

# THE ROMANS

In the Tees Valley



River Tees  
**Rediscovered** →



# The Romans In the Tees Valley

A Guide by  
David Mason



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It was compiled by  
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Cover images: Trooper Barbaratus aka Paul Martin: Preserved area of Roman Fort at Piercebridge (Peter Giroux); Bronze figure of ploughman with bull and cow from Piercebridge (© 2019 Trustees of the British Museum)

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## FOREWORD

Groundwork NE & Cumbria work on hundreds of projects every year, helping communities find practical solutions to challenges they face. The River Tees Rediscovered Landscape Partnership, with funding raised by National Lottery players and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is an exciting initiative involving a wide range of partners, stretching from Piercebridge to the mouth of the Tees.

Our vision is for the Tees Valley to be renowned for its rich landscape, heritage and culture. We aim to connect people and communities to the built and natural heritage within the Tees Valley, bringing our heritage to life, by offering new ways for people to see, hear, touch and enjoy it. This is one of a series of guides which helps to increase learning about our landscape and its heritage.

We hope you enjoy it!

**Lucy Chapman**

River Tees Rediscovered Partnership Manager  
Groundwork NE & Cumbria



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Auxiliaries** – second rank infantry and cavalry units in the Roman army, recruited from the provinces and mostly non-citizens apart from their senior officers.

**Caldarium** – the hottest and most humid room in a bath-house or baths-suite equipped with one or more hot plunge-pools.

**Frigidarium** – the coldest room in a bath-house or baths-suite equipped with one or more cold plunge-pools.

**Hypocaust** – an underfloor heating system consisting of a grid-pattern of brick-stack or stone pillars supplied with heat by an attached furnace.

**Iron Age** – the final part of the prehistoric period stretching roughly from 800 BC until the Roman invasion of 43 AD in Britain.

**Legion** – an elite infantry unit in the Roman army composed of approximately 5,500 men, all with Roman citizenship.

**Notitia Dignitatum** – a late Roman document listing the military units in each province.

**Merlon** – the solid upright section of a battlement on the top of a defensive wall.

**Obsidian** - naturally produced volcanic glass.

**Principia** – the headquarters building in a Roman fortress or fort which functioned as the main administrative building and which also housed the regimental standards and pay chests.

**Rampart** – a defensive bank of earth, sand, clay and/or rubble usually accompanied by one or more ditches in front of it which provided the material for the bank.

**Tepidarium** – a room of moderate heat in a bath-house or baths-suite.

**Tessera/ae** – the small cubical pieces of coloured stone used to make mosaics.

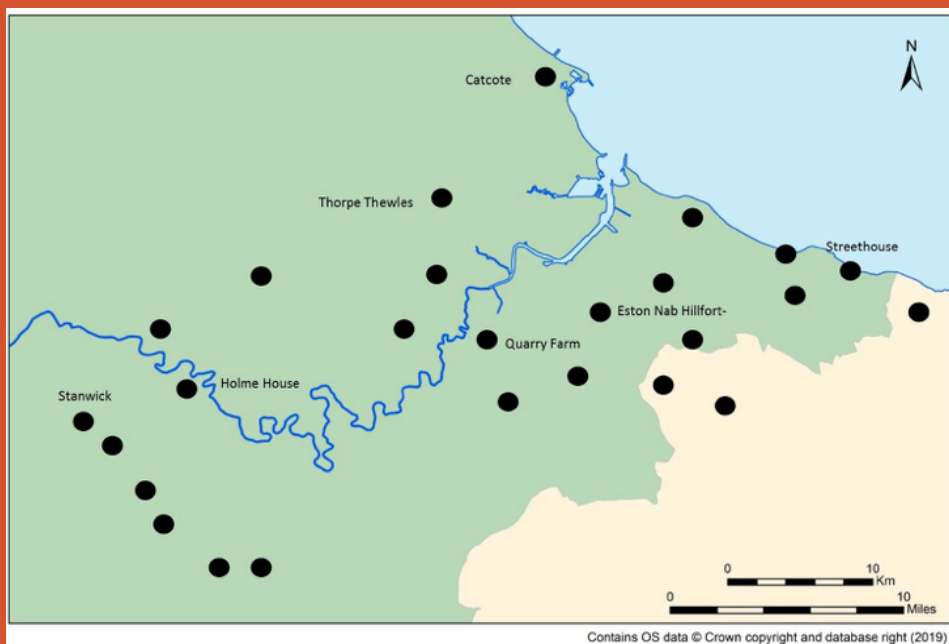
**Vicus** – a village, also the term used to describe the civil settlement beside a Roman fort.

**Villa** – a farmstead or rural residence built in the Roman style of architecture.



## The Tees Valley in the Late Iron Age

In the last twenty years or so, archaeological excavation and research have revealed that the number of Iron Age settlements both within the Tees Valley and in the surrounding areas, was far higher than previously imagined. These settlements took the form of farmsteads, consisting of one or more timber roundhouses set within an enclosure defined by a deep ditch and substantial bank, and small settlements set within enclosures. That which preceded the villa at Holme House, near Piercebridge, is a good example.



Map of Iron Age Sites in the Tees Valley (Tees Archaeology, TA)

The importance of investigating the environs of Iron Age settlements and not just the buildings has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Geophysical survey followed by large-scale excavation (or 'strip, map and record' as the methodology is often described) has shown they were often accompanied by an arrangement of fenced and/or ditched fields and paddocks used for a variety of agricultural purposes. The site at Faverdale on the outskirts of Darlington is just such an example. In other cases (such as the recently excavated sites at West Chilton and Eden Drive, Sedgfield) both settlement and associated 'field-system' were found to have been re-arranged a number of times over several centuries resulting in a complicated sequence of features difficult to unravel. It is highly likely that by the beginning of the Iron Age (c. 700 BC) the entirety of the lower Tees Valley was being farmed and quite successfully.



Part of the 4 mile long ramparts of the Stanwick earthworks (© English Heritage)

As yet, there is no evidence for large settlements within the Tees Valley. However, only 3 km south of Piercebridge lie the remains of the enormous Iron Age site of Stanwick, one of the largest in Europe, where a complex of massive earthworks enclose an area of around 270 hectares. Located in the middle Tees Valley, it occupies a strategic location close to important north-south and east-west routes through the region (now followed by the A1 and the A66 respectively). This is considered to have been the royal capital of the Brigantes - the tribe, or more probably a confederation of tribes, that occupied the whole of northern England and parts of southern Scotland. Excavations prompted by the upgrading of the A66 in 2006-07 revealed that the north-south linear earthwork known as the Scot's Dyke, which passes by Stanwick about 1 km to the east is in fact of Iron Age date and not medieval as previously thought. It runs for many kilometres and seems likely that this sizeable ditch and bank functioned as a territorial boundary. This is not unusual as linear landscape divisions first appeared many centuries earlier. Extending the alignment of Scot's Dyke from its northernmost known point would bring it to the River Tees at a spot very close to the earliest known bridge structure at Piercebridge; merely coincidence or a deliberate arrangement?

## Events leading up to the Roman Annexation

The Roman invasion of Britain took place in 43 AD. At first, only the south and east, and later the Midlands, were under Roman control. The Brigantes, under their ruler Cartimandua, entered into a treaty relationship with Rome soon after the invasion. Excavations at Stanwick have shown that although occupation here began before 100 BC, the most impressive developments on the site took place in the 50s and 60s of the first century AD. It was during this period that the extensive system of massive fortifications consisting of banks and ditches was erected and, at the heart of the settlement, large and substantially built timber roundhouses were constructed.

The main enclosing rampart was stone-fronted and at least 5 metres in height and ran for c. 6.5 km. This period saw the accumulation of deposits on the site accelerate, indicating a greater intensity of occupation, while the nature and range of Roman imports recovered from these indicate the very high status of its principal inhabitants. These imports included an Italian obsidian cup and types of pottery that are rare in north-west Europe, let alone Britain. Roman building materials – bricks and tiles – were recovered from the mid-first century deposits indicating the existence of substantial Roman-style buildings although no actual wall foundations were encountered. Cartimandua and her retinue clearly developed a liking for Roman luxury goods some of which were probably gifts from the Roman authorities.

Excavations prompted by improvements to the A1 just north of Catterick in 2016-17 identified a very extensive settlement dating to the 60s/70s. Measuring over a kilometre north-south and containing numerous rectilinear timber buildings as well as traditional roundhouses associated with copious quantities of Roman pottery, this appears to be quite separate from the military and civilian sites at Catterick itself and to have been abandoned around the same time as the latter was founded. Paralleling the appearance of Roman style settlements beyond the frontier in other parts of the Empire, there was clearly a very considerable Roman influence at and around Stanwick even before the Roman province was expanded to include this area.

Despite various minor revolts against Roman authority the treaty relationship with the Brigantes endured until late in 68 AD. The emperor Nero, believing that he was about to be assassinated following a revolt in Germany, committed suicide thereby plunging the Roman world into a period of civil war that has gone down

in history as the 'Year of the Four Emperors' - because there were four emperors in quick succession. Galba reigned for a few months before being assassinated. This pattern was then repeated with his successors Otho and Vitellius, before the final claimant – Vespasian – took the throne, restored order and established a lasting administration.

In Britain, where the garrison had been reduced by the removal of one of the four legions in the province a few years earlier, the anti-Roman party seized their opportunity and wrested power from Cartimandua. The ringleader was Venutius, Cartimandua's former husband whom she had rejected some time before and replaced with her squire Vellocatus. Perhaps this act had outraged a substantial proportion of her people and weakened her control. She would undoubtedly have been killed had not the Romans mounted a rapid rescue mission that managed to get her to safety. Tacitus tells us this involved both infantry and cavalry. The Roman forces, below strength and with their attention focused on the struggle for imperial power, were in no position to invade Brigantia. For the next few years their energies were devoted to defending the province against Brigantian attacks. Cartimandua disappears from history; perhaps she received a reward for her loyalty in the form of a villa in Italy.

