

11th October 2017

Glendale in the 7th century

We were very fortunate to have the well-known archaeologist Max Adams to speak on Glendale in the 7th century. As it is the 40th anniversary of the society's inauguration this year, it seemed appropriate to learn more about the history of our own area in its heyday, the 'golden' age of Northumbria, A large audience of appreciative members were there for the occasion.

Max drew our attention to local archaeologist Roger Miket, who had long shared this area of enquiry and helped further our understanding.

An intellectual revolution had taken place in the 7th century, when the district was heavily populated with 10 times the population we have today. There was good soil, and good communication, partly due to the Roman roads. New research techniques show that the Roman occupation had extended more fully into the land north of the Wall.

In 547 Ida fortified his kingdom from his Bamburgh stronghold creating an Anglo-Saxon kingdom on land which was easily cultivated, not too wet, including the coastal plain and with all the resources needed to give him power. By the end of the 6th century Northumbria was the most powerful kingdom in Britain.

Max quoted heavily from Bede, the paramount historian writing from the 8th century. We know that Ethelfrith, Ida's grandson, was a successful warlord who united the dual states of Bernicia and Deira as Northumbria. Later Edwin continued this development, ruling so skillfully that it was said that a woman could travel from one end of the kingdom to the other without harm.

As well as a winter palace at Bamburgh, Brian Hope-Taylor's excavations have shown that there was a summer base at Yeavering – still with secrets to give up when further excavations take place – as well as at Maelmin and Gefrin, alternative residences of the court. (Max used various maps to show the extent of Yeavering, including its famous 'bandstand'.) In fact, 10 shires have been identified at which the retinue would spend 36 days (a tenth of the year). This was undoubtedly why in 627 Paulinus spent 36 days baptising pagans at Gefrin, when Ethelburgha had prevailed on her husband King Edwin to bring Christianity to the kingdom.

Edwin was killed by a pagan king and until his brother Oswald, who had been in exile and educated at Iona in the Celtic form of Christianity, beat Cadwallion at Heavensfield in 635, Christianity and thus the continuation of authority was in abeyance.

It was Oswald, also educated at Iona, who brought Aidan to Lindisfarne. His brother Oswii continued as ruler, and large parcels of land were given to the church – altogether 6 monasteries were established – and land was granted to members of the royal family, helping ensure stability at the end of each reign.

By the time Maelmin was built, in Oswii's time, it was fenced as kings realised the benefits of security. There were weaving sheds, and pottery was produced there. Once again, more

excavating and geo-physics need to be done to discover further surprises. But eventually so much land had been given away that there was too little to support the warriors who were needed to defend the kingdom: Bede writes 'Who knows where this will lead?'.