

Paul Flynn of Cumbria University gave Appleby Archaeology Group a stimulating talk to start their autumn season. Recent excavations, organised by Maryport and District Archaeological Society and led by Paul Flynn, have altered historians' views of Maryport's Roman Heritage.

The Maryport Roman fort and its vicus (a civilian settlement) to the north of the fort have been known for many years. There is a long history of antiquarian investigation going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when John Senhouse, the land owner, began to form a collection of inscriptions and sculptures. Over the next three centuries the Senhouses continued the investigations of the fort and vicus but this interest did not prevent much of the stone being reused in the building of Maryport. In 1870 seventeen buried altars were found in the vicus and the inscriptions on these and those on the sculptures and tomb stones provided some details of the garrisons that occupied the fort. In 1880 excavation traced the Roman road running through the vicus and a number of strip houses along its length. Remains of temples and tombs were also found. The 1900 Ordnance survey map depicted the edge of a parade ground to the south of the fort.

Excavation in 1966 by The Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society established that the fort was Hadrianic (AD117-138). They thought that it had had three to four periods of occupation and that it had been used until 4-5<sup>th</sup> century. In 2000 Timescape Survey carried out a geophysical study of a wide area around the fort. The results showed that the vicus to the north of the fort was the largest civilian settlement so far surveyed along the northern frontier of Roman Britain. The survey of the area to the south (currently, a grassed children's play area) was less conclusive but certain features and the belief that there had been a parade ground in the vicinity suggested that a more detailed evaluation would be worthwhile.

Maryport and District Archaeological Society led by Paul Flynn undertook this work between 2002 and 2005. They were joined, for a few days in 2005, by Time Team as part of their "Big Roman Dig".

Several exploratory trenches were dug to look at the features identified on the survey. Evidence of the presence of buildings, a ditch or track way leading into nearby fields and the edge of the parade ground were found. The last trench was the most rewarding as it revealed two wall lines

which followed the exact orientation of the barrack block found in 1966 and this led to a fuller excavation

The team found evidence of a Roman road, six metre wide ramparts and two phases of timber buildings, the earlier were superseded by buildings with stone foundations. The position of stones marking the entrances to the buildings suggest that they were military barracks. These findings indicate that a wooden fort, similar in construction to the one built at Carlisle in 72-73AD was on the site at about the same time. Tacitus, a Roman historian, reported trouble with the local Brigantes in the early days of the conquest and this may have been the reason the early forts were built. A further clue to dating is the evidences of an annex to the fort, a feature of Flavian forts (70-73BC) and not evident in those built at the time of Hadrian. The original wooden buildings were replaced by buildings with stone foundations but the ramparts and road remained in use. The first forts appear to have been in use, but not necessarily in continuous occupation, until the building of the Hadrianic fort and there are signs that material was recycled for its construction.

Paul concluded by mentioning some other early Roman forts. Roman pottery, of the same date as that found at Carlisle was discovered at Blennerhasset on the River Ellen. It is possible that the fort at Cummersdale, which is a short distance from and within sight of the fort at Carlisle, was never completed because the Romans decided Carlisle would be the better site. Further investigation would be required to confirm this idea..

The findings from Maryport are important as they indicates that the earliest Roman settlements were built around the same time as those at Carlisle and that the fort, and its port facilities were significant in the conquest of northern England.

A number of questions were taken before Paul was thanked for a comprehensive and very interesting talk.

The next evening talk will be on the Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall, Appleby, when Andrew Birley of the Vindolanda Trust will give a talk on *Vindolanda - Size Does Matter*.

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