Having first put down a major insurrection in Lower Germany, Vespasian ordered the Roman Army to sort out the situation in Britain. He had a particular connection with the province as he had served with the invasion force in AD 43, commanding legio II Augusta as it conquered the south and south-west and earning himself a significant military reputation in the process. His son Titus had seen service here too, holding the rank of tribune when Suetonius Paullinus was governor in the early 60s. The situation in Britain in fact offered Vespasian the opportunity that every new emperor desired at the start of his reign – military glory – as this was the one thing above all others that the Roman populace regarded as proof that they had 'the right man for the job'. This was especially important in his case because Nero was the last of the Julio-Claudian emperors and so Vespasian was the founder of a new dynasty – the Flavians. It was also a way of encouraging loyalty to the new regime by the legions in Britain especially as they had not been supporters of his in the contest for the purple. Thus it was that events on the imperial stage led to a new forward policy in the remote province of Britannia.

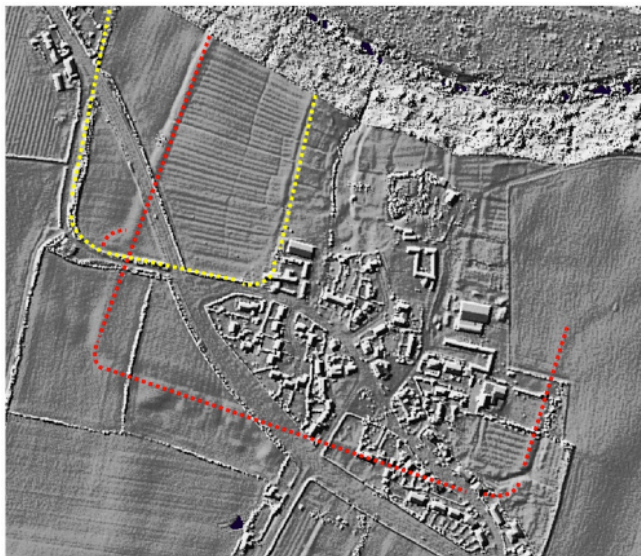
### 3 The Conquest of the North

Petilius Cerialis was appointed governor of Britain in 71 AD and he arrived with an additional legion legio II Adiutrix. During the next four years the whole of Brigantian territory was conquered. A network of roads and forts was established to control the newly conquered territory and its population. The main north-south road east of the Pennines was that referred to in modern times as Dere Street, so named because it continued in use as the main road through the early Northumbrian kingdom of Deira. This ran from the legionary fortress at York to Corbridge and was later extended into Scotland as far as the Firth of Forth. Much of its route is followed by the modern A1 and A68 and it entered our area by crossing the River Tees at Piercebridge.



Dendrochronological dating of a timber recovered from the gateway of the fort at Carlisle gave a date of AD 72/3 for its construction and certainly some of the other forts in the region – once thought to belong to the late 70s – were probably built around the same time. A recently discovered fort at Dalton-on-Tees seems likely to belong to this early stage in the conquest of the North. Its defences included a rampart of early type – the so-called ‘box-rampart’ consisting of vertical timber revetments front and rear linked by cross-members and with the interior space filled with earth, clay and stone. At some 16 ha in size this is approaching the size of a legionary fortress and it could have accommodated a force of around 4,000 men. It appears to have succeeded an earlier fort some 6ha in extent.

Map of major roads in northern England and principal Roman sites in the north east (Pre-Construct Archaeology North (PCA))



Roman camps at Dalton on Tees (TA)

The main route of advance to the west would have been via the Stainmore Pass and the marching-camps at Rey Cross, Crackenthorpe, Plumpton Head and perhaps that at Greta Bridge and Newsham are thought to date to this period. The primary fort at Bowes was also equipped with a box-rampart suggesting it too was a Cerialian foundation. A possible fortlet at Winston, beside the Tees, could be contemporary. It has long been supposed that a fort of this period existed at Piercebridge – as distinct from the late Roman fort here - but as yet no evidence to support this notion had come to light. If such existed, it may have stood on the south side of the river in an area yet to be investigated.



Winston fortlet (Durham County Council, DCC)

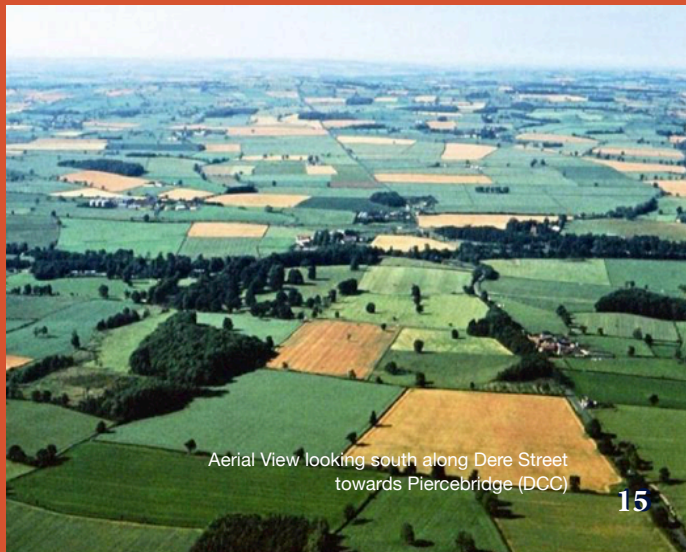
Consolidation in the North and completion of the conquest of Wales took place during the term of the next governor Sextus Julius Frontinus (74-77). The forts at Binchester and Ebchester were also probably founded during this period. The fort at Binchester was very large at approximately 7.5 hectares in size, sufficient to house a 'battle-group' two thousand strong consisting of two legionary cohorts and two units of auxiliary cavalry. A naval and supply base somewhere along the Tees estuary would have been a logical facility to establish in this period and there are a few Roman finds from Middlesbrough, however the large-scale industrial development here from the mid-nineteenth century is likely to have destroyed all traces of it. The next governor – Gnaeus Julius Agricola (77-83) – is the best known person to have held that office owing to the survival of the biography written by his son-in-law - the historian Tacitus. Agricola was given permission by Vespasian to extend the province still further and in fact to conquer the whole of mainland Britain. This he achieved with a great final victory over the Caledonii at the battle of Mons Graupius in 83 AD after which Tacitus tells us that the fleet was ordered to sail northwards to confirm that Britain was indeed an island.



Only a few years after the victory at Mons Graupius, the withdrawal of troops for service on more threatened frontiers of the empire initiated a gradual retreat from much of Scotland. Eventually, under Hadrian, the Tyne – Solway line became the established frontier of the province with the construction of the Wall that bears his name begun in 122 AD.

The increase in the number of units stationed along the newly constructed frontier would have acted as a stimulus to agricultural production in its hinterland especially in relatively fertile and easily cultivable areas such as the middle and lower Tees Valley. This is indicated by the increasing number of villas discovered in the area reflecting perhaps greater prosperity for a number of farmers fulfilling contracts with the Roman army (see below). That at Holme House near Piercebridge is one of the earliest where a modest but well-built stone house in the Roman style was erected by 100 AD.

This period also saw the expansion of the road system, possibly in part to aid the movement of goods and supplies northwards to the frontier garrisons. A new road (known today as Cade's Road after one of the first people in modern times to study its course in detail) was built running roughly parallel with Dere Street and about 15 kilometres east of it. This originated at Brough-on-Humber and ran up to Newcastle, the northern section of its course perpetuated by the A177 and A167. It crossed the Tees at Middleton St George where the foundations of the bridge that carried the road across the river have been found in the form of massive blocks of stone linked together by iron clamps set in lead. The bridge was known as Pountey's Bridge from at least the thirteenth century – Pons Teys (bridge over the Tees). The growth of the extensive civil settlement at Sedgefield in this period, on the line of Cade's Road, with its layout of large fenced and ditched enclosures (upwards of 50 by 50 metres in size) may also have been connected with an upsurge in



Aerial View looking south along Dere Street towards Piercebridge (DCC)

farming activity. Further north again, a new fort was built at Chester-le-Street.

For a brief period from 142 AD the frontier was moved forward by some 80 miles to the Forth-Clyde line with the construction of the Antonine Wall. The retreat back to the line of Hadrian's Wall in 158 AD involved yet another redeployment of garrisons including the construction of a new and smaller fort at Binchester some 4 hectares in size and the establishment of a completely new fort at Lanchester.

We know from the ancient sources that there were outbreaks of warfare in Britain in the later second century. The most serious occurred during the reign of Commodus when, as the contemporary historian Cassius Dio tells us, 'the tribes in the island crossed the wall that separated them from the Roman forts, doing much damage and killing a general and the troops he had with him; so Commodus in alarm sent Ulpus Marcellus against them..... Marcellus inflicted a major defeat on the barbarians'. This victory was commemorated by a coinage issued in 184 AD. These events are actually reflected by developments within our region, specifically at Piercebridge where there were massive changes in both the character and the physical layout of the settlement at this time and for several decades thereafter.

The close of the second century saw the empire disintegrate into civil war once more. Britain's governor at the time, Clodius Albinus, was one of the main contenders for the purple. His main opponent, Septimius Severus, managed to defeat his rivals and came to an uneasy truce with Albinus. This fell apart when the latter discovered Severus had tried to have him poisoned. Albinus therefore assembled an expeditionary force, crossed the Channel and began a march on Rome. The decisive battle occurred near Lyon early in 197 in which Albinus was defeated and killed. To put together a force of sufficient size, Albinus must have stripped Britain of most of its soldiers and the fact that both sides suffered heavy casualties in the decisive engagement would imply that the returning units were severely depleted in numbers as well as demoralised.

