

OCTOBER MONTHLY MEETING: Report by Ian Reid



We welcomed back Gary Bankhead, who had given a presentation several years ago about underwater archaeology in the River Wear in Durham. Since then, Gary has graduated with an M. Phil from Durham University, become a research associate in the Archaeology Department, illustrated and

published papers and books, and been on TV programmes with Alice Roberts, Tony Robinson, Matt Baker, Bettany Hughes and Helen Skelton amongst others. We were delighted that he found the time to speak to us again about 'Dive into Durham' with new material.

Gary began excavating the river bed in Durham between the bridges, Elvet and Prebends. At the beginning of his excavations, under Prebends Bridge, he found a beautiful silver and ivory trowel. There were clusters of other valuable objects, which were apparently gifts presented to Bishop Ramsay, Bishop of Durham, during his many travels throughout the world. Since then, Gary has found thousands of other objects some of which were dated from Roman times. These excavations led to a research project involving students from the University. The items were subsequently arranged into groups, which were recorded and displayed in exhibitions in the Palace Green Library, and then published.

In mediaeval times there would have been dwellings and small business outlets on the bridges. The early bridges had recesses at each side. Some objects could have fallen into the river accidentally, whereas others might have been deliberately thrown in e.g. small coins, good luck charms and pilgrim souvenirs. The most prevalent group of objects were those associated with trades, situated on the edge of the river. The objects identified included lead trade tokens, buckles, cloth jettons, brass pins of various sizes, coins and seals. Durham University Archaeology Department now holds the largest collection of mediaeval seals in Europe. Some finds originated from other European countries suggesting that the city was heavily involved in European trade from mediaeval times.

Gary gave an engaging and enthusiastic presentation, and he continues to look for funding to continue his research. TV and film producers are approaching him about future programmes so it is quite likely that we shall see him again, this time on TV.