



# Appleby Archaeology

## ROMAN EDITION



Summer 2005

Volume 8 Issue 2

### Romans in Eden

This edition of the newsletter is focused on a particular period of Cumbrian history about which relatively little is known; the Roman period. Despite the proximity of Hadrian's Wall, little research has been undertaken on Roman sites in Cumbria, with the exception of Carlisle. Our forthcoming conference will provide an opportunity to examine the evidence for this period in more detail. The following article by Martin Joyce about the Roman cemetery at Brougham, illustrates how much potential archaeological evidence still lies undiscovered in our corner of the Roman Empire.

### Amazons of the A66

There's a spot on the A66, close to Brougham Castle, where your radio goes a bit funny as your car slips underneath overhead electricity cables slung beneath two enormous pylons. Curiously, this is the place where, long ago, Roman Penrith brought its dead on elaborately decorated biers for cremation and subsequent burial. Here too stood a pair of monumental towers and here were enacted complex rituals which modern archaeological science is only just beginning to reveal.

The cemetery site was excavated in great haste in 1966 ahead of the re-alignment of the A66. Recent developments in forensic techniques have permitted a major re-appraisal of the immensely rich material that was recovered by the initial rapid excavation. The results have proved quite startling.

It seems that the dead, young and old alike, went to their pyres dressed in the clothes which they wore in life. The biers of adults, in particular, were richly inlaid with ivory and laden with offerings of meat and poultry. Enormous wealth went up, literally, in smoke as offerings of jewellery, metal vessels inlaid with gold and silver and military equipment were committed to the flames. So rich were the tributes that the biers may have been multi-tiered. By contrast, the pyres of the young were bare though they may have been decked with fruit and flowers. After cremation the ashes were gathered and interred in ornate vessels of glass and samian pottery.

The cemetery has been dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD at a time when the nearby fort of Brocavum (Brougham) was occupied by a cavalry *numerus*. One of the most intriguing finds on the cemetery site was the burial of two adult women who had each been burnt with both horses and

military equipment on their pyres. Though *numerii* are generally referred to as irregular units they were not generally thought to include women in their ranks. Nevertheless the Brocavum unit came from an area associated by the Ancient Greeks with the female warriors known as Amazons. Perhaps the *numerii* were more irregular than we imagined.

More details of this fascinating excavation can be obtained at the forthcoming conference. This will be held at Appleby Grammar school on Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> September. Entrance is £8.00. Details are available from Harry Hawkins on 01768 864340. Alternatively please use the enclosed form to book your place.



Pieces of Nittiunis's gravestone

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## Cumbrian Prehistoric Rock Art

The study of Prehistoric Rock Art is currently one of the most rapidly developing areas of Archaeology. Appleby Archaeology Group's meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March attracted a large audience to hear Dr Stan Beckensall describe the "wow factor" which inspired his own interest in the subject and which he feels lies behind its sudden popularity.

As his slides graphically illustrated, the rock carvings are often simply spectacularly beautiful. This alone would make them worthy of study but the interest is also due, Stan feels, to the intrinsic mystery of the subject and the ephemeral qualities of the carvings themselves.

The designs vary from the well-known "cup and ring" marks to concentric circles, chevrons, strange linear features and the rarer spiral carvings. These have usually been "pecked" into softish sedimentary rocks with a harder stone "chisel". It seems obvious that the carvings had some significance since the same patterns are repeated at many different sites and it is natural to search for a meaning. But the reality is that we can never know the truth and therein lies the attraction, since possible explanations are many and various and we are free to choose the one that suits us best!

Perhaps another reason for the fascination of the subject is the fickle nature of many of the carvings. They are not always

visible to the naked eye. Stan showed photographs of a carving that he himself has never seen in the field. He was able to take a rubbing of the carving but could not detect it directly. Clearly lighting plays a large part as some designs have only been seen under the oblique light of a winter or setting sun. Atmospheric conditions and lichen growth may play a part too. Until quite recently no carvings were known at the Castle Rigg stone circle. All manner of diamonds, spirals and lozenge shapes have since been recorded. The lesson is clear. Keep your eyes peeled because carved stones can turn up almost anywhere.



Since Stan first became involved with the subject over 30 years ago he has become the au-

thor of numerous books on the subject, has been awarded an honorary degree at Newcastle University and has provided the inspiration for a website which received over 3 million "hits" in its first two months of operation. In this time the number of known rock art sites has grown dramatically, in no small part due to Stan's own efforts. This was illustrated amply at the Appleby Archaeology meeting when a member was able to tell him of yet another discovery.

Possibly the finest Cumbrian rock art panel was discovered as recently as 1999 when two colleagues of Stan's, following up his theory that carvings might be located along prehistoric communication routes, discovered a veritable "Tate Gallery" of concentric circles and cup marks in Gt Langdale. Another enormous panel turned up even more recently in a private garden in Patterdale.

The Cumbrian rock art is part of a much larger distribution that extends from the Orkneys to the south-west of England and covers part of Ireland. Stan concluded his talk with a dramatic series of slides showing examples of art from Kilmartin in Scotland and from Northumberland.

We are fortunate indeed to have such a treasury on our own doorstep and Stan was thanked warmly for the effort he had put into his lecture.

Martin Joyce

## Romans in the North West

A one day conference organized by the Centre for North West Studies and the CWAAS was held at Newton Rigg on Saturday, May 7<sup>th</sup> with David Shotton in the chair.