The tribes beyond the Wall took advantage of the situation and started making trouble. The Roman authorities, having insufficient resources to mount a punitive expedition north of the Wall, bought them off for the time being. The army was put to work restoring and enhancing various installations. By 208 Severus, like

Vespasian more than a century before, had decided to make Britain the setting for a major military campaign to bolster his image. This time, though, the emperor himself was to lead the campaign. This decision was in part influenced by a desire that his sons, Caracalla and Geta, should acquire some military experience and thereby gain prestige with the soldiery.

Much preparatory work had been done in the years preceding Severus's arrival to ensure the infrastructure was in place to support the expeditionary army. The fort at South Shields for example was converted into a supply-base containing sixteen granaries, later increased to twenty-four. The amount of shipping along the east coast must have increased tremendously to move the requisite supplies and equipment up to the frontier. The imperial headquarters were established at York. The campaign, again replicating events in the Flavian period, was to involve large-scale amphibious operations and an inscription from Rome suggests that in order to have the requisite number of ships the *Classis Britannica* was augmented by flotillas from the fleets of Germany, Moesia and Pannonia. The campaigning in Scotland continued until 211 when it was brought to a premature end by Severus's death at York after which his sons returned to Rome now as co-emperors - but not for long as Caracalla murdered his brother a few years later! With matters returning to normal after the drama and spectacle of the great imperial expedition, the army in the north was put to work on a very extensive programme of rebuilding and refurbishment which affected pretty well every military installation to a greater or lesser extent. Inscriptions record the presence of legionary detachments at Piercebridge in this period (see below).

This period also saw the extension of Roman citizenship to all free-born subjects of the empire. This abolished the complex hierarchy of settlements, with its differing grades of rights and privileges which had existed previously. As far as the army was concerned, this reform did away with the previous distinction between the citizen legions and the non-citizen auxiliary regiments although the former still retained their higher status and pay levels. The pay of both was considerably increased and for the first time serving soldiers were officially allowed to establish family homes in the settlements beside forts. That this measure was accompanied by official permission to marry seems a logical conclusion.

## 5 The Third and Fourth Centuries

For much of the third century Britain enjoyed a period of relative peace and prosperity to the extent that some army units were withdrawn for service overseas. From 258 until 274 Britain was part of the separatist so-called Gallic Empire but its reunion with the central empire does not appear to have resulted in any major reprisals. The final addition to the network of forts in the region was built at Piercebridge in the period 260 - 80 AD (see below). From 286 the situation was rather more serious. Carausius, commander of naval forces in the Channel charged with eliminating the increasing attacks by Frankish and Saxon pirates and raiders, came under suspicion of retaining rescued treasure for his own use and, to avoid arrest, set himself up as emperor in Britain. The loss of the parts of Gaul under his control in 293 resulted in assassination by his chief finance officer Allectus who ruled for the next three years until Britain was recovered by an expeditionary force led by Constantius Chlorus, father of the future emperor Constantine I.

It appears that trouble broke out again in the opening years of the fourth century and this was so serious that it required Constantius, now emperor in the western half of the empire, to return to Britain in 306 to lead an expeditionary force to the far north. After winning a great victory, Constantius withdrew to York where he died on 25th July. His son Constantine was proclaimed – illegally – his successor, eventually becoming the first Christian ruler of the entire Roman Empire in 324 and later making Christianity the official state religion. The repair of the infrastructure of the British provinces – for Britain was divided into four provinces by 313 – that had begun in his father's time continued during the reign of Constantine, as the score of milestones recording repairs to Britain's roads attest. As important elements in the supply route to the north, the roads in our region would have been included in this infrastructure programme.

For much of the first half of the fourth century Britain enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity. Agriculture in particular appears to have experienced something of a boom period. Many villa estates in the south and south-west saw the erection of lavish, even palatial, new residences while the production of grain was such that considerable quantities were shipped across the North Sea and then up the Rhine to feed the forces arranged along the German frontier. The situation deteriorated early in the 340s. A crisis arose so serious that the emperor Constans visited Britain in person, risking a mid-winter crossing of the Channel early in 343 and probably bringing reinforcements. It seems that the chain of signal/watch towers

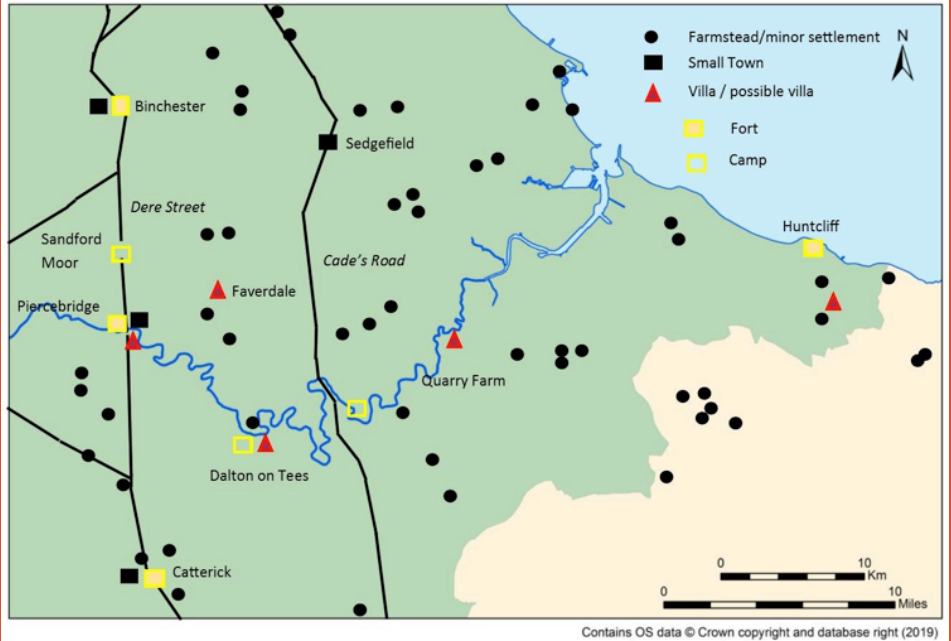
along the Stainmore Pass was constructed at this time, presumably to improve communications between and a more co-ordinated response by Roman forces to incursions on both sides of the Pennines. This period also probably saw the construction of fortlets or signal stations along the Yorkshire coast, with the most northerly being at Saltburn (Huntcliff) or possibly Hartlepool.

A series of raids in the 360s culminated in 367 in a concerted attack by Rome's enemies known as the *barbarica conspiratio* or 'barbarian conspiracy'. This involved the Picts from north of the Forth, the Scotti from Ireland and the Attacotti from the Western Isles who broke through, or more likely went around, Hadrian's Wall while the Franks and Saxons descended upon the coasts and frontiers of Gaul. The Roman command in Britain was taken by surprise. The frontier scouts or *areani*, who should have given warning of an impending attack, submitted to bribery and gave information to the enemy about the disposition of Roman forces who as a consequence were caught unawares and overwhelmed by the barbarian onslaught. The officer in charge of coastal forces – the *Comes Maritimi Tractus* ('Count of the Maritime Region') - was killed and his counterpart in charge of the other units spread throughout the remainder of the (by now) four British provinces – the *Dux Britanniarum* (Duke of the British provinces) - was besieged and/or captured. It took several years before order was restored.

The final decades of the fourth century and the opening years of the fifth century witnessed further serious incursions, retaliatory expeditions from the continent as well as ill-fated attempts by a number of leaders of the Roman forces in Britain to become emperor in the west. By c.415 AD Britain had in effect ceased to be part of the Roman Empire. While the strength of the fort garrisons had been depleted by successive troop withdrawals it is clear from excavations at both Piercebridge and Binchester for example that, as one might expect, these fortified sites continued to be occupied by the remaining soldiers and their families and subsequently by their descendants. It has been suggested that a situation evolved whereby such communities provided military protection for the rural population in the surrounding area in return for foodstuffs and other supplies; in effect becoming war-bands guarding their territories.

## Piercebridge

One of the most interesting features of the present village of Piercebridge is the fact that it lies almost entirely within the area of the late Roman fort. Of course, this and the fact that the B6275 runs through the middle of it on a north-south alignment mean that much of the fort interior is unavailable for exploration. Nonetheless, there have been significant excavations here, chiefly in the 1970s, with extensive remains being conserved and placed on public display.



Map of Romano-British sites in the Tees Valley (TA)

By the end of the first century a civilian settlement had begun to grow beside Dere Street on the north bank of the river. It seems to have developed gradually with no overall systematic planning. Some of its buildings were explored in the 1970s during the series of excavations directed by the late Peter Scott while much of the overall layout of the settlement has been revealed by aerial reconnaissance of cropmarks (the ground above stone walls and hard-surfaced streets retains less moisture than other areas resulting in poorer crop growth showing as lighter coloured areas and lines).

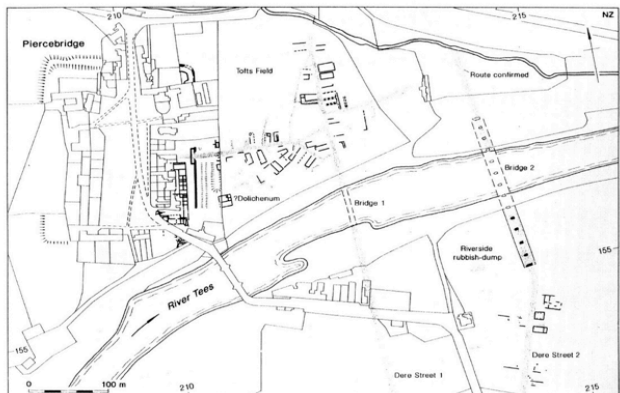


Aerial Photograph of Tofts Field showing cropmarks of streets and buildings. Fort at top of picture (DCC)

The buildings, initially built of timber, were mostly long narrow buildings placed end-on to Dere Street. Often referred to as 'strip-buildings, these structures were typical of the commercial areas of Roman settlements and usually featured a shop at the front, a store or manufacturing area to the rear and living quarters at the back or above on a first floor level. The location on the main road from York to Hadrian's Wall with its considerable volume of traffic was an ideal one for people engaged in commerce. Furthermore, the position at a river crossing was probably one where

people were likely to make an overnight stop. As time went by, side-streets or lanes heading off from Dere Street – particularly to the west - were constructed and these, too, were lined with more strip-buildings. The excavations revealed one of the early buildings was occupied by a potter and another by a blacksmith.

