

## MARYPORT

The fort dominates the Solway coast, being sited on a sandstone ridge 55 metres above sea level, at one of the highest point on the coast and visible for miles to north and south. It lies 750 m north-east of the mouth of the river Ellen but there is no evidence that the river was used as a harbour until the creation of the modern town of Maryport after 1750. The course of the Ellen loops north-east from its mouth past the south-east side of the ridge through an area of low lying marshy ground. At the north end of the sandstone ridge a very small stream, Barney Gill, reaches the sea close to Bank End. The red sandstone of the ridge was found in the 1966 excavations to be overlain by yellow sand and red clay but whether these were natural, i.e. glacial, deposits remains uncertain (Jarrett 1976, 29). The sandstone itself is visible as a result of post-medieval stone quarrying of the cliff face and also shows as a stone 'apron' along the foreshore.

The fort and the northern *vicus* are not covered by buildings except for Camp Hill farm on the north-east edge of the *vicus*. The fort field is under permanent pasture; the fields of the northern *vicus* are ploughed regularly. The fort is known to have been heavily robbed and the building lines visible on aerial photographs are actually robber trenches. Roman activity is known to the south-east of fort where large 19<sup>th</sup> century houses line the south-east side of Camp Road. Beyond this, geophysical work has proved activity beneath the playing field of Camp Hill School and the Roman road to Papcastle has been identified as far as the Ellen crossing in the grounds of Netherhall School. Immediately south-west of the fort is a recreation ground and playground surrounded by houses constructed since the 1920s. This area is known to have Roman remains and recent work has given indications that this might be the site of an earlier, pre-Hadrianic fort.

The Battery, now housing the Senhouse Museum, occupies the strip of land between the north-western fort ditches and the cliff edge. Observations when the tower was erected and results of the geophysical surveys suggest that Roman activity in this area was probably sparse. However, discovery of Roman finds when Docherty's quarry was reopened in 1880 and occasional cross-sections at the cliff top exposed by erosion indicate that Roman remains may not be evenly distributed. The grounds of the Battery also held a wooden accommodation hut (now demolished) for the Instructor at the Battery and a garden plot (now the museum car park)

There are records of 19<sup>th</sup> century and later military activity on the fort site. A saluting battery is known to have operated in the fort field for national and local celebrations. Some of the earthworks in the area of the corner towers on the west face of the fort, which give the appearance of concealing external towers (Lax & Blood 1997, 55), may be the result of this or other post-Roman disturbance. A World War II anti-aircraft battery was sited in the fields of the northern *vicus*.

*History of Exploration:* although the Senhouse family had a long history of interest in the Roman remains on their land, active interventions only began seriously in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These excavations exposed the north-east ('north') gate (1787), the *principia* (c.1686 and 1766), the *praetorium* bath-house (1788) and unlocated work in 1779 and 1785 (summarised in Birley 1961, 216-22; Jarrett 1976, 1-8). The mound known as Pudding Pie Hill, south-west of the fort was investigated in 1742 and 1763 (Head

1773). Reports of this work appeared in 18<sup>th</sup> century volumes of *Archaeologia*. The chance discovery of Roman altars in 1870 led to the exposure of a series of pits and the recovery of 17 altars (Bruce 1874). In 1880 further excavation took place in the *vicus* (Robinson 1881). No further excavations were undertaken until 1966 when the C.W.A.A.S. celebrated their centenary by sponsoring an investigation of the fort interior. Absence of excavation did not signal a diminution of interest in the site. A detailed catalogue of the collection of artefacts from the site was produced in 1915 (Bailey 1915) with a supplement (Bailey 1926) and Bailey continued to record new finds and observations.

Since the publication of the 1966 excavations two major developments have been the creation of the Senhouse Museum Trust leading to the setting up of a museum for the Netherhall collection and the extensive geophysical surveys by TimeScape of the fort and *vicus* (Biggins & Taylor 2004). A watching brief in the town discounted the traditional interpretation of the Roman harbour (Percival 1996, contradicting Bailey 1923). Excavations by the Maryport Archaeological Society south of the fort appear to have uncovered traces of a pre-Hadrianic fort (unpublished).

*Garrison*: the Roman name for the fort at Maryport is now generally accepted to be *Alauna*, which is reflected in the name of the river Ellen. The first three units in garrison at the fort are known from epigraphic evidence to be *cohors I Hispanorum equitata* (Hadrianic, c.123-c.139), *cohors I Delmatarum* (Antonine, c.139-c.165), and *cohors I Baetiasiorum* (late Antonine, c.165-c.183). Nothing is known of the later garrisons. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, which for many sites identifies the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century unit name, appears to have a gap where *Alauna* should be (Holder 2004). The existence of such a lacuna makes better sense of the document and means that attempts to identify Maryport with *Alione* or *Axelodunum* in the *Notitia* may be discounted. There is, therefore, no reason to believe that either *cohors III Nerviorum* or *cohors I Hispanorum milliaria* were the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century garrison, as has sometimes been postulated in the past.

