Detail of a fine mosaic on display in Tripoli Museum, Libya when the ARA Study Tour visited in November 2009. Marigold Norbye looks back at the tour on pages 6 to 11.

Photo: © Nich Hogben.
EDITORIAL

Before you start reading through the magazine, I suggest that you turn to page 33 and complete the booking form for this year’s special symposium, which (together with the AGM), will be held at the British Museum on Saturday, 26th November.

Lectures will be given by Drs Philip Kenrick, Nick Hodgson and Fraser Hunter on The Reign of Septimius Severus, in commemoration of the 1,800th anniversary of the emperor’s death at York. The event will be held in collaboration with The Roman Society. Entry is by ticket only, and a limited number of tickets have been allocated to each society, so it would be best to book up early to ensure you get a seat. Please send your form and cheque to the Director, Bryn Walters, at the ARA’s Swindon address, as he holds the tickets allocated to the ARA.

Photocopies of the booking form are acceptable; alternatively you can download a copy of the form from the ARA’s website, http://www.associationromanarchaeology.org/. If you do cut out and send the form, please do take the time to read about the ARA’s recent grants on page 34 before you do so. One of the ARA’s main aims is to support archaeological or associated research projects, and we do this using donations made to the Graham Webster Research Fund.

That done, you can enjoy the wealth of articles written by members for this issue! Marigold Norbye has been especially prolific. She provides an excellent account of the 2009 ARA study tour to Libya, which members were fortunate to visit before the current turmoil. Marigold also discusses the variety of Roman inscriptions in the first part of her article on epigraphy and reading Latin inscriptions – the second part will appear in the spring issue.

In addition to his usual role as author of Archaeology Round-up, Anthony Beeson, the ARA’s Archivist, describes and analyses the imagery on the Mithras and Sol Invictus altars recently discovered at Musselburgh in Scotland. We also have articles from regular contributors: Gareth Harney (spotlight on Dolaucothi Roman mines), David Sleep (developments at Hadrian’s Wall), Martin Elvery (South Warwickshire Roman Hoard) and John Bithell (the military hospital at Novae, Bulgaria).

After John’s article, Dr Patricia Baker, author of a British Archaeological Report on military hospitals, discusses whether such sites should be classified as valetudinaria.

As ever, my thanks go out to all of our authors: without them there would be no magazine. If you would like to write an article for ARA News, please get in touch – I’d be delighted to hear from you!

Nich Hogben, Editor.
A new excavation project at the Roman fort at Camp Farm, Maryport, in Cumbria, led by Tony Wilmott and Professor Ian Haynes, has produced fascinating results. The site was first excavated in 1870 when an astonishing array of carved stonework and 17 altars dedicated to Jupiter were discovered buried in pits on the site. These are now in the adjacent Senhouse Museum, whose Trust commissioned the excavation. Roman Maryport or Alauna as it was called, was part of the Roman frontier coastal defences that extended along the west coast from Hadrian’s Wall. Hadrian’s Wall Heritage has submitted plans for a £10 million Roman Maryport visitor attraction. It is part of the development of the whole of Hadrian’s Wall Country over the coming years, designed to draw many more visitors to the north of England.

When the altars were discovered it was assumed that they had been buried as part of the annual ritual of renewal of vows to the State and prayers for the emperor’s health. On January 3rd each year new altars were erected and old ones buried. It was thought that there was only one altar active to Jupiter Optimus Maximus beside the parade-ground at any given moment, and a new one was perhaps dedicated by the unit commander each year, at which time the old altar was ceremoniously buried beneath the parade-ground so as to prevent desecration.

The new excavation has located the pits in which the landowner Humphrey Senhouse discovered the altars in 1870 and has re-excavated some. One yielded a fragment of a rosette-decorated pulvinar or bolster from the top corner of an altar. This joined with another altar already in the collection but which was not known to have originated from the same cache, having been first recorded in the gardens of Netherhall, where it was being used as the base of an ornamental sundial in 1725. The presence of the fragment in the pit proves that the altar was originally found in Maryport, transported to Netherhall (without the missing fragment), and then back to the Senhouse Museum. As Tony Wilmott says “It is a little ironic that this altar, the circumstances of whose discovery were completely unknown, is now the only Maryport altar for which the archaeological context is firmly established”. The excavation of a pit untouched by Senhouse in 1870 unfortunately did not yield more intact altars but did show that the stones in it had been used as packing for an enormous wooden post, one Roman foot square. It soon became clear that rather than being reverently and ritually buried as had been believed, that the Maryport altars had been rather used as effective foundation packing for a massive wooden construction on the hillside that is not yet understood. Six pits in a row identify one wall of the building whilst another curving line of pits is also present. A worn silver coin found in the packing may provide dating evidence.

The end of the annual altar myth at Maryport also leads one to wonder whether this cache of altars to Jupiter came not from the parade ground of the fort, as has always been assumed, but rather from a temple to the god in the nearby vicinity.

Other investigations have located a curving enclosure ditch and have revealed an entrance on its west side leading to the extramural settlement, which is known from geophysical survey. Pottery from the ditch fill is now dated to the late third or early fourth century. The ditch is associated with the pits because an altar fragment was found in its primary fill, but at the moment there is no firm evidence to prove that the ditch and the pits go together.