Richard Hingley of Durham University, began at the beginning - *The Beginning of Roman Contact in the North*. Accepted thinking has been that in the South of Britain, Iron Age tribal leaders had peacefully co-operated with the Roman administration, whereas in the North the native people were seen as barbarians and were more resistant to the Romans. However, archaeological research paints a different picture. Remains of amphorae and other pottery in the Stanwick area suggest trade in the pre-Roman era; and sites of villas and small towns resemble those within the civil zone of the South. It is likely that in towns such as Carlisle and Corbridge there were local centres of power, which were used by the Romans. Many of the vici, eg. at Maryport and Brougham, were too large to have been dependent on military markets alone.

Then Tony Wilmott moved on to the end of the Roman era and spoke mainly of the excavations at Birdoswald and the large vicus discovered there. We were shown slides of the Roman granary site being subsequently filled in and paved over for civilian use. Post holes showed that a large hall

had later been built over this site.

Sebastian Sommer of Bavaria gave an excellent lecture (in English!) entitled *Soldiers and Civilians; the Continental Background*. He showed that most Roman forts had a vicus, which was probably essential for the well-being of the soldiers of the fort. With the help of slides he categorised the vici into three types - street, tangential and ring. The market places were usually in front of one of the forts main gates. From the orientation of the houses it was obvious that their function was to provide goods and services for the soldiers. Excavations of possible shops, pubs (tavernae), potteries and metal working sites supported this theory. We were shown plans of so-called strip houses mainly from military vici on the Continent.

In the afternoon David Breeze took over the chair and first spoke on Maryport and the geophysical survey which had been carried out relatively recently and had revealed details of the former large vicus outside the Roman fort. Sebastian Sommer then enlarged upon David's introduction by comparing the Maryport vicus with the remarkably similar vici excavated on Continental sites. Further details would only be revealed by excavation. The military vici in Britain and the Continent show that the Roman military applied the same principles in both cases.

Altogether an interesting day!  
*Shirley and Stanley Darke*

## Time Tours

Members with long memories may recall the launch of Appleby Archaeology's "Time Tours project" at last year's AGM. The idea was that members should develop a web site show-casing illustrated tours of the Eden valley's archaeological and historic monuments. The hope was that this would help us to consolidate our own knowledge of the area whilst also contributing something to local tourism.

As usual with grand designs, there is something of a gap between the concept and the concrete. Nevertheless the "project team" is now able to demonstrate a working prototype of the idea. This can be viewed on a temporary site with the following address: [smjoyce.webspace.fish.co.uk](http://smjoyce.webspace.fish.co.uk) (just type this into the top line of your web browser where it says "Address" and then press the "Enter" key). It contains just three tours at present: "Lady Anne's Castles" provides a virtual tour of Brougham, Pendragon, Brough and Appleby castles, and Stone Circles A and B present a selection of the area's finest Neolithic monuments.

Lack of time has been the main problem, though I suppose our photographic and map-making facilities could probably be improved upon too. These quibbles apart, the experience of developing the site has shown that the task of researching a subject and writing it up in a concise and organised fashion provides excellent mental exercise. If the wretched weather ever improves, the task might also provide some useful physical exercise.

Please get in touch if you'd like to be involved. No special technical knowledge is required - though anyone with a decent digital camera and the skill to use it would be particularly welcome.

Martin Joyce  
(email to [smjoyce@compuserve.com](mailto:smjoyce@compuserve.com)  
or telephone 017683 61131)

## SUMMER EVENTS

### Fieldwork Day: Kirkland Fell

Sunday 3rd July 2005

A day of surveying open to all members - no previous experience necessary. We will be using the latest technology to record a possible settlement on Kirkland Fell and investigating a number of monuments located by members last year.

Meet 10.00am at Kirkland Hall NY 651 326

Bring a drink, lunch, waterproofs and suitable footwear

*Sponsored by Durham University*

Contact: Martin 017683 88318 or email: martin@fellside-eden.freereserve.co.uk

Please let me have your name and telephone number if you wish to participate. You will be kept informed of cancellation due to bad weather etc.

### Visit to the Thornborough Henges

Sunday 19th June 2005

\* POSTPONED \*

A day trip to this important prehistoric site. Leader Harry Hawkins 01768 864340. Meet at the Moot Hall, Appleby 10.30 return 5.00pm. Bring packet lunch/pub lunch.

Details to be finalised.

### Walk: Asby Winderwath Common

Tuesday 19 July 2005

A walk to Asby Winderwath Common - site of the Preconquest Ironwork Hoard (November Meeting). Leader Marjory Campion/Harry Hawkins. Meet 7.00pm Copper Mine Lane NY 663 114.



### THE ROMANS IN THE EDEN VALLEY

Appleby Grammar School,  
9.30 for 10.00 am - 4.00 pm,  
Saturday, 17 September

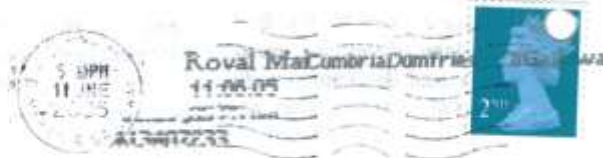
The Eden Valley is full of Roman sites and history yet little has been done in recent years to bring together what is known about the Roman presence and the monuments they left behind.

Chairman for the day:  
Professor David Shotton.  
Speakers: David Shotton, Tony Wilmott, Frank Giecco, Richard Newman.

*The Romans in Cumbria  
Roman Sites of the  
Eden Valley  
The Roman Cemetery at  
Brougham  
Roman Carlisle*

Entrance: £8.00.  
Buffet Lunch: £4.00  
Tel 01768 864340

Rouston Phyllis  
White House  
Brampton  
Appleby  
Cumbria



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