The settlement appears to have expanded in a gradual fashion throughout the second century and as the decades passed more and more of the buildings were reconstructed in stone and some at least probably now acquired a second storey. An investigation by the Time Team in 2009 discovered further examples of second/third century masonry buildings 300 metres beyond the north-west corner of the fort revealing that this pre-fort settlement was far more extensive than previously thought.



Plan of the fort and vicus Piercebridge (DCC)

The same Time Team event also examined timbers in the river bed belonging to the bridge which the 'Piercebridge Divers' – Bob Middlemass and Rolfe Mitchinson – had been investigating for many years. Radiocarbon dating of samples from several timbers yielded dates of c. 130 AD and c.260 AD. The later timber could represent repairs to the original structure but it is also possible that it belonged to a different type of structure. A new bridge was built further downstream around 200 AD while hundreds of objects retrieved from the river bed by the 'divers' over a period of twenty years or more would seem to be votive offerings to the river deity. It is possible therefore that the later structure was some form of shrine.



Copper Alloy handle in the shape of a leg with sandal and sock form the river at Piercebridge (DCC)

Around AD 170/80 something momentous happened at Piercebridge. There was a sudden and massive increase in the amount and value of the coinage circulating at the site and also in the volume, range and quality of pottery, metalwork and other goods. Unusual and luxurious items of glassware are present in some quantity and the women wore jewellery of precious metals. Piercebridge was obviously providing a market that attracted goods from far away. This can be seen in items such as lead candlesticks and various types of pottery that are very rare in Britain. Campanian wine jars of this date form a noticeably larger proportion of the pottery assemblage than they do at York. This mirrors the relative status of the sites seen in the vessel glass as proportionately speaking Piercebridge has produced more luxury glass of this period than York. There were clearly people here in this period who could afford to indulge themselves in whatever delicacy or exotic product they desired. Some of these luxury items may well have been coming from a considerable distance. Amongst the finds from the river there are three lead sealings which are unparalleled in Britain, including one using letters of the Greek alphabet. Presumably this came attached to something that originated in the eastern part of the empire.



Although it is clear that there was a major change in the character of the occupation towards the end of the second Century we do not as yet know exactly what was happening. The increase in both the quantity and the quality of the goods used by the inhabitants suggests a military, or at least an official, presence and there is certainly evidence of army activity here in the early third century (see below). We know that there was a major outbreak of warfare in the early 180s during which a legionary legate was killed and presumably Roman forces defeated before peace was restored. As a major staging-post on Dere Street, the main road north into Scotland, and located at an important river-crossing it could have made sense for a garrison to be installed here during the undoubted introduction of reinforcements in the wake of these disturbances.

There is substantial evidence for the presence of legionaries at Piercebridge in the early third century. An inscribed stone records building work done by a detachment of the Sixth Legion (based at York) while lead baggage-tags with the legion's stamp have been recovered from the river. A detachment of the Sixth Legion is mentioned on another inscription which also refers to detachments from the provincial armies of both Upper and Lower Germany all under the command of a centurion (Marcus Lollius Venator) of the Second Legion whose base lay at Caerleon in South Wales. A centurion from the army of Upper Germany (Julius Valentinus) paid for a dedication to Jupiter which can be dated to 217 AD from the names of the consuls included in the inscription to which can be added a tombstone commemorating a centurion from the Twenty-Second Legion based in the same province. Finally, there is the fragmentary tombstone of a man from the army of Upper Germany who served as a *beneficiarius tribunus* – that is he was a legionary attached to the staff of a tribune (the senior of the six tribunes in a legion was second in command to the legate).



Base of statue from Piercebridge, dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus with inscription recording set up by centurion Marcus Lollius Venator on behalf of detachments of the Sixth Legion and of the army of each Germany (DCC)

The evidence suggests the presence of a substantial and elite military force at Piercebridge in the period c 180 to c. 220 AD. The likely context is the campaigns launched by the emperor Septimius Severus against tribes in Scotland during the years 208-211. We know that he led them in person accompanied by his two sons Caracalla and Geta and that he brought reinforcements for both land and naval forces from other provinces. As he used the legionary fortress at York as his winter base and advanced northwards via Dere Street up the east side of Scotland, Piercebridge was well placed to function as a staging-post for both men and equipment. However, the location of any base they may have occupied is unknown. The construction of the known fort seems securely dated to c 260 AD although it is clear that in its south-east corner a pre-existing bath-building was incorporated into what was probably the commanding officer's house. Part of the adjoining section of the east range of that building may also have originated in this period as the evidence suggest it was begun but left uncompleted until much later. High quality finely dressed masonry from some prestigious building has also been discovered re-used in the foundations of the fort's perimeter wall and in other structures. Possibly therefore an earlier military base stood on the site occupied by the later fort which may have been abandoned some time before the latter was built.

As described below, it was also during the early third century that a new bridge was constructed about 200 metres downstream from the original and a diversionary road was built from Dere Street to the new crossing on both sides of the river. The civil settlement now expanded along the new stretch of road on the south bank with buildings lining it for several hundred metres.

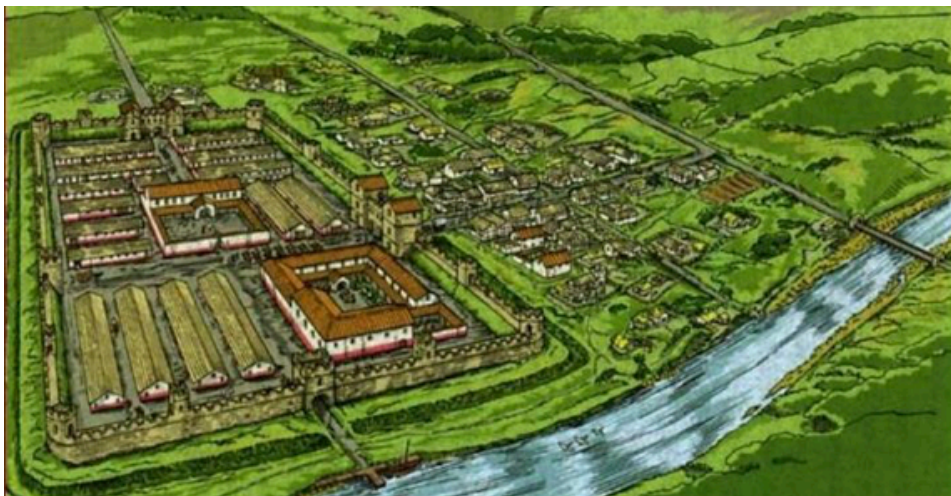


High quality ashlar masonry re-used in a bath drain (DCC)

### The Late Fort

The finds evidence suggests that the intensity of occupation at Piercebridge diminished in the second quarter of the third century, presumably indicating an end of the 'special' period in its history. Then, around 260 AD, the topography of the site underwent another significant change with the decision to construct a

large fort on land to the west of the original Dere Street. Its defences have been located on all four sides enabling its overall size (as measured across the outer face of the fort wall) to be determined as 213m north-south by 189m east-west giving an area of 4.025 ha or 10.54 acres.



Reconstruction of Late Fort and Vicus (DCC)

The fort wall averaged 3m in width faced with buff sandstone blocks laid in regular courses and containing a core of mortared rubble. It stood on a cobble foundation three courses thick set in blue clay some 5m wide. The wall face proper was inset 60mm from the face of the footing course and commenced with a chamfered plinth. Behind the wall lay a clay rampart c. 4.5m wide. Three corners of the fort have been examined and in all three cases there was no trace of an angle-tower. Similarly, on the evidence of the long stretch south of the east gate excavated in the 1970s, the curtain wall was also devoid of interval towers. This is indicative of a date after c. AD 200 while the combined evidence of the pottery and coins recovered points to a date around 260 AD for the fort's construction.

The west gate, examined in 1938, was located centrally in the west defences. The cobble and blue clay foundation for the fort wall thickened to 5.20 metres at the gatehouse and its two towers were constructed upon it, each having internal area 3.66 metres square, giving the structure an overall width of 16.25 metres.

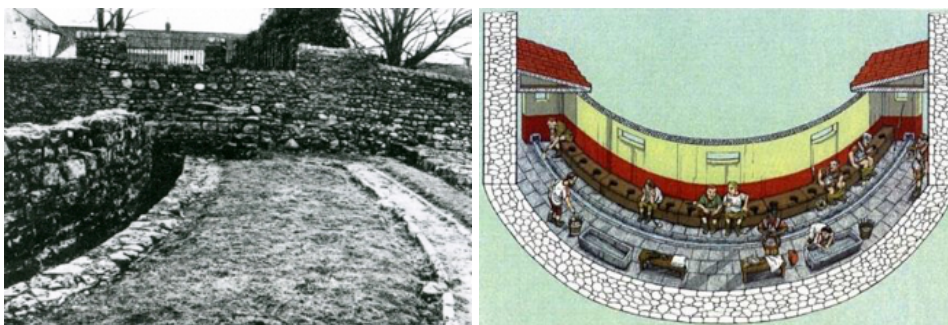
The roadway passing through the gateway was only 2.74 metres wide, indicating a single portal. The eastern gateway, also centrally positioned, was excavated in the 1970s and subsequently placed on display. This was a somewhat grander affair, befitting its location as the main approach to the fort from Dere Street. It was double-portalled with each archway c. 3 metres wide. The gatehouse protruded 5.5 metres back from the rear face of the fort wall and measured 26 metres wide. The towers measured c. 3 by 2.5 metres internally. To gain an impression of what the structure looked like one need only compare it with the reconstructed gatehouse at South Shields which is similar in terms of size and design. Contemporary with the construction of the fort a new road was built to link it with the original line of Dere Street meeting it at a point a little south of the junction between the latter and a road that headed east to the revised line of Dere Street.