Excavations at Vindolanda have uncovered a hoard of twenty-one silver denarii in the centre of the clay floor of a centurion’s quarters dating from the late Antonine period (c. AD 180–200). The coins had been buried in a shallow pit in the foundation material of the floor and were tightly packed together. They had obviously been contained in a purse or bag which had subsequently rotted away. The surface area covered by the coins was no more than 10cms and some had corroded onto others, suggesting that after deposition they had not been disturbed. This all suggests that rather than being lost the hoard was deliberately buried but never again disturbed. The sum represented by the hoard would probably be the equivalent nowadays of around £2,500–£3,000. At the time, twenty-one denarii would have represented about a tenth of a ranking auxiliary’s annual salary and was probably enough to buy a good horse. The intriguing mystery is why the coins were buried and why they were never retrieved.

The hoard of denarii has now been conserved at Vindolanda and reported as treasure trove. It is to be hoped that it will remain on display in the site museum at Vindolanda. Photographs show that they are in a beautiful condition.


http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-14173527

NEW EXCAVATIONS AT MARYPORT DESTROY OLD MYTHS

The Council for Kentish Archaeology and The Association for Roman Archaeology present a joint conference entitled:

New ideas on some major Roman villas, including Chedworth, Lullingstone and Great Witcombe

on Saturday 22nd October 2011 2.00pm until 5.30pm

at the Old Sessions Lecture Theatre, North Holmes Campus, Canterbury Christchurch University, Canterbury, Kent

Speakers include:

Dr Martin Henig and Bryn Walters

Tickets £5.00

Tickets are available from CKA, 7 Sandy Ridge, Borough Green, Kent TN1 8HP (SAE please)

Website: www.the-cka.fsnet.co.uk

This information is correct at the time of publication


(Newcastle) Evening Chronicle – 14. 7. 2011
As Libya is torn apart by civil strife, making the headlines on a regular basis, it is time to look back at the wonderful study tour that ARA organised there in November 2009. We were a reasonably sizeable group – forty two – ably led by ARA experts Mike Stone, Bryn Walters and Grahame Soffe. Libya had been only recently opened to foreign tourists, and tourist visas were only available to group travellers. Thus, whilst its tourist infrastructure was relatively underdeveloped in terms of facilities, the advantage was that the population’s attitudes to tourists had not yet been transformed by mass tourism and the sites themselves were blissfully empty. The year we went was the 40th anniversary of the Libyan revolution, and there were posters and slogans in every public place, alongside the roads, on building facades, etc. reminding us of the fact. Portraits of Colonel Gaddafi were displayed everywhere, including in museums and restaurants. Whenever we went out to visit museums and archaeological sites, we were shadowed by a pair of amiable tourist policemen who spoke no English but made graphic gestures if we tried to take photographs in sensitive zones. However, we were struck by the friendliness and welcoming attitude of the Libyan people.

We arrived at Tripoli in the evening of Friday 20 November. The next day, we spent the morning at the National Museum of Antiquities, in the old Fort on Green Square, which covers the whole history of Libya, the star attractions being the galleries dedicated to Greco-Roman art. This gave us an opportunity to learn about Libya’s past. Historically, coastal Libya has always been divided into western and eastern regions with different cultural traditions.

On the west side, bordering Tunisia where ancient Carthage once stood, emporia were founded by Phoenician traders. The language spoken there was Punic and the towns had links with Carthage. This is the region known as Tripolitania, the original tripolis being the three cities of Oea (modern Tripoli), Leptis Magna and Sabratha (Fig. 1). After the final defeat of Carthage in 146BC, the whole territory around it, including Tripolitania, was annexed by the Romans. While most traces of Punic culture disappeared, some elements survived into Roman times, witnessed by the occasional inscription in Punic of the 2nd century BC, of which the most important was Cyrene, hence the region being called Cyrenaica. When the Greek Ptolemaic dynasty took over Egypt, it extended its power into this region, strengthening Greek cultural influence. Cyrenaica became a Roman province once more, and its capital was Cyrene.

On the east coast of Libya, next to Egypt, some of the earliest towns were Greek colonies from the 8th century BC, of which the most important was Cyrene, hence the region being called Cyrenaica. When the Greek Ptolemaic dynasty took over Egypt, it extended its power into this region, strengthening Greek cultural influence. Cyrenaica became a Roman province once more, and its capital was Cyrene.

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Both Greek and Phoenician colonists, and their Roman successors, controlled mainly the coastal areas; the native peoples of the Sahara desert, the Garamantes, were the main local power further inland. ‘Libya’ as a single nation is a modern construct, dating from the time of the Italian colonisation of its territory from 1911–43: Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were distinct cultural and political entities throughout antiquity and the period that followed, and remain separate administrative units to this day. Colonisation by Italy led to political unification, but the current situation shows that the concept of a single Libya may not be as solid as it once seemed. Another fall-out of the Italian occupation is that the Roman ruins are often associated in modern Libyan minds with the more recent colonisation by Italy. Under Fascist Italy in particular, a direct link was made between the past grand deeds of Rome and the aspirations of the Fascist regime, and much archaeological activity took place in Libya in that period in order to discover and promote remnants of the glorious Roman past. Hence the indifference or downright hostility shown by members of the present regime towards the Roman archaeological remains, symbols of a recently hated Italian coloniser.

