getting the message across. But then many professional archaeologists are blissfully unaware of what survives and what is involved.

The threat comes at a bad time, not simply because archaeological resources are under such serious threat everywhere, but because the numbers of active archaeologists are so reduced and their morale is at such a low ebb. This year, 1988, for the first time in twenty-one years there will be no NAG dig: not because there is no money or interest within NAG, nor urgent work to be done. It is simply because there is no professional available to direct an excavation in Northumberland. In a sense this will break a tradition which goes back even further, to the days when George Jobey began his local digs in the early 1950s. Rescue work in the region goes on, some field projects start or continue. But the research excavation, where anyone interested can come along to help, will not be taking place north of the Wall this year. We hope this is merely a temporary hiccup.

Colin Burgess
Margaret Maddison
Paul Sellers

May, 1988