On the west side of the fort there was a gap or berm 3.65 metres wide and then a V-shaped ditch 7.32 metres wide and 1.60 metres deep. Beyond this lay a counter-scarp bank 3.65 metres wide beyond which lay a second ditch with dimensions very similar to the inner ditch. There may have been yet a third ditch but this is not certain. On the east side the berm was considerably wider at 6m and there appears to have been only a single ditch. The 1970s excavations showed that the space between the ditch and the wall face south of the east gate contained an additional defensive feature. This took the form of closely-spaced pairs of pits, some square and some rectangular, each about 1 metre in size and averaging 0.60 metres in depth. Similar examples have recently been found immediately in advance of Hadrian's Wall. Described as *cippi* in the sources, these either held sharpened stakes covered with brushwood or posts with brambles or hawthorn attached (like a primitive form of barbed wire) and thus constituted a significant impediment to those trying to approach the fort wall.



Fort wall foundation, 'cippi' and ditch after excavation (DCC)

The buildings and streets of the modern village have obviously impeded exploration of the fort interior and so only a fraction has been investigated. A mid-late fourth century curvilinear latrine building set against the rear of the fort wall in the north-east corner was excavated in 1933.



Latrine as excavated and how it might have looked (DCC)

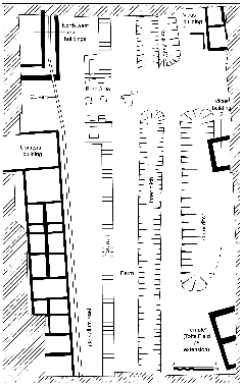
Apart from fragments of walling recorded during utility works the only building to be investigated to any extent is that occupying the south-east quarter of the fort. The 10 metre wide east range of this building complex was excavated by Peter Scott in the 1970s. Initially interpreted as a barrack block, it became clear as work progressed that it was in fact merely one wing of a much larger and sophisticated building of courtyard plan.



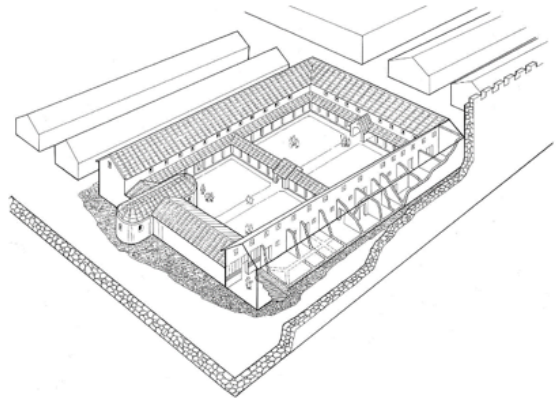
Courtyard building during excavation (DCC)

The rooms varied from 4.5 to 8 metres in width apart from one example that was a little less than 2 metres wide and was either a corridor or housed a staircase to an upper storey. Several rooms were equipped with a hypocaust and all were decorated with brightly painted wall-plaster. The east end of the north range was examined on the same occasion along with a section of the street to the north. As already mentioned, the complex incorporated an earlier bath-building at the south end

of the east range. The overall size of the complex is indicated by fragments of walling found by excavating small areas further to the west suggesting dimensions of c. 80 metres north-south by c. 52 metres east-west.



Plan of east defences and courtyard building (DCC)



Reconstruction of Courtyard Building (DCC)

The size of the fort, at a little over 4 ha, implies either a garrison of considerable size, or the inclusion of substantial storage space, or both. The fort at Newton Kyme, also built around this time, is comparable in size. Unfortunately knowledge of the detailed arrangements is equally meagre. Given its location on an arterial supply-route, the provision of significant storage capacity for goods in transit could well have been an important consideration. The thickness of the perimeter wall, at 3 metres, is typical of fortifications constructed after c 250. The lack of projecting towers along the curtain wall is something to be expected as these are extremely rare at military sites in the north, occurring only at the fort at Lancaster which was built - on the evidence of a slightly worn coin of c. 326 discovered in the construction levels - at some point in the period 330-350. Otherwise bastions occur only at the watch-tower/signal-stations of the Yorkshire coast. The lack of projecting towers at the gates on the other hand is a little more surprising as is the complete absence of both corner and interval towers. Indeed the defences, although substantial and competently constructed, are plain in the extreme. Then again, this lack of elaboration might reflect the presence of a substantial garrison, obviating the need for sophisticated defensive architecture. If Piercebridge was indeed the Morbium listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* then its garrison was a unit of heavy cavalry or equities *Cataphractarii*.

The construction of the fort and the introduction of a presumably substantial garrison would have provided a fresh stimulus to the economy and its social composition. Aerial photographs show rectangular ‘strip-buildings’ aligned on the road running from the east gate to the old Dere Street which presumably date to the later third and fourth centuries. Occupation in the outlying areas of the vicus continued well after 300 AD but had certainly declined substantially by c. 350 AD. The fort and the extramural area closer to it by contrast show relatively strong fourth century activity. Indeed, a new building was constructed over the former line of the outer ditch during the second quarter of the fourth century. A building to the north of the main east/west road was also modified in the fourth century.

Alterations to the fort buildings and facilities continued to be made right down to the end of the Roman period. A substantial stone-lined culvert was inserted along the inner edge of the intervallum road leading from the latrine in the north-east corner and existing via the south-east corner where drains serving the bath-house were modified so that the waste water flowed into them. The final surfacing of the road at the east gate formed part of these works and this sealed coins dating to 402 AD. There is some evidence for later modifications of the ditch system and one can well imagine the remaining elements of the civilian population relocating within the walled enceinte of the fort in the increasingly uncertain conditions of the fifth century post-Roman world. The site has produced pottery dated to the later fifth and sixth centuries along with brooches of sixth century type so continuity of occupation seems very likely albeit probably with a population much reduced in number.



Reconstruction drawing of the late vicus (DCC)

### The Bridges

Piercebridge is arguably best known for the remains of successive Roman bridges and the material that has been retrieved from the river bed in recent decades. Intermittent investigation of the river bed since the 1930s has revealed the foundations of a timber bridge on the precise alignment of Dere Street. Close-set vertical piles had been driven into the gravel bed of the river and then linked and reinforced by massive transverse beams. Examination of these remains was included in the Time Team project of 2009 investigation. Samples from one example of both types of timber were taken for radio-carbon dating funded by DCC's Archaeology Section. This gave results for the beam of c. 130 AD and for one of the piles of around 260 AD. Such widely differing dates can be explained by the frequent repair that timber structures of this type would have required. It is also possible – given the votive nature of much of the material that had been deposited in this section of the river (see below) - that part of the bridge may have been re-used as part of a religious structure later in the Roman period.

The remains of what appears to have been an earlier river crossing have been found much closer to the present bridge. Two parallel rows of timber piles set in the gravel bed of the river. A sample from one of these has been radiocarbon dated to the period c. 10 – c.100 AD. This structure is conceivably the original river crossing constructed by the Roman Army during the advance north in the early 70s, the final line of Dere Street not being fixed until several decades later when a new bridge was built. Another possibility is that the bridge was constructed by Roman engineers as a gift of infrastructure to Cartimandua some years earlier, a common practice by the Roman authorities in the territories of allied states bordering the empire.

Yet a third bridge is known at Piercebridge, one whose partial remains can be seen today. This lies nearly 200 metres downstream from the first bridge described above and its existence was totally unsuspected until its foundations were exposed by gravel extraction in the 1970s.



Bridge foundations being uncovered in 1972 (DCC)



Excavations were mounted by Peter Scott and the bridge remains were subsequently designated a scheduled ancient monument by central government, in the form of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, conserved and placed on display thus preserving them for the nation. The bridge remains can be accessed via a footpath at the east end of the overflow car-park belonging to the George Hotel. This runs down to and then along the riverbank terminating at the entrance to a fenced-off area defining the scheduled area.

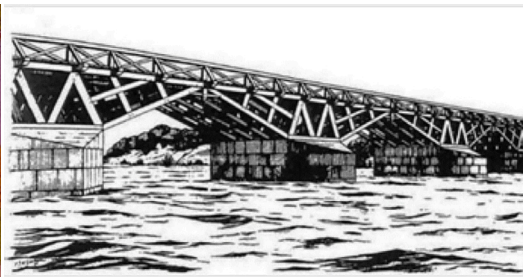
By this point the river has entered a broad floodplain in contrast to the rather more restricted course up river. This may explain why, around 200 AD, the decision was taken to move the crossing-point downstream for although it meant the structure had to be far longer – estimated to be around 200 metres overall - the pressure on its supports in flood conditions would have been far less than upstream and thus the risk of damage or even collapse much reduced. Over the centuries the river channel has moved northwards leaving the remains of the southern half of this bridge buried beneath tons of gravel brought down by the river.

The Roman engineers had to construct the foundations for the new bridge on the gravel bed of the river and the method they adopted was to build a continuous platform or ‘pavement’ of massive blocks of stone 13 metres wide. The irregularly shaped blocks were carefully fitted together but without the use of iron cramps except at the points where the piers stood. The southern abutment is the most impressive element of the structure to survive. This was built using carefully cut blocks of stone up to 1.5 metres in length and 0.60 metres in height. Two courses survive but there would have been several more courses at least originally. The blocks were laid without any mortar and only those along the front of the cutwater were clamped together with iron bars set in lead. A few of these still survive. The abutment measures 8.05 metres by 3.1 metres by 1.2 metres in height and has a cutwater (angled face) at the north-east (upstream) corner. The front face is 6.1 metres wide (approximately 20 Roman feet) and this is assumed to have been the width of the carriageway above. Cut into the base of the uppermost surviving course on the front of the abutment are five angled slots or chases spaced about 1 metre apart. Blocks with similar slots were found amongst the rubble of the third and fourth piers and all were clearly designed to take timber beams. These timbers could have formed part of the construction scaffolding or they may have been angled struts supporting the beams that carried the timber deck of the bridge.