We had a startling visual reminder of the surviving links between Italy and Libya as we walked into the National Museum: a large photograph of Gaddafi shaking hands with Berlusconi, with a statue of a naked woman in the background. It turned out to be a commemoration of the return of the Venus of Cyrene, found by Italian archaeologists in 1913 and removed to Rome where it was displayed until 2008, when it was returned to Libya as a goodwill gesture. Keep in mind, however, that the museum has obviously been recently renovated, and the objects were beautifully presented. All types of classical art were represented; highlights include wonderful mosaics made out of standard tesserae and/or opus sectile (Fig. 2), popular motifs being the...
Four Seasons or scenes along the Nile (‘Nilotic’); numerous marble statues; and the originals of the bas reliefs from the arch of Septimius Severus at Leptis Magna. Emperor Septimius Severus (ruled 193–211) came from Leptis and considerably beautified his home city. The arch celebrates him and his sons in the reliefs (Fig. 3), though art history purists might criticise the stiffness of the draperies and figures compared to those made a century before; Roman sculpture was at this stage starting to move towards the hieratic, stylised and less naturalistic compositions that were to become the norm in late antiquity.

After lunch in the Old Town near the Museum, which gave us a quick glimpse into some of the old Arab architecture of Tripoli, we spent the afternoon flying to Benghazi, the capital of Cyrenaica. Sunday morning saw us being driven by coach to a series of ancient Cyrenaican cities, all originally sea ports on the narrow red-earthed coastal plain; in the background one sees the coastal chain of hills, called the Green Mountain, separating the plain from the desert. We started with ancient Tocra (also known as Taucheira or Arsinoe), founded in the later 7th century BC. This site has fewer visible ruins than the others that we saw, but still boasts some impressive remains, in particular the massive defensive walls built under Justinian in the early 6th century AD, partly adorned with various Greek graffiti (Fig. 4), with its 23 excavated towers and its southwestern gate. There are also parts of Byzantine baths and a gymnasium, two churches, as well as the paved main street (decumanus). What struck me was the quantity of pieces of pottery still randomly littering the ground, representing a huge variety of types according to our experts. There were also black and white mosaics; throughout our visit, we would encounter numerous such mosaic floors, left in situ, some encroached upon by sand or vegetation. Mosaics such as these, which would be source of great excitement if found in the UK, are commonplace in Libya.

The next city, Ptolemais, is more recent, being dated to the 3rd century BC and named after the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt. We went to the site museum before walking around the ruins; it consists of three medium-sized rooms afflicted with terribly harsh colour-distorting lighting, but containing some wonderful works. The first room is dominated by a Four Seasons mosaic whose main motif consists of the standard four roundels depicting personifications of the Seasons surrounded by geometric patterns, but with the curious addition of two striped tigresses at the bottom (particularly unusual insofar as there are no tigers in Africa) (Fig. 5). There are several other impressive mosaics, in particular one of Orpheus and the beasts, numerous statues, a couple of tombstones of named gladiators, a beautiful bas relief of dancing maenads in rippling robes, and various sarcophagi. The most famous monument in Ptolemais is the ‘Palazzo delle Colonne’, named after its impressive surviving colonnades; it looks stunning with either the sea or the Green Mountain as backdrop (Fig. 6).

Further on, we came to a large square, the former Greek agora, where we went underground to visit a series of cisterns: long, thin chambers with barrel-vaulted roofs, ranged side by side linked by low doorways (Fig. 7). Although the climate was less arid in the Roman period, rain was seasonal and water had to be brought long distances by aqueduct and stored locally. Other highlights include a small theatre (an odeon) and another colonnaded villa, the Villa of the Four Seasons, named after the beautiful mosaic that we had seen in the museum.

Our final stop that day was a detour inland to the Green Mountain: Qasr Libya, where in 1957 some splendid mid 6th century mosaics were unearthed by labourers in a ruined and buried Byzantine church; a second church to the west of it was discovered in 1964 with more mosaics. The churches had been part
of a small village called Olbia, renamed Theodorias in honour of Justinian’s empress at the time the mosaics were laid. The East Church had a floor containing fifty separate square panels, separated by guilloche borders, each measuring about 75 cm wide. The panels were removed from the floor and placed on the walls of the nearby museum; one can visit the remains of the church and see the gaps left between the borders. The current state of the church does not do justice to what must have been a spectacular sight when the panels were in situ. The panels are fascinating, although they lack the subtle workmanship of mosaics a few centuries earlier. The majority represent animals, and a couple contain human figures; there are mythical creatures (a satyr and a merman), four river gods and the nymph of the famous Kastalia fountain at Delphi; and personifications of the concepts of Adornment, Foundation and Renewal (probably linked to the contemporary embellishment of the local town, Olbia). Three panels show architectural elements: one is probably a church facade, the second is a castle, and the third is of particular interest, depicting the famous Pharos at Alexandria, as a caption informs us (Fig. 8). It is the earliest extant representation of that landmark, whose appearance still provokes heated debates among scholars today. Finally, a panel with an inscription informs us when the mosaics were made, in 539 AD. This combination of subject matters in a Christian church has given rise to plenty of speculation. Apart from the floor with the panels, there is also a mosaic that covered a smaller room in the same church, with lively hunting and Nilotic scenes. The mosaics of the West Church are displayed in the original church, and show animals and Christian crosses. We ended up at Apollonia (adjacent to modern-day Sousa), staying in a new hotel built about 50 metres from the entrance of the archaeological site, which has an inevitable impact on some of the vistas within the site. On Monday morning we visited the ancient city, a long narrow settlement strung along its main street parallel to the coastline. It was founded in the 7th century BC to serve as seaport to Cyrene, which is about half an hour’s drive inland. Much of the original plan of the city has been obscured by Byzantine rebuilding from the 5th century AD onwards. The most impressive buildings still standing are several temples converted into Byzantine churches whose marble columns look striking against the nearby sea (Fig. 9), the Palace of the Byzantine governor (dux) with more than eighty rooms, and, after a walk over a steep hill ridge, a small theatre on the other side of the hill, with the sea serving as a dramatic backdrop. Part of the ancient harbour is now submerged, but there remain elements of it still on dry land, such as warehouses cut into the rock, and huge storage vats for wine or oil. Other architectural elements in the town include a peristyle house with baths, a cistern, town gates and protective walls. Human touches from the past enliven the ruins: a grid for playing draughts scratched into the floor of the guards’ room in the Palace, and a seven-branched candelabrum (a menorah?) carved roughly on a wall.