*Plan*: the fort is almost square with an internal area estimated from 1.87 ha (4.5 acres) (Lax & Blood 1997, 53) to 1.96 ha (Biggins & Taylor 2004, 111) or 2.58 ha (6.5 acres) over the ramparts. The fort faces north-west. The *via principalis* lies only a short distance north-west of the central NE-SW axis. The *principia* can be identified in its conventional position on the RCHM plan (Lax & Blood 1997, Fig.3.1 nos 16 and 17) and in the geophysical surveys, but is 5m off the central axis of the fort (Biggins & Taylor 2004, 124). The *praetorium*, with the bath-house excavated in 1788, lies on the north-east side of the head-quarters building. There is no evidence for the granaries which were presumably on the south-west side. The 1966 excavation, in the *retentura*, uncovered a sequence of barracks in Periods I and II and long, narrow buildings of uncertain function (?stables, ?stores) in Period III.

The plan reconstructed from the geophysical surveys suggests that the *retentura* held only four buildings (barracks) and the *praetentura* may have held six barrack blocks and two other buildings (Biggins and Taylor 2004, Fig.5.7). The unusually large size of the fort (6.5 acres) has tended to reinforce the idea that the fort was built for a milliary, equitate cohort. This explanation arose out of the use of the title *tribunus* for two of the unit's commanders, Maenius Agrippa and Caballius Priscus. According to this theory the unit was milliary in the 120s under its first two commanders, *tribuni*,

with a title appropriate to such a sized unit, but later reduced in size to 500-strong, commanded by *praefecti*.

A milliary cohort would have needed ten infantry and four cavalry barracks plus stables. It is impossible to envisage how this accommodation can be reconciled with the likely plan established by the geophysics. The other part of the argument has also been challenged by Frere who, for various reasons, disputes the dating of Maenius Agrippa and his assignment as first commander at Maryport, preferring to see Agrippa arriving at Maryport in 128 or 129. He points out other examples of the use of the title *tribunus* in a quingenary cohort other than the size of the regiment (Frere 2000).

*Defences:* the 1966 excavations demonstrated that the clay rampart was fronted by a contemporary stone wall (Jarrett 1976, Plate IV). The excavations exposed three, and possibly four, ditches on the east face. The *porta principalis dextra*, excavated in 1787, was a single portal structure and the evidence for the other gates appears to be the same where no *spinae* are visible in the geophysical surveys (Biggins & Taylor 2004, 112). There may also be later additions to the north-east and possibly the south-west gates (*ibid.*). Similar external masonry may also have been observed at the south-east gate (Jarrett 1976, 4 quoting Whellan 1860) Angle and interval towers are also identifiable on the survey plans.

*Structural history:* one of the aims of the 1966 excavation was to establish a dated structural sequence for the fort and this remains the only evidence for the fort's archaeological history but even this is not entirely secure. Jarrett and Birley's working model was as follows:

Period I, Hadrianic

Period II, beginning after c.170 and possibly as late as 238-44

Period III, undated but possibly 238-44

Period IV, c.360+

An alternative possibility is that Periods I and II can be conflated and treated as a single period with internal modifications.

*Changes of plan:* the only evidence for changes in the arrangement of the fort again comes from the 1966 excavation which saw the pair of barracks of Periods I and/or II replaced by a long, narrow building in Period III and post-built structures of uncertain plan in Period IV

*Late developments:* the 1966 excavations produced a final phase of timber post building which is characteristic of late occupation in a number of forts. The excavators assigned this phase a date of c. 360+ (Jarrett 1976, 40-41). Chance finds include late Roman military belt fittings believed to be indicative of military activity (Brown in Jarrett 1976, 76-82). One interpretation of this evidence is that there was an important line of late Roman garrisons running through Stainmore from South Shields to Maryport (Mann 1989). Several tombstones from Maryport show stylistic characteristics of late fourth or fifth century date (*RIB* 862-3). There is no evidence for destruction or the end of Roman occupation

There is no evidence of any **annexes** which might be expected to have shown up in the geophysical surveys.

### ***Vicus***

As a result of the geophysical surveys by TimeScape we have a full picture of the north-east *vicus* and a partial picture of the south-east one. On the other hand since these investigations lack stratigraphical and chronological detail, we have only a generalised picture of the *vicus*. Moreover, any interpretation of the results shown on the geophysical maps is necessarily subjective.

*Form:* the north-east *vicus* takes the form of ribbon development alongside the coast road to the north. The majority of the buildings are gable-end on to the road, most less than 7 metres wide but about a quarter with widths of 7 to 11 metres (Biggins & Taylor 2004, 115). Buildings also follow the line of the ditches up to and beyond the north and east corners of the fort. How far they extend to the east is unclear because of modern houses. The road from the south-east gate of the fort, leading to Papcastle, has been traced as far as the crossing of the river Ellen (Dykes 1870, 169). Geophysics has identified features south-east of Camp Road school but they do not appear to have urban characteristics (unless they are cemetery enclosures). A watching brief in 2004 in the grounds south-east of Netherhall School found only a few pits and stake holes, all of which were undated, and may not even be Roman (HER 2/04/1259; *CW*<sup>3</sup> v, 2005, 289). It is likely, therefore, the *vicus* was less extensive on the south-east side.