South bridge abutment during excavation (DCC)

Although two of the piers were removed in antiquity and the neighbouring two only survive in part their form and dimensions can be determined. They were both 4.5 metres wide with a cutwater of 45 degrees and a square end on the downstream side. The piers are very similar to those of the bridges at Corbridge and the later version of that at Chesters. The blocks were locked together both vertically by dowels and laterally by iron clamps. The interval between the southern abutment and Pier 1 was 10.5 metres while the intervals between the others varied from 11.6 to 12.1 metres. From this it has been estimated that there would have been a total of 12 piers originally. Given the stronger current in the main river channel, the piers supporting the central part of the bridge may have been built on a different and more secure form of foundation, the usual method being a grid pattern of timber piles with iron-shod points driven deep into the gravel and often cased in concrete.



Reconstruction drawings of the bridge (DCC)

At a later stage in the history of the bridge, when a substantial deposit of river silt had accumulated between the piers at the south end of the bridge, it was decided to modify the substructure in this section. Piers 1 and 2 were removed and

instead a causeway of earth and rubble contained by masonry revetments was built out from the southern abutment as far as Pier 3.

### **The Finds Assemblage from the River**

Over the last twenty years or so more than 2,500 objects have been retrieved from a small area of the riverbed close to the site of the original Dere Street bridge by two divers from a local archaeological group; Bob Middlemass and Rolfe Mitchinson. While some of this material is almost certainly rubbish (either thrown into the river from the bridge or eroded out of its original place of deposition by the river) other items seem very likely to represent deliberate votive offerings. River crossings of any sort were significant places in antiquity charged with religious or spiritual associations. Both Iron Age and Roman populations worshipped and appeased river deities. The potential votive objects include many intact brooches, pierced and/or folded coins, figurines, and over 130 small folded lead rolls. At the time of writing most of the latter still have to be unrolled but there is the possibility that some at least of these are 'curse tablets' bearing inscriptions to invoke a god's blessing for one-self or punishment for someone who has done you ill. The cataloguing and identification process has been underway for some time and should be concluded within a year or two when, hopefully, the assemblage can be acquired and displayed by a local museum.

### **The Fort and Civil Settlement**

From the George car-park you can walk back along the main road towards the village crossing over the Tees via the present bridge which was built in 1772 to replace one that was swept away in the catastrophic flood of November 1771, which also destroyed a number of other bridges. There is a steep bank on the left as you approach the bridge and the higher ground beyond has been suggested as the likely site for the early fort assumed to have been established in the 70s of the first century.

Crossing the bridge the road bends slightly to the left before turning rather more sharply to the right to lead in to the village green. You have now crossed over the line of the south wall of the late fort. The semi-detached property on your right known as 'Glen View' overlies part of the bath-building in the south-east quadrant of the fort interior. As you continue northwards bear in mind that the east wall of the fort lies to the rear of the houses on your right and the west wall well beyond the buildings on the other side of the green. When you are about halfway along

the green you will see a finger-post sign pointing the way to displayed remains on your right. You can either visit these now or continue your walk straight on, following a route which will eventually bring you around the fort perimeter to a point where you can enter the same display area from the opposite side. A little way beyond the north end of the green you are standing where the north wall of the fort once ran and a short distance from the site of the north gate.

If on reaching the T-junction opposite the Foxhole Inn you follow the road to the left for a short distance you will see in the field on your left the bank marking the line of the north wall and north-west corner of the fort. All the facing stone was robbed away in 1822 to construct farm buildings and what you see now is the rubble core of the wall overgrown with earth and grass.

Retracing your steps and crossing over the T-junction heading back towards the A67 you will come to a small lay-by on the right – the alternative parking spot for visiting the fort – where you will see another information panel. Standing in front of this you will be facing south looking down the line of the eastern defences. Proceeding along the footpath you will see in the field on your right beside the farm buildings the north-east corner of the fort wall, the latrine immediately inside it and the corner of what is assumed to have been a barrack block. All of these were excavated in 1933.

Behind the robbed out fort wall is a narrow path between it and the outer wall of the latrine, itself largely destroyed. Three metres in from this is a culvert through which there would have run a constant stream of water. The back of the culvert and the inside wall of the latrine building were one and the same. At intervals of about 1.5 metres there are holes in this wall about 50 centimetres above the floor level. Into these recesses were fitted wooden joists which spanned the culvert and were supported by uprights standing on its forward edge. This formed the framework for the communal wooden latrine seat; the front and top of which would have been boarded and holes cut in the top at regular intervals. Users sat over the holes with their backs to the wall, facing outwards. It is estimated that the building could have accommodated twenty-eight to thirty people at a time. A pipe entering through the west wall of the building provided a supply of water for the channel which ran along the floor just in front of the feet of the users. Visitors rinsed their personal cleaning materials in this. The building would have had a flagged floor, probably a single span roof sloping downwards from the outer wall,

windows high in the walls for light, and water basins and jars on the floor for hand washing.

Beyond the latrine lay the intervallum road which ran right round the interior of the fort to enable the rapid deployment of troops to any threatened point; it also acted as an open zone into which missiles thrown over the wall could fall without causing damage. The culvert from the latrine passed under the road and would have been covered by heavy flags which were themselves covered by the road surface. At the back of the site is the corner of a barrack block. The culvert runs southwards alongside this building and here again it would have been flagged over.

### **The Civil Settlement (vicus)**

Proceeding southwards along the footpath you will arrive at a small gateway giving access to the largest area of displayed remains including the eastern gatehouse of the fort. Before entering this area, however, you may wish to read the interpretation panel on your left which gives information about the civil settlement which lay east of the fort. As explained in the Introduction, there was a civil settlement at Piercebridge for at least one hundred years before the fort was built. Developing originally along Dere Street, this soon expanded with buildings lining side-roads heading off both to the east and to the west. A few of the buildings were excavated in the 1970s but most of our knowledge of the settlement or vicus derives from aerial photography.

The community here would have included traders and merchants selling their wares to those travelling along Dere Street, many probably breaking their journey at Piercebridge as a convenient overnight stop. The settlement here also probably functioned as a small market town for the surrounding area and its farming communities. The presence of legionary troops here for an unknown period in the early years of the third century would have provided a fillip for the local economy while the construction of the courtyard building with its neighbouring bath-building as well as the Temple to Jupiter Dolichenus may have been due to their presence.

The construction of the massive fort around 260 AD and, more particularly, the installation of a very substantial garrison with lots of disposable income would have provided a tremendous boost for the local economy affording a wide variety of money-making opportunities for local entrepreneurs. The garrison was very

probably accompanied by their families and they may have lived in the civil settlement, bringing new vitality to the community.

### **The Eastern Defences and the Courtyard Building**

Turning back towards the fort and passing through the small gateway into the display area you will find another interpretation panel. This provides information about the fort defences and the imposing east gateway. In the 1970s this area was designated as the site for new housing but as the impressive quality of the archaeological remains was revealed by investigation in advance of laying the sewer system, it was decided not to proceed with the development but to expose the remains and place them on public display. Immediately in front of you lie the remains of the eastern gatehouse. This was the main entrance into the fort and as such was probably given more elaborate treatment than those on the other three sides. The fort wall was 3 metres thick at the foundation course and the walls of the gatehouse were similarly massive. The wall itself consisted of an inner and outer face built of modestly-sized cut blocks enclosing a core of rubble, stone chippings and cobbles, the whole bonded together with mortar. Its precise height is unknown but was probably around 4 metres to walkway level continuing for around another 1.75 metres to allow for a parapet and merlons.

As you can see from the accompanying illustration, and also on a major interpretation panel set just inside the gateway, the gate had two arched entrances flanked by towers which were linked by a roofed fighting gallery – capable of housing bolt-firing artillery pieces (*ballistae*) – with an open fighting platform above.

In front of the fort wall was a large ditch. The space between them (the berm) contained a nasty surprise for any would-be attacker as beneath a layer of covering brushwood were numerous small pits (*lilia* or *cippi*), each containing either sharpened wooden stakes or thorn bushes capable of causing considerable injury. The ditch itself was 8.7 metres wide and 2.1 metres deep. At the bottom was a small, square-cut gully probably formed by regular cleanings-out of silt deposits. For a short distance south of the gate there was a second, outer ditch 3.25 metres wide and 1.48 metres deep. This cut through the remains of the earlier Temple of Jupiter.

As you pass through the gate you will see the intervallum road to your left and right running parallel with and immediately behind the defensive wall. On the inner side of this road are the remains of a substantial drainage culvert, now missing most of its cover slabs. The road running straight ahead of you, towards the centre of the modern village, continued through the fort to the west gate passing by the principia on the right. On the far side of the intervallum road left of the gate lie the remains of one wing of a large building of courtyard plan measuring around 60 by 70 metres in size and occupying the entire south-east corner of the fort. This building and a small bath-house immediately to the south were erected about sixty years before the fort but were subsequently incorporated into its facilities probably, in view of the high standard of its accommodation and appointments, functioning as the garrison commander's residence.

In some of the rooms at the far end of the range you can see the remains of hypocaust – underfloor heating – systems. In some hypocausts a grid pattern of stone pillars or stacks of bricks supported the floor of the room above. In others, such as those here, a series of interconnecting stone channels or ducts allowed the hot gases from the adjacent furnace to pass beneath and heat the floor. The hot gases were drawn up through hollow channels recessed into the walls of a room, thus heating them as well, finally exiting via vents set just below the eaves. Pieces of wall plaster recovered during excavation show that some rooms were decorated with sophisticated and brightly painted scenes and designs.

Returning to the gateway area you now have a choice of either resuming your walk down the outside of the east defences or turning left and proceeding to the village green. If you choose the second option, you are recommended to visit the farm shop and tea-room directly opposite the entrance to the displayed remains.