We then drove inland to Cyrene, which is set on the top of a plateau dominating the plain, and built on three levels. Before seeing the city, we went to the museum, essentially one big room, chock full of statues, together with some bas reliefs and mosaics. Near the entrance was the famous Venus returned by the Italians; next to it was pointedly placed a plaster cast of a piece still held in Britain… The statue collection was superb; some more unusual items, typically Cyrenaican, were female figures with their faces either entirely obscured by a veil or faceless; they are usually associated with divinities of the Underworld (Fig. 10). Chronological range went from archaic Greek kouroi to late Roman pieces. Cyrene was an impressive sight. We started at the top of the north-east hill to see the temple of Zeus, an imposing Doric structure older than the Parthenon (Fig. 11). We then drove down to the largest section of the city proper, containing the Greek agora and the Roman forum (formerly the gymnasium),

2 The website http://www.livius.org/q/qasr_libya/qasr_libya1.html shows the mosaic panels in their original respective positions.
a basilica, two theatres, various temples, townhouses (including some fine mosaics in situ), and many other buildings. From here, we walked down a fairly steep path along the side of the hill, which harbours some of the numerous tomb chambers that form part of the extensive necropolis occupying many of the banks of the plateau on which Cyrene is built. We reached the most spectacular part of all, on a ledge over a steep precipice: the sanctuary of Apollo, complete with sacred fountain, temple to the god, other temples and buildings, a theatre cut into the side of the hill that the Romans had transformed into an amphitheatre up to the very edge of the cliff, and a large complex of baths restored in the Hadrianic period (Fig. 12). Afterwards, as we drove down the winding road back to the plain, we saw more tomb chambers riddling the rocky escarpment.

We flew back to Tripoli on Tuesday morning and went to Janzur, a small town on the edge of Tripoli, where in 1958 a group of underground tombs was accidentally discovered. They date from the 1st to 4th centuries AD. The most spectacular tomb chamber has walls and ceilings adorned with painted frescoes. A small museum has been built above it, containing cases displaying finds from the tombs: funerary jars, some with cremated bones still in them, pottery dishes, and various funerary items, mainly objects for daily life. The main attraction is the chamber itself, a mere 2.5 by 2.2 metres in size. Against a white background, there are three registers of paintings: on the bottom half of the walls, different kinds of wild beasts chase domestic animals; on the top half, various humans and gods appear to be involved in scenes relating to death and the underworld, including Charon in his boat, Proserpina and Pluto receiving the dead (Fig. 13), a man carrying a body, a bearded man (Hercules?) and a chained dog (Cerberus?) with a woman, and a priest (?) carrying out a libation. On the ceiling are depictions of angel-like winged figures (the soul?) surrounded by garlands and roses. The tombs are often described as Punic, but it is argued that they reflect elements of the indigenous Berber culture. From all this, it is obvious that the interpretation of the tombs and the paintings is still the object of scholarly debate.

The next day, we went to the most famous Libyan site of them all, the city of Leptis Magna, originally founded by Punic traders, later rich enough to carry out major public works in the 1st century AD, and further embellished by the ‘local boy made good’, Septimius Severus. We started outside the town itself, where the authorities built the amphitheatre and the circus. The long thin shape of the latter is still clearly distinguishable in the strip of land alongside the sea; it is linked by a passage under a set of two perpendicular archways to the mainly well-preserved amphitheatre. From there, one can see the harbour and city of Leptis in the distance. On arrival at the main site, one is met by the richly decorated 3rd century tower mausoleum of a local dignitary, moved to the museum garden from a site two kilometres away (Qasr ad-Duirat). We then visited the museum which contains a large number of sculptures (statues, portrait heads, bas reliefs and architectural elements) found in the city, as well as objects from daily life, inscriptions, wall paintings and mosaics.

