

Digging up ancient history

Iron Age and Roman artefacts, including a rare Roman altar, were unearthed by archaeologists exploring a Wingerworth area building site. John Winter reports

COMMUNITY archaeologist Laura Binns of Trent and Peak Archaeology told a packed audience at Tupton Local History Group that local excavation findings will be studied in depth before a full report is published.

So many attended the meeting at St John's Church that many people had to be turned away. Another date was arranged for them later in March.

Laura said county archaeologists routinely looked at every site where development was planned to establish the likelihood of archaeology.

In the case of Hanging Banks, it was situated close to the ancient Roman route of Rykneld Street, which once ran from Gloucester to South Yorkshire, so there was obvious interest.

With the co-operation of the developer, Bellway, who were about to build more than 200 homes on the site, Archaeological Research Services, a provider of archaeological consultancy services from Sheffield, conducted a geophysical survey of the site to identify areas of interest. Twenty ditches were dug and early finds included shards of Roman pottery and a 17th or 18th Century clay pipe.

"If a feature was identified, then we would dig a slot through it to see if we could find any artefacts, and based on that we made decisions on open excavations," said Laura.

The work started in September 2017 and carried on until spring, sometimes in atrocious conditions.

It was impossible to explore the whole site because it was, after all, a building site, and work could not be held up indefinitely, so three main areas were investigated based on the potential revealed by the earlier survey. One area at the highest part of the site had indications that it had been an enclosure, dating to the Iron Age, between 800BC and the arrival of the Romans in 45AD. It was



Pottery remains

New lagoon

WINGERWORTH Parish Council has agreed in principle to adopt an area of lagoon created by the house building at Hanging Banks, off Derby Road, for a sum of £100,000, with money ring-fenced for future maintenance.

The developers, Bellway Homes, are to create a boardwalk and introduce a planting scheme, so that the lagoon will become a wildlife feature.

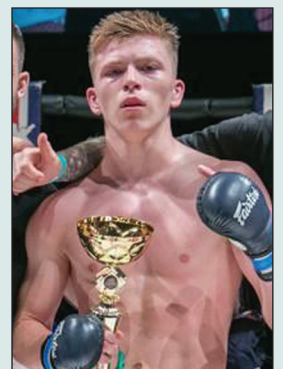
Ted closes in on title fight

FEATURED in the previous edition of Wings, Teddy Adlington-Stringer is continuing to make a big name for himself in the tough world of cage-fighting.

Competing in the UK fighting championships at Preston Guildhall on 23rd March, Ted, from Wingerworth, fought against Gabi Lolo and defeated him in only 36 seconds.

His double-quick victory came about thanks to him using an 'anaconda choke' submission technique.

Ted has now earned himself a number one contender fight that will probably be in June which could lead to a lightweight title fight before the end of the year!



The unearthed Roman altar

possibly for holding animals, with few artefacts apart from heat-cracked pebbles which might have been dropped into water to help the boiling process.

There were also four post-holes, which suggested a storage facility, and in one hole they found 822 grains from a variety of crops suggesting a diversity of crop production.

They also discovered a Roundhouse gully measuring 10m sq with an entrance and a few shards of Roman/British pottery.

There was evidence of other roundhouses across the site, some dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries, suggesting they were still very much in use by the Brits throughout the Roman occupation, and one building which may have been built by Romans as a homestead, possibly housing animals at one end.

Ditches built by Iron Age settlers may have been for defence or to enclose animals, and later used as a dump for broken pottery or other rubbish by the Romans.

Many more post-holes were identified, suggesting stores or roofed buildings, and a silver Roman coin was found inside one hole.

By far the most significant find was a tiny metal box structure, with legs, that may have been used as an altar by a Roman soldier, carried around in his equipment in order to worship his god. Laura explained that 30 such altars had been found across Britain, one in Wales, another at Hadrian's Wall plus one reported in Germany.

The Hanging Banks altar had blue/green enamel, one leg was bent, another missing, and it had been repaired with rivets - the only other one showing evidence of repair is in the British Museum.

Other discoveries included a beehive kiln and two trackways, one of which may have had a bridge to cross one of the larger ditches.

"The excavations do create more questions than answers," explained Laura. "What if the Romans used the Iron Age ditch to enclose a fort or a settlement? Did the native people still live there, perhaps providing a storage area for food for the Romans? There was a Roman fort at Chesterfield just three miles away, so perhaps the site was used to provide bread for the soldiers?"

Archaeologists also turned up evidence of an 18th Century trackway running from the bottom of the hill where there was once an iron mill or forge, to the top where Wingerworth Hall stood until 1920. There were large wheel-ruts containing iron slag.

Analysis of the findings, including carbon dating, will take a few years, before a full report is published.