### **Astounding Pottery**

An intriguing aspect of the finds from Piercebridge is the number of pottery vessels depicting human faces. These are present both as flagons with faces and as head pots, both in early third century North African tradition and later styles. The preference for head-pots seems to be a regional preference in the third and fourth centuries but an intriguing aspect of the ones from Piercebridge are the number deposited in very late contexts. This includes an almost complete North African style face pot that is undoubtedly the most famous of all the finds from the Scott excavations at Piercebridge.



Face Pot from Piercebridge (DCC)

This was made in the early to mid-third century but was found deposited in the lower fill of the inner ditch, a context dating to the very end of the fourth century at the earliest. That it was part of a deliberately structured ritual deposit seems very likely given that the pot must have been treasured as an heirloom for at least 150 years before its final deposition. A notable feature of this vessel is the fact that it lacks the base which would have formed the 'neck' and stand. This enhances its appearance as a head, rather than a pot masquerading as a head. It is noticeable that the head pots that survive nearly complete do not normally break in this way. It is more often the rim and upper body that is damaged, as it is with most jar forms. Given all of the features of the face at the front and the hairstyle at the back survive one has to suspect that the vessel had been deliberately re-worked to achieve this appearance.



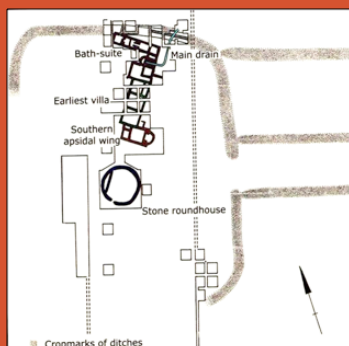
## Rural Settlement and the Economy

### Holme House Villa

Professor Colin Haselgrove's excavations at the Brigantian centre at Stanwick have shown that not only were high quality Roman goods reaching the site by the mid-first century but also that buildings in the Roman style and roofed with tile were being erected in the decade before its abandonment c AD 68. This suggests those in charge of this settlement were pro-Roman in attitude and it seems more than likely that Stanwick housed the residence of Queen Cartimandua and her pro-Roman followers. That a section of the native population beyond Stanwick was also keen to take on the material trappings of the Roman way of life has been demonstrated by discoveries at an increasing number of sites in the middle and lower Tees valley and further north in recent years.

The excavations at Holme House in 1969 and 1970 revealed a succession of occupation phases from the mid/late Iron Age through to the late fourth century which typify developments at those sites where the inhabitants increased their wealth and chose to use this to build houses in the Roman style of increasing sophistication. Occupation of the site began with the construction of an irregular, sub-rectangular ditched enclosure measuring some 80m by 90m. It was approached from the east by a roadway or track, itself flanked on either side by ditches, and was accompanied by external paddocks or yards. The enclosure had been re-modelled at least once and the timber roundhouses inside it had been re-built several times.

By the end of the first century AD, this settlement was succeeded by a small, rectangular cottage-type house in the Roman style measuring 18 by 7.5m with a veranda on its north and west sides. Its foundations consisted of cobbles set in stiff red clay and its superstructure appears to have been of timber. The existence of a possible staircase implies the existence of an upper storey. Very few finds were recovered from the associated deposits.



Holme House villa and Iron Age farmstead (DCC) Apsidal dining room with underfloor heating (DCC)

In the mid-second century the simple unpretentious house was enlarged by the addition of two further suites of rooms, one comprising a bath building at the north end of the original building, the other a wing extending eastwards at its southern end. The latter suite, which probably functioned as a reception and dining area, comprised two rooms with underfloor heating (hypocausts) like the baths suite as well as an unheated apsidal room.

The collapsed debris within both the heated rooms yielded a good deal of painted wall plaster, including fragments, which showed traces of re-plastering. The baths-suite consisted of no fewer than eleven rooms including the furnace-chambers.



The Holme House villa c. 150 AD (numbers are those of rooms referred to in text, DCC)

Although it is impossible to assign a function to all the rooms in the suite, the principal elements in the series can be identified with reasonable confidence. The furnace for the wing was located in Room 12, where two short lengths of wall projecting from the east end of the room flanked the stokehole leading to the hypocausted rooms 7 and 6. Located immediately adjacent to the stokehole Room 7 can be identified as the caldarium, which in turn led to Room 6, the tepidarium. Quantities of tesserae in the collapsed debris indicated that these had been patterned tessellated floors. The apsidal Room 8 was the cold room or frigidarium housing a plunge-bath. The presence of red, white and blue tesserae in the demolition debris indicate that the apse had boasted a patterned floor, perhaps in a fan-shaped design as indicated by the shapes of individual tesserae.

Although the excavations of 1969 and 1970 left a number of questions of detail unanswered, and the remains of this important northern villa were subsequently destroyed by gravel extraction (like those of the northernmost known villa at Old Durham), the work nonetheless provided much valuable information about rural settlement and the processes of Romanisation in the region. In its pre-Roman phase, the ditched enclosure and its series of large timber roundhouses conformed to a pattern represented on a large number of comparable sites in northern Britain, and though the material and artefactual evidence for this period of activity is characteristically sparse, we may presume that it was a Brigantian homestead whose occupants were engaged in a mixed farming economy within a regional territory dominated by the tribal stronghold of Stanwick 5km or so to the south-west. So far, the site is unremarkable, being one of many now known through aerial survey in the immediate vicinity. What makes Holme House distinctive is the speed at which the building was improved for within a decade or two of the stabilisation of the Roman north under Agricola, the site was transformed from native settlement to Romanised farm, and by the early-mid second century had acquired the status and wealth of a small but fully-equipped Roman villa.



Large Circular buildings at Piercebridge (DCC) and Ingleby Barwick (Archaeological Services Durham University, ASDU),

A large circular stone structure existed to the south of the main house and was clearly contemporary with it. This situation occurs at other villa sites including that at Old Durham and Ingleby Barwick. Some at least of these circular stone buildings are likely to have had an agricultural function, most probably as horse or donkey powered mills possibly with the actual milling mechanism located on the first floor.

There seems little doubt that in general the economic basis of the northern villas was their agricultural potential, and the concentration of villas east of the Pennines is surely a reflection less of the primitive way of life in the upland regions than of the dependence of the villa economy on cereal-production on a commercial scale, and on accessibility to suitable markets. Holme House was locally well situated to meet both these requirements. Whatever the size and capacity of its own estate, it may have derived additional status from its location at an important crossing-point of the Tees on the main route north, and perhaps from the existence there of a garrison with its attendant civilian population from an early period, equally, it is possible that the Tees itself afforded commercial access from the south and to the frontier regions, which could be exploited by a native entrepreneur over and above the immediate agricultural potential of the settlement.

A noteworthy feature of the finds from Holme House are the number of mid second century pottery and glass vessels that are either complete or substantially so. These all appear to come from the main drain of the bath-house. The vessels represent both cooking and table-wares and, taken with the evidence of the animal bone suggest that what the drain is preserving are the remains of elite dining episodes. Certainly the types of meats being consumed - veal, pork including suckling pig and domestic fowl – are ones that are regularly associated in contexts that can be seen as high status. Enjoying fast food snacks was clearly a feature of a visit to the baths in general. However, the incorporation of complete bowls and complete cooking pots is unusual and suggests that something out of the ordinary was happening. Possibly they had been used for some form of special meal, one which involved the deliberate deposition of the vessels used afterwards.

Another villa explored in some detail but more recently is that at Quarry Farm, Ingleby Barwick 20 km down river from Holme House and in similar proximity to the Tees. The site was first identified in the 1970s by aerial reconnaissance. The subsequent zoning of the general area for the urban expansion of Stockton led to the undertaking of field evaluation in 1979. This located parts of a field system and pottery ranging date from the late Iron Age to the late 4th century. An extensive field-walking survey was undertaken in 1997 followed by geophysical survey and further trial-trenching in 2000. This revealed the existence of a villa complex consisting of a main residence of winged corridor plan, measuring 30 by 16m overall containing eleven rooms, accompanied by a sequence of outlying stone structures. Because of these discoveries the layout of the proposed residential

development was modified to enable the main villa building to be reserved in situ beneath and open public space while extensive excavations of the other buildings were conducted in 2003-04.



Roman villa complex at Quarry Farm, Ingleby Barwick with detail of area around villa (ASDU)



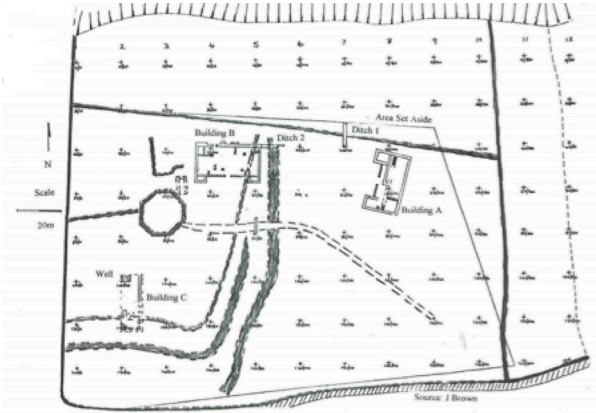
These included an aisled rectangular building, a circular stone building like the one at Piercebridge, a free-standing hot bath facility (caldarium) along with the fragmentary remains of other structures. The buildings were surrounded by a pattern of rectilinear ditched and fenced enclosures used variously for stock paddocks, agricultural/industrial processes and burials. Traces of a late Iron Age settlement underlay the Roman buildings. This villa was built in the mid-second century, around fifty years after that at Piercebridge.

A third villa that has been investigated at Chapel House Farm, Dalton on Tees. Excavated by the Teesside Archaeological Society in the 1990s this complex also featured a winged corridor house as its main residence identical in dimensions to that at Ingleby Barwick. It was accompanied by an aisled building also 30 x 17m in size along with at least one other structure. The aisled building was subsequently modified to become a second winged-corridor house. There was also an Iron Age enclosure on the site and the presence of a roundhouse is suggested by geophysics. Only the latest phase of the



'Caldarium' with later 'T' shaped furnace inserted, Quarry Farm, Ingleby Barwick (ASDU)

main residence was recorded though pottery implies occupation spanning the period from the middle of the second century down to the end of the fourth century.