The afternoon was spent in the city itself, walking up and down paved streets often edged with two-metre high walls, giving one a good feel of the size and scale of the site, which measures roughly one kilometre on each side. There were many architectural highlights, starting with the square arch (quadrifrons) of Septimius Severus with its intricate carvings and strange pointed pediment corners. Other high points include the splendid Hadrianic baths, with enough surviving arches, tall walls and marble veneers to give an idea of their former splendour (Fig. 14); a semi-circular nymphaeum (a sacred fountain complex consecrated to the nymphs) which, despite the removal of its many statues to the museum, was still highly impressive; the enormous forum built by Septimius Severus with its sets of internal arches adorned by heads of Medusa; and the Severan basilica built along one
We were privileged afterwards to be able to visit the Villa Selene, which is currently officially closed whilst awaiting much-needed restoration. This villa on the coast near Leptis survived buried in the sands with most of its roofs intact. It offers a rare chance to see in situ mosaics of the quality usually only seen in museums. It has a small U-shaped sea-facing courtyard adorned with geometric floor mosaics edged with charming Nilotic scenes (Fig. 19) as well as individual rooms off the courtyard embellished with some superb floor mosaics and colourful wall paintings; unfortunately, low lighting and dust on the floors made it very difficult to see them – this is truly a Sleeping Beauty needing careful restoration, with the challenging task of making the treasures of a small site accessible to visitors whilst respecting conservation issues.

The villa also has some well preserved baths, with wall paintings, marble cladding and delicate mosaics.

Our last full day in Libya took us to another dazzling site, Sabratha. Like Leptis Magna, Sabratha started as a Phoenician trading outpost before reaching the height of its splendour during the Roman occupation. It suffered the fate of many of the sites we visited, a combination of a disastrous earthquake in 365AD followed by the Vandal invasions in the 5th century; efforts at rebuilding when the Byzantines regained the area did not stop the city’s ultimate decline and disappearance. The first monument we saw was the most unusual, a three-sided Punic mausoleum tower, 24 metres tall. We then entered the central region of the city, which had been surrounded by a solid Byzantine wall, a dense area of temples, basilicas, a curia (senate house) and two fora.
The first forum, the South Forum, had an interesting marble floor in opus spicatum, the herring bone pattern more commonly found in Roman brick work (Fig. 20). A bit further, in the main temple complex, stands a statue of one of the city’s benefactors, Flavius Tullus, who provided the town with twelve fountains and an aqueduct. A 4th century inscription in the same area, which we examined in detail, evokes the ‘miserias communes’ (‘the common miseries’) that the city had had to endure, probably after the earthquake (you can find the inscription online as number 111 of the Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania).

We moved away from this central complex to a series of buildings near the coast, going past a large stone vat-like object that is traditionally called ‘the olive press’ but which the collective wisdom of the ARA group concluded was more likely to have been a dough mixing bowl, on the grounds that there were no holes through which liquids might have been channelled to pour (Fig. 21). Further along we found the Seaward Baths, with beautiful sea views, large hexagonal collective latrines, elegant geometric patterned floor mosaics and remnants of marble wall cladding.

After retracing our steps through the central complex in order to go out and have lunch, we re-entered the site and headed towards the theatre area. There is a residential complex around the theatre and the temple of Isis profiled in the distance.3 It was clearly visible in places how soft and liable to erosion this material is. From the top of the amphitheatre, one can look along the coast and see the stark silhouettes of the theatre and the temple of Isis profiled in the distance.

On Friday 27 November, the day of our departure, we went to the Old Town in Tripoli to see the only surviving Roman building left from ancient Oea; the rest have been quarried for their stone and have long since disappeared. Only an ancient superstition that it would be unlucky to destroy it saved the triumphal arch of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus from the same fate (Fig. 24). It is a classic tetrapylon in marble, built in AD 163–4 at a local magistrate’s expense. Motifs on the bas reliefs include the usual trophies of captured arms and captive barbarians, as well as Apollo and Minerva in their respective chariots. The arch is placed in a small garden filled with various fragments from classical buildings discovered in Tripoli. It is surrounded by the Arab medina, a labyrinth of small streets and alleyways bordered with old fashioned houses, and several mosques. We visited the nearby Gurgi mosque and had a short walk in the medina, including a quick peek into the Greek Orthodox church. After that, it was time to head for the airport and home.

All in all, the study tour was a great success. The archaeological sites were captivating and often visually stunning, our Libyan guides and courier did an excellent job wherever we went, and it was fascinating to see something of modern Libyan life and culture. The country is definitely worth a visit, and we can but hope that it will be open to tourism again soon.

3 Some statistics from The North African Stones Speak, by Paul MacKendrick, p172: the amphitheatre lies 800 metres from the temple of Isis, and is two-thirds of the size of the Colosseum in Rome.
The second-century Roman mosaic, found at Berryfield (or Bury Field) in 1923 when a rubbish pit was being dug, which has been displayed in Colchester Castle's well-house since its discovery, has now been removed from the Castle Museum and restored. The work involved the removal of the old mortar backing and the cleaning of each tessera.

The rather gloomy original setting in the castle was never ideal for studying this interesting mosaic. Unfortunately when it was discovered and lifted no further excavation work was done on the site and so what sort of a building it ornamented remains a mystery, although it is commonly credited with coming from a townhouse in the city of Camulodunum. The pavement floored a room 5.8m square. The first task facing the restorers was to remove it from the well-house where it was fronted by a 100 foot well. A false floor had to be constructed and the panel sawn into nine sections in order to remove it through a small door. These panels were then cleaned at the Cliveden Conservation workshop in Maidenhead and afterwards rebacked in a lighter material than the reinforced concrete it was given in 1923.