The situation south-west of the fort is also uncertain. It has been postulated that this area may have been the third century parade-ground, based in part on an interpretation of the mound known as Pudding Pie Hill as an inspection platform. Recent investigations on the playing field (unpublished and unreported) seem to show evidence of a pre-Hadrianic fort but it is not clear whether there were also *vicus* remains overlying it. Limited geophysical work by TimeScape shows the presence of anomalies in this field but the report seems to conflate the excavation results with the geophysics (Biggins & Taylor 2004, 122 & fig.5.6). The plan of the geophysics results shows nothing that can be interpreted easily.

*Extent:* the *vicus* area has been estimated as 70 ha. but this is a crude, and not very accurate, calculation based upon the 67 ha. extent of the survey (Biggins & Taylor 2004, 102). Any additional buildings present on the south-east and south-west may have been close to the fort in areas unavailable for survey because of housing and, therefore, not yet recorded.

*Development history:* there has been no modern excavation within the *vicus* which can give details of structural development. In 1880 Robinson found evidence for different structural phases but these were not examined in detail and not dated.

*Boundary:* there appears to be a ditch to the north and east which may mark the outer limit of the *vicus* around 600-700 metres from the fort (Biggins & Taylor 2004, fig.5.10). Another indication of the *vicus* limit on the north-east side is a possible ditch (or series of linked ditches) which forms the rear of the properties fronting the road and running across the road in Field 4 (ibid. fig.5.9).

*Zoning*: the buildings seem to cluster mainly around the fort and along the roadside. However, at the rear of many buildings the apparent ditches, mentioned previously, may mark property boundaries at some distance back from the structures. Beyond these are traces of other ditches, suggesting field or enclosure boundaries, but whether they are pre-Roman, Roman or later is unknown.

*Official buildings*: a large building (c.19 x 28 m) has been identified outside the north angle of the fort as a possible *mansio*. Other large buildings have also been identified e.g. no.15, c.30 m by c.11 m, and no.16, c.26 m by c.11 m, with buttresses and no.17 on both sides of the main road in the north-east *vicus* (Biggins & Taylor 2004, 114-5)

*Shrines and temples*: two of the buildings excavated in 1880 appear to have been temples. One circular structure with at least three external buttresses may have been a mausoleum (Robinson 1881, 246 and plan opp.256). The neighbouring structure with a rectangular nave and a shallow rectangular apse (ibid. 245; photograph in Wilson 1997, fig.1.8) is almost certainly a temple, possibly even a *mithraeum*.

*Bath-house*: not located. The bath-house uncovered in 1788 is generally understood to be a suite attached to the commanding officer's house. A situation closer to the river Ellen on the south-east or south-west side of the fort may be possible locations.

*Cemeteries*: no modern intervention has been undertaken in the cemeteries but Robinson's explorations uncovered a number of cremations on the edge of the *vicus*, in the fourth field from the fort, where the Serpent Stone appears to have been a burial marker and numerous burial urns were found in its vicinity (1881, 242). These burials began immediately beyond the *vicus* edge but others in the area of the circular temple in the second field may have been built over by the expanding *vicus* (1881, 248-9). A gravestone was found in the 1920s close to Barney Gill (*RIB* 863) and another close to the Ellen crossing (*RIB* 862). Since these are likely places for the fort cemeteries they may have been at or close to their original location. A number of enclosures and smaller anomalies seen on the TimeScape plans are also plausibly interpreted as enclosed cemeteries and cremations.

*Aqueducts*: not identified

*Latest Occupation*: there is no information about the chronology of the *vicus*.

### ***Epigraphy***

J.B. Bailey calculated that there have been 213 inscribed and sculpted stones found at Maryport up to his time (Bailey 1926, 422). A few stones have been discovered since then. Of these about 40% are inscribed.

The site corpus includes almost all categories of inscriptions: dedication slabs from legions (*RIB* 814, 852, 854), by *cohors I Hispanorum* (*RIB* 855), by Postumius Acilianus prefect of *cohors I Delmatarum* (*RIB* 832), and to Asclepius in Greek (*RIB* 808); 22 (or 23) altars to Jupiter (discussed by Wenham 1939, Jarrett 1976, 8-15, and Breeze 1997), other altars to Mars (*RIB* 837-8), Victory (*RIB* 842-3), Neptune (*RIB* 839), Roma and Fortuna (*RIB* 812, 840), to all gods and goddesses (*RIB* 810); altars to native gods Belatucadrus (*RIB* 809) and Setlocenia (*RIB* 841); buildings stones of Legion XX (*RIB* 853) and with phalluses (*RIB* 872, and others uninscribed); a lost

Christian fragment (*RIB* 856); and tombstones (*RIB* 857-69 plus two found in the 1966 excavations). There is also an unusual stamped tile of the *cohors I Hispanorum* (*RIB II* 2474) which is a very early occurrence of tile stamping by an auxiliary unit.

The sculpted stones have been recorded for the *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* but await the appearance of the relevant volume. A discussion of the stones has appeared from the volume editor (Coulston 1997)

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