The villa complex at Dalton on Tees (John Brown)

Through a combination of aerial reconnaissance, chance discoveries and most recently Lidar the number of potential villa sites has increased considerably in the past few years with the consequence that it now seems likely there were at least ten such establishments in the Tees Valley. It is clear not only that the area was fully integrated into the framework of increased agricultural production stimulated by a large military presence and the growth of urban centres like York and Aldborough but also this produced sufficient wealth for some landowners to build themselves comfortable residences in the Roman style.

While the number of known/potential villas has increased the majority of rural settlement sites of course continued in their traditional native style. Roundhouses continued to be the predominant form of dwelling though in some cases these began to be built of stone rather than timber.

The Faverdale site in 2004 ( PCA)



Investigations in 2004 prior to the construction of an Argos distribution centre at Faverdale, on the north-western outskirts of Darlington, resulted in one of the first excavations to examine not

only the settlement site itself but also its accompanying complex of stock enclosures and fields. The area excavated totalled more than 6 hectares. Occupation of the site began around AD 70 and took the form of an extensive and apparently unenclosed settlement consisting mostly of roundhouses. At least nine individual circular structures were identified varying from 7 to 10m in diameter although in most cases the degree of preservation was quite poor. These were arranged in three separate groupings and all appear to have been occupied at the same time so the settlement is interpreted as a multi-focal farmstead inhabited by an extended family group.



Agricultural exploitation of the surrounding landscape was based on a mixed farming regime. The presence of quernstones suggests arable fields and the processing of crops. Analysis of the animal bone indicated beef was the main type of meat consumed although pork and mutton also formed part of the inhabitants' diet. The bulk of the pottery used at the site in the late first century consisted of local handmade wares in the Iron Age tradition tempered with quartz and/or dolerite. However there was also a significant quantity of South Gaulish samian (the glossy bright red ware) of Flavian date indicating an eagerness on the part of the inhabitants to acquire high status Roman pottery.

In the early decades of the second century there was a significant change in the scale and nature of activity at the site. The level of land management was intensified with much of the sloping, south-facing ground parcelled up into a series of relatively small rectilinear enclosures resembling the 'ladder-style' field systems typically associated with Romanisation of the British countryside. These were used for a variety of functions; habitation, metalworking, processing of crops and stock management. A single sub-rectangular ditched enclosure 70m long and 64m wide of larger size was set out on the shoulder of the spur of higher ground to the north. The steep sided perimeter ditch measured up to 3m wide and 1.40m deep. An entrance, approximately 4m wide, was revealed within the eastern side of the enclosure, offset from the centre and towards the south. The discovery of substantial post-settings shows that the entrance was equipped with gates.





Few features were found inside the enclosure as it had suffered considerable truncation of deposits through ploughing. However, because of its deeper foundations and more durable fabric a small rectangular two-roomed structure equipped with a hypocaust had survived, located adjacent to the southern boundary ditch of the enclosure. Overall, the building was relatively small measuring 6.35 x 2.80m and was divided into two chambers of similar size. Fragments of wall-plaster indicated the interior had been decorated with brightly painted panels featuring multi-coloured plant motifs. The building has been interpreted as a free-standing bath-building although it is not impossible that it was part of a larger building in which the rest had shallower foundations and a less substantial superstructure. Its similarity to that at Ingleby Barwick is very noticeable.

There was a notable decline in the intensity of activity during the first half of the third century AD on the part of the complex that was excavated. However, the continuing maintenance of some boundaries and ditches and the establishment of new ones points to continued occupation somewhere in the near vicinity. It seems likely that during the early part of this century the hypocaust block was abandoned, along with many of the landscape features. By the second half of the third century there was evidently only minimal activity at the site. At some point in the second half of the fourth century a new and substantial stone building – possibly of aisled plan – was constructed in the north-east corner of the area examined.

The Faverdale site produced a large assemblage of Roman ceramics along with handmade pottery in the native style, together with stone artefacts, worked bone objects and metalwork. Over 4,300 sherds of pottery were recovered in total, including over 200 sherds of samian ware and over 2,110 sherds of handmade pottery. The non-ceramic finds include items of personal adornment, such as brooches and glass bangles. An outstanding item is a copper alloy mount from a wine jug similar to one found at East Park, Sedgefield, but here the body of the vessel was not recovered.



Pottery, probably imported from Gaul, dating to 2nd century AD, Faverdale, Darlington (PCA)

The changes seen at Faverdale are echoed at Catcote, just outside Hartlepool, where an Iron Age settlement continued into the period of the Roman occupation with very little change until the mid-second century. At this time the Iron Age settlement was re-organised and rectangular buildings replaced the traditional Iron Age roundhouses. This site was also notable for the number of coins that were found in the excavations and it is possible the site was involved in coastal trade with Roman ships beaching near Seaton Carew and trading wine and other goods for local produce.



Rectangular timber building and Roman coin from Catcote, Hartlepool (TA)

On the opposite (east) side of Darlington another previously unknown settlement was discovered in 2018 during evaluation of the site of the Symmetry Park development. Analysis of the data recovered was only just beginning at the time this guide was being written so the following comments must be regarded as very provisional.



Timber roundhouse, Symmetry Park, Darlington (PCA)

Few features were found inside the enclosure as it had suffered considerable truncation of deposits through ploughing. However, because of its deeper foundations and more durable fabric a small rectangular two-roomed structure equipped with a hypocaust had survived, located adjacent to the southern boundary ditch of the enclosure. Overall, the building was relatively small measuring 6.35 x 2.80m and was divided into two chambers of similar size. Fragments of wall-plaster indicated the interior had been decorated with brightly painted panels featuring multi-coloured plant motifs. The building has been interpreted as a free-standing bath-building although it is not impossible that it was part of a larger building in which the rest had shallower foundations and a less substantial superstructure. Its similarity to that at Ingleby Barwick is very noticeable.

Symmetry Park, Darlington (PCA)



The central part of the enclosure had been used as a rubbish-dump. An extensive midden deposit was found filling in a natural depression. Relatively large quantities of pottery were recovered from this deposit. A T-shaped corn drier cut through a backfilled ditch within the large enclosure, indicating that there may have been earlier phases of enclosures in this area.

A complex of intercutting drainage ditches, channels and gullies was located to the south-west of the substantial enclosure and the initial interpretation is that these were concerned with water management. Several metal objects were discovered in the base of one of the channels in this area including two copper-alloy bracelets. To the north of this drainage area lay a substantial watering hole measuring 5.70m by 4m and up to 1.50m deep. A relatively large animal bone assemblage survived in this water-logged feature.

To the west of the drainage ditches lay an area of intense activity comprising a series of intersecting narrow ditches set at right angles defining blocks of land which all generally measured 5m across but were of varying length. Plough truncation resulted in limited survival of features inside these blocks of land so interpretation of the activity which took place within is not certain, however material infilling the bases of irregular-shaped pits and occasional postholes indicated that manufacturing or processing activities may have taken place in this area.

This possible processing area was bounded to the south by an extensive ditch extending for over 70m, continuing beyond the limits of excavation to east and west, and the block of land to the south of this was occupied by another group of enclosures. The composition of the fills of ditches bounding these enclosures and the artefactual material recovered was notably different from elsewhere on site. Large quantities of charcoal and burnt stone were evident and fragments of building stone and ceramic building material were recovered indicating the presence of a stone structure in the vicinity. It is evident that significant archaeological remains survive beyond the development site to the south. To the north, traces of an extensive field system were identified.



Crambeck Ware Mortaria and Huntcliff type jar, from Catcote, Hartlepool (TA)

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this site is the date of the pottery assemblage. Initial scanning of the material suggests this is predominantly of fourth century date. This includes a range of Crambeck parchment ware bowls and mortaria dated to the second half of the fourth century as well as Yorkshire Calcite-Gritted Ware Huntcliff-type jars, both of which are known from the area but tend to be rather rare on rural sites. Only a few second-century sherds have been identified indicating that this extensive and planned rural settlement may well have been established in the fourth century, something rather unusual and endowing this site with regional significance.

## Further Information

If you have enjoyed this booklet the following sources of information are also available. Bidwell, P.T. & Hodgson, N. 2009 **The Roman Army in Northern England**. Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Arbeia Society.

Cool, Hilary & Mason David 2008 **Roman Piercebridge**, Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland Research Report 7.

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Hanson, W.S. 1987 **Agricola and the Conquest of the North**. London:

Haselgrove, C (Ed) 2016 **Cartimandua's Capital? The late Iron Age royal site at Stanwick, North Yorkshire, fieldwork and analysis 1981-2011**. York: CBA Research Report 175.

Rivet, A.L.F. & Smith, C 1979 **The Place-Names of Roman Britain**. London: Batsford.

Sherlock, Stephen 2012 **Late Prehistoric Settlement in the Tees Valley and North – East England**, Tees Archaeology Monograph 5

Willis, Stephen & Carne, Peter 2013 **A Roman Villa at the Edge of Empire, Excavations at Ingleby Barwick, Stockton on Tees, 2003-04**, Council for British Archaeology Report 170

## Places to visit

In addition to Piercebridge you might wish to visit

Binchester Roman Fort located 1 mile north of Bishop Auckland beside the River Wear.

DL14 8DJ. Tel 01388 663089

[www.durham.gov.uk/Binchester](http://www.durham.gov.uk/Binchester)

## Tees Archaeology Archaeological Booklets

No 1 Anglo-Saxon Teesside

No 2 Iron Age Teesside

No 3 Roman Teesside

No 4 Vikings on Teesside

These booklets can be downloaded free of charge from the Tees Archaeology website

<http://www.teesarchaeology.com/>

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