This April it was re-laid as part of the floor in the new Firstsite art complex that is due to open in Colchester in September this year, near to the site and so what sort of a building it ornamented remains a mystery, although it is commonly credited with coming from a townhouse in the city of Camulodunum. The pavement floored a room 5.8m square. The first task facing the restorers was to remove it from the well-house where it was fronted by a 100 foot well. A false floor had to be constructed and the panel sawn into nine sections in order to remove it through a small door. These panels were then cleaned at the Cliveden Conservation workshop in Maidenhead and afterwards rebacked in a lighter material than the reinforced concrete it was given in 1923.

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THE COLOSSAL STATUE OF CALIGULA FROM NEMI: AN UPDATE

The colossal first century statue, claimed to be of Caligula, that was reported in the last edition of ARA News (p8) has now been unveiled by Italian police, who seized it from a thief who was trying to remove it from a site at Lake Nemi near to Rome.

Archaeologists have now conducted an excavation on the site of its discovery and uncovered a large semi-circular nymphaeum court. This was surrounded by columns 23 foot high, and the statue sat within a central niche. The area excavated yielded more than one hundred fragments belonging to the statue including the head. In addition another 150 objects, such as vases and pieces of jewellery were discovered. The building is believed to be part of a villa, and a lead pipe stamped with Caius Iulius Silanus hints at the name of its first owner.

The statue portrays a clean-shaven and bare-chested man seated on an elaborately decorated chair of state with a robe about his waist and lower body in the manner of the god Jupiter. A chlamys or cloak is draped over his left shoulder. The head of the statue was found in a water tank away from the rest of the remains. Although it seems to be in scale with the rest of the statue it has been disfigured and survives in an abraded state. It has not been finished at the back and so was obviously designed to stand against a wall or in a niche. It certainly does not resemble other statues of Caligula, nor does it seem suitable for any of the gods as it appears too earthly in appearance. It may possibly be another of the first century emperors or members of the imperial house. Profile shots of the head suggest that it wears a fillet around its cropped hair.

Much attention has been drawn to the statue’s footwear as it is claimed that these are the ‘caligae’ or military boots after which the notorious Roman emperor, whose real name was Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, was nicknmaed. The statue is carved in Parian marble which was considered the most desirable in the ancient world.

The throne or chair of state again suggests that the occupant is either a god or an emperor. The upper part of the front legs of the chair are carved with a winged figure, possibly Victoria, although she seems to be holding a jug which may indicate that she is Hebe.

Below her is a Medusa head and finally a winged Psyche-like female. The high back of the throne is pedimented and the arms and stretchers are turned and resemble columns.

HERCULANEUM YIELDS UP ITS SEWAGE FOR STUDY

Ten tons of Roman sewage has been excavated from a cess pit discovered in the town of Herculaneum. The archaeologists from the British School in Rome working on the Herculaneum Conservation Project found the drains by accident while searching for a way to prevent the site from being flooded during prolonged heavy rain. Measuring some 230 feet (70 metres) long, one metre (three feet) wide, and about seven to ten feet (twο to three metres) tall, the large underground structure was at first thought to be part of the town’s drainage system. However, no outlet was found and it is clear that it instead functioned as a giant septic tank. Dating to around AD 79, the sewage that was flushed into it from the surrounding apartment blocks and shops has been described as the largest collection of ancient Roman human waste and rubbish ever discovered. Amongst the strange finds were ingeniously constructed terracotta pots, believed to be used for fattening dormice, and several human skeletons.

The team led by Mark Robinson of the University of Oxford sieved the waste through a series of graded sieves. The first sieving captured larger objects such as pottery and bone, whilst the second trapped smaller objects, including nuts and seeds. Lost jewellery, coins, and even semiprecious stones from a gem shop have been found, along with discarded household items such as broken lamps and pottery. The sewage was said to be odourless and resembling garden compost. Its content illustrates the daily diet of the inhabitants of the district of shopkeepers and artisans who produced it. Finds suggest that the average Herculanean had a healthy and diverse diet that included mutton, chicken, fish, sea urchins and shellfish. They also enjoyed figs, fennel and fruit. Writers on Roman cookery always concentrate on the elaborate dishes but ignore the

standard and basic fare that the majority of citizens enjoyed, so this study opens up that new world to us. In future, studies of Roman stools will inform us of what bacterial or parasitic infections they suffered from.

Of the 774 sacks of human waste excavated from the pit, so far only 70 have been investigated. The findings of the study will be presented at the British Museum in 2013.

NEW INVESTIGATIONS INTO ROMAN DONCASTER

Excavations in advance of the construction of the second phase of Doncaster’s civic and cultural quarter have revealed part of the settlement’s cemetery. This cremation cemetery was in use between AD 140 and 180 and is said to be the largest known Roman burial site in South Yorkshire. Archaeological investigations have uncovered a rare Roman glass flagon dating back to about AD 150, several cremation urns and five oil lamps, which accompanied the burials.

Four of the five Roman oil lamps discovered in a large cremation pit are in near perfect condition and carry the makers’ names ‘Fortis’ and ‘Strobili’. This indicates they were probably created in Modena in Northern Italy. The glass flagon, which has been snapped off at the neck, is very similar to one discovered when the town’s Frenchgate Centre was being built in the 1960s; it is on display in Doncaster Museum.

