



ABERLADY ANGLES: EXPLORING ABERLADY'S ANGLO-SAXON PAST

OH-14-00974

EVALUATION REPORT

This evaluation is intended to be read in conjunction with the project Participation Report separately submitted. That report contains a detailed analysis of the project participants, their learning, their enjoyment, and their feedback.

Some numbers and feedback

Community Excavation

51 people, volunteering nearly 150 person days, took part in the community excavation. Feedback from 28 participants and collected through a comprehensive questionnaire tells us that 68% to 86% of people either agreed or strongly agreed that they had learnt more about their heritage and learnt new skills. One volunteer has subsequently decided not to do ethnology at University but '*...instead I decided to do archaeology because of how much I loved my time digging at the Glebe Field*'.

Schools Project

12 groups from 5 schools; 294 children visited the excavations. The site visits were followed up by classroom workshops in which 191 children took part. These centred on teaching the children about the Anglo-Saxon period and lifestyles. They created their own illuminated manuscripts, built their own Timber Halls and made their own musical instruments.

Feedback from staff

Teaching staff said that the project contributed to their own professional development and enabled them to access new knowledge and skills. Together with the Teacher's Resource CD and the Artefact Teaching Kit provided as part of the project, the project will enable the teachers to continue to bring archaeology and the Anglo-Saxons into their classrooms in the future. 75% of teachers strongly agree that they feel more confident about teaching archaeology and the Anglo-Saxon era.

Feedback from pupils

140 children completed a feedback form. 90% said they had a great time learning about the Anglo-Saxons and the local archaeology. The most popular 'onsite' activity was digging the trenches. The favourite classroom activity was building the timber hall.

Can You Dig it?

The 'Can You Dig it?' project delivered by our partners Lamp House Music aimed to educate pupils on Anglo-Saxon music and poetry as a practical add-on to the schools project. Lamp

House Music hosted a project week in which pupil formed into bands and wrote, rehearsed and recorded their own original songs. Masterclasses in guitar, drums and song-writing were provided. They produced their own CD which was played on the radio. The bands performed at the project's Anglo-Saxon feast. The actual project week attracted 15 applicants and ten participants, aged between 8 and 11. Feedback was excellent:

'One of the best weeks in my life. I really wish I could do it again'.

'The best week of the holidays ever'.

Anglo-Saxon Feast

The Anglo-Saxon torchlight procession and feast was a complete sell out shortly after the tickets were announced. 120 people attended and gave overwhelming positive feedback.

Social media and the Internet

Since the www.aberladyangles.com website was launched 18 months ago it has been viewed almost 12,000 times. Together with press releases, newspaper articles and coverage in quality seasonal magazine East Lothian Life the project has probably reached over 50,000 people. Updates on the #AbAngles tag reached up to 6000 people on some days. Each day at least 6000 people would have read about it on Aberlady Angles Facebook page or within AOC posts on its Facebook page.

Project Evaluation

The Aberlady Angles project might conveniently be divided into four overlapping parts:

1. Community Excavation
2. Schools Programme
3. Anglo-Saxon Feast
4. National Significance

1. Community Excavation

The excavation was professionally supervised by our contractor AOC Archaeology Group. The aim of the work was to better understand the village's Anglo-Saxon era (7th-10th C) past. It was unclear at the outset what level of volunteer support we might attract. The professional supervisor-volunteer ratio demanded that we have no more than 50 volunteers. Just a few days after the Call for Archaeologists was posted on the project website, we were over-subscribed. That was amazing. In all 51 volunteers took part in the excavation while one or two others helped out at the nearby Kirk Stables community hall where teas and lunches were provided. The two weeks of the excavation took place in good weather for the most part and only once did we have to clear the site because of bad weather. During the dig, volunteers were so very enthusiastic and there was a great community atmosphere. Friendships were made across all age-groups. AOC staff were fantastic in their community work and always had time to field questions and to offer advice. The number of casual visitors to the site also grew as word spread about what was being discovered. Soon the project created a real buzz in the village.

2. Schools Programme

From the outset, the level of enthusiasm from the local schools has been amazing. This in turn fed the enthusiasm of the pupils who, in turn, enthused their parents! It's difficult to know how to communicate that here. The article in the East Lothian Life magazine (Winter 2016) reflects it very well:

'According to Aberlady head teacher Pamela Currie, the project exceeded all expectations. 'All of the children were involved. It wasn't just a little dig. We submerged in it. Many of our staff gave up free time and it certainly generated an enthusiasm for history. It was the catalyst for a really in-depth history project. When they discussed homes of the period, the children built models in the school, when they discussed music they followed that up with help from Lamp House Music in Haddington. We found out what archaeology is, focusing on Anglo-Saxons and we were actually using historic evidence to teach. The children could go and touch history and they made their contributions to the school museum, so will always have that knowledge. It was a time consuming but very worthwhile project.'

3. Anglo-Saxon Feast

We preceded the Anglo-Saxon Feast with a torchlight procession and we had encouraged villagers and volunteers to dress in costume relative to the Anglo-Saxon era or the pagan festival of Samhain and to bring and play musical instruments like drums or trumpets. The route had been cleared in advance with the local authority and the police who would escort it. Up until 5 minutes to go, only a handful of people had arrived. But then, like an army appearing from the mists, they all suddenly appeared, all ages, some dressed in costume and a few with trumpets. It was amazing. Aberlady had never experienced a torchlight procession before. People taking photographs lined the Main Street through the village. When the participants arrived at the feast venue, they were simply stunned by the Timber Hall façade volunteers had created. Inside the courtyard, the walls were draped by tapestries with Anglo-Saxon designs painted by the school pupils. With the help of coloured up-lighting and fake flames and a few props, volunteers had created a convincing Timber Hall interior, laid out with wooden tables for the feast. In the corner, was the hog-roast. A real treat and a really good experience that villagers hadn't experienced before. Talks on the historical context for the feast, followed by the pupil bands playing their own Anglo-Saxon music to the assembled people, followed by traditional musicians made it special.

There's huge demand for it to be repeated. Whether we can guarantee the same balmy weather on a late October evening is another question!

4. National Significance

Other than community learning and skills development – and a demand for more of the same! – the community archaeology project has realised other benefits for the community and nationally. The volunteer dig uncovered a range of stone built structures. Radio-carbon analysis of associated artefacts dates the structures to the 7-9th centuries AD, right in the middle of the Anglo-Saxon period we were hoping to explore. One particular paved structure has a large hole within it and at least one expert expressed the view that this is where the original five metre high Anglo-Saxon cross may have stood. Tantalisingly, one 20 metre by 4 metre stone structure uncovered may very well extend to 20 metres by 40 metres – perhaps an early church. We won't know the answer to that until we carry out a further excavation but the expert opinion is that we have brought to the light of day a monastic settlement of the Anglo-Saxon period and probably that of Pefferham, a church of the monastery of Lindisfarne in the heart of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Consequently, the site is immensely important nationally (UK as well as Scottish) and has a status at least on a par with the Early Christian centres of Whithorn and Portmahomack. But, more work is required.

Conclusion

This has been a super project which has surpassed all expectations. According to Dr Alex Woolf, Senior Lecturer in Dark Age Studies at the University of St Andrews:

“This project and its fruits are a wonderful example of archaeology, historical research and community engagement in collaboration. It serves as a model for giving history back to the people”.

Ian Malcolm
Secretary
Aberlady Conservation & History Society
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