The town, which was called Danum in Roman times, was a large settlement and the site of two forts: a Flavian one which was established close to the Market Place around the site of Doncaster Minster in around AD 71, and a smaller Trajanic/Hadrianic one which appears to have been occupied to the end of the Roman period. The defences of the vicus have also been excavated. Danum is notable for the discovery of a uniquely preserved Roman shield that was excavated in 1971 beneath the rampart of the 2nd century fort. After analysis, the finds will be deposited in Doncaster Museum.

Yorkshire Post – 19. 7. 2011
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Condemned to the mines: a visit to Dolaucothi

"Britain contains gold and silver and other metals, as the prize of conquest."
Tacitus, Agricola 12

When the Roman legions advanced westward into the territory of ancient Wales (75–78AD), they most likely found the native Demetae tribe already exploiting the rich gold deposits at Dolaucothi. Naturally, Sextus Julius Frontinus (Governor of Britannia, known for his treatise on the aqueducts of Rome) turned the extraction of gold here into a full-scale military operation. Devoting their engineering expertise to both opencast and deep mining, the Romans relieved these rolling hillside of their golden interior on a scale unsurpassed until the 19th century. It is often difficult to distinguish the Roman works from those of the Victorians as mining techniques changed so little in the intervening millennia; and, while Roman artefacts have been found, it has yet to be proved whether the Demetae worked the site before them.

The site is possibly that named in Ptolemy’s Geographia as ‘Louentium’ or ‘The Washing Place’, if so, this gives an obvious hint as to one of the most powerful forces employed in the mining of gold. Water was very important to the process of Roman mining. At least three leats carried water to Louentium from the River Cothi seven miles away. On its arrival it was collected in a series of large rock-hewn reservoirs. One of these, now a marsh called ‘The Millpond of the Soldiers’, held over a million litres and had its outflow precisely controlled using sluice gates. The most dramatic use for this water was the process known as hydraulicing, whereby a volume of water was released into an opencast mine. The power of the sudden wave would clear away surface soil and rock debris from gold veins, leaving behind the precious metal. This process is known to have been used in the Las Medulas gold mines of Spain and the Alpine Val d’Aosta mines in Italy; the steep slopes around Dolaucothi were perfect for hydraulicing, allowing engineers to combine the power of water and gravity to great effect.

The efficiency with which the Romans mastered nature is evident as soon as you arrive at Dolaucothi. The cavernous basin in which the information centre buildings are nestled is by no means natural (Fig. 1). It is a mammoth opencast Roman pit, left when the most accessible gold deposits were initially gouged out. The resulting twenty-metre spoil mound which stands just to the north is so large it was, up until recently, believed to be a medieval motte. From this crater, engineers followed gold-bearing quartz veins deep into the surrounding hills, sometimes to very lucrative prizes.

No visit to the site is complete without donning a hard-hat and exploring the dark, cool adits on one of the excellent guided tours on offer (adits are near-horizontal passages; shafts are vertical). The ‘Roman tour’ takes you up a grassy path to the south, where all around the landscape is crated by Roman pits. You can see the line of a channel that drained water from the mines to the river (Fig. 2) and the village of Pumsaint, the location of a Roman fort that guarded the mines. Excavations indicated that a turf, clay and timber fort was built in the mid-70s and replaced by a smaller stone fortlet c. 100AD, which was in use until c. 120AD. Geophysical survey to the south and south-east has revealed the vicus; an 1830s excavation found a bath-house further south.

You will soon come to the foreboding entrance of the Lower Roman Adit (Fig. 3). As you enter the tunnel it is difficult to believe that every square inch was cut by the hands of men two millennia ago, yet you are reminded of this fact every step of the way by the pick marks that score the walls. The size and distinctive shape of these tunnels have been compared to those of the Rio Tinto gold mines in Spain which may suggest a similar date of operation. In the 1960s a Roman water wheel fragment was discovered in now-inaccessible galleries broken into by the 1930s shaft beneath the main opencast (i.e. under where the visitor centre now stands). Both Vitruvius and Pliny the Elder describe how complex networks of water wheels were utilised to remove flood water from mines. While the number of wheels in use at Dolaucothi
Nearby you get a good view of the repeatedly stepping on the blades (Fig. 5). Its design: the operator powered it by a system of water wheels found here, ingenious in its simplicity. With this tunnel, the miners had already followed the path of a gold-bearing quartz vein in the hope of finding its end. The impressive Roman-era adit entrances show that ancient engineers had learned to study the natural contours of the landscape carefully, tunnelling at the meeting point of rock strata (Fig. 6). The less-patient Victorians were aided by something their Roman counterparts did not have: explosives. Victorian miners utilised their superior technology to further explore existing Roman adits; yet, as our guide gleefully explained, their efforts were rarely rewarded. Again and again they found that they had been beaten to the prize: the most productive gold seams had been thoroughly extracted by hand, 1,700 years before. In a last-ditch effort to hit new deposits an immense shaft was driven 430 feet down, yet they seem to have overstretched themselves: the mine flooded and became unstable, and was abandoned soon after.

After retracing your steps out of the tunnel and readjusting your eyes to the daylight, the tour continues up the hill to the Upper Roman Adit. This passage, also completely cut by hand, is notable for its uniformity: it measures two metres both in height and width (Fig. 4). If you still have not adjusted to the claustrophobic conditions inside the mines, be prepared: at the time of my visit this passage also had a resident bat which hung from the ceiling and that we did our best not to disturb. Another remarkable feature of this tunnel is the presence of deep grooves, worn into the walls by the ropes used to haul rubble out of it. As you advance into the damp, dark passage it is easy to understand why the sentence ‘condemnation to the mines’ was so feared in the Roman world.

With this tunnel, the miners had evidently followed the path of a gold-bearing quartz vein in the hope of reaching rich deposits and, as you see at the end of the passage, they certainly did. The tunnel opens into a large subterranean cavern that, though impressive in its own right, is merely the negative space left behind by a tremendous deposit of quartz. Standing in the midst of the church-like space, one wonders what became of all the gold discovered here and to how many corners of the Empire it found its way.

Upon returning to the surface, pause to visit the large stone posts. Then you pass through the ruins of Victorian-era industrial buildings to view the Middle Adit, which was worked in the Roman period and then again in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Any Roman enthusiast visiting Dolaucothi should also take the ‘Victorian tour’, which explores the later and deeper mines of the 19th century. The impressive Roman-era adit entrances show that ancient engineers had learned to study the natural contours of the landscape carefully, tunnelling at the meeting point of rock strata, (Fig. 6). The less-patient Victorians were aided by something their Roman counterparts did not have: explosives. Victorian miners utilised their superior technology to further explore existing Roman adits; yet, as our guide gleefully explained, their efforts were rarely rewarded. Again and again they found that they had been beaten to the prize: the most productive gold seams had been thoroughly extracted by hand, 1,700 years before. In a last-ditch effort to hit new deposits an immense shaft was driven 430 feet down, yet they seem to have overstretched themselves: the mine flooded and became unstable, and was abandoned soon after.

After the tours, make your way back to the information centre and, like countless generations before you, try your luck at gold panning. It is quite absorbing and you will likely leave with a few sparkling specks of promise, but beware of the infamous iron pyrite, more commonly known as fool’s gold! Before you leave, visit the large stone near the carpark, believed to be the anvil for a Roman water-powered trip hammer, used to break up quartz.

Today, Dolaucothi can justly be described as a truly unique site: it is the only known gold mine of Roman Britain. Anyone who visits will gain a new appreciation for the wonders of Roman engineering. It may not have the classic mosaics and hypocausts of other Romano-British sites, yet this is what makes Dolaucothi so intriguing: where else can you walk through dark tunnels, hewn painfully by hand millennia ago? Overall, Dolaucothi’s beautiful, brutalised landscape speaks of Rome’s great contradiction: just as she was inventive, industrious and civilised so she was greedy, exploitative and cruel. Today at least, it was a joy to be condemned to the mines.
**Vindolanda**

There is no doubt that a visit to the Hadrian’s Wall frontier system would not be complete without a visit to Vindolanda. I visited the site this year on my annual visit to Hadrian’s Wall, timed to coincide with the Hadrian’s Wall Archaeology Forum event in Carlisle. Many members will remember the delight of walking down from the Roman fort to the Victorian country house of Chesterholm that houses the outstanding museum. This year the walk has become even more rewarding, with the opening of the new museum.

Out have gone the wooden-framed display cabinets, and in has come a multi-million pound re-development; this does great justice to a collection renowned throughout the world (Fig. 1).

The new museum provides additional display material and, as ever, all the material on display was found at Vindolanda: from those first discoveries in the 1970s right up to finds from the current excavations. Pride of place is given to nine of the famous tablets (Fig. 2), the oldest surviving hand written documents in Britain, which are newly returned to Vindolanda. When you enter the purpose-built temperature-controlled room with its safe-like doors, you feel you are about to see something special. A breathtaking moment!

Understandably the tablets get much attention in the museum, and rightly so. I particularly liked the display by Robin Birley – a name synonymous with Vindolanda. It shows his ‘top tablets’, including the first tablet discovered (which mentions a parcel of socks and underpants), and the extraordinary birthday party invitation from Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina. Early antiquarians and pioneers of archaeology get full recognition, including: William Camden who made the first post-Roman accounts of the ruins at Vindolanda in 1586; Vindolanda’s first excavator Anthony Hedley, the builder of Chesterholm House; the famous Victorian antiquarian John Clayton, who did so much to preserve sites in the central sector; and Eric Birley, whose invaluable *Research on Hadrian’s Wall*, published fifty years ago, is still regarded as one of the great works and is relevant to the modern archaeologist and researcher.

The display of ‘small finds’ has been expanded. It includes the classic Gladiator glass bowl, described as the most striking piece of painted glass to come from Vindolanda, and a display of those incredible Roman leather shoes – there are now over 6,000 in Vindolanda’s collection (Fig. 3). Justly receiving its own display area is the altar dedicated to the god Jupiter Dolichenus, discovered in 2009. When I visited Vindolanda on the Hadrian’s Wall Pilgrimage a highlight of my visit was seeing it standing at the site, freshly lifted out of the ground (Fig. 4). The altar was excavated within the temple site on the northern ramparts of the fort, and it has now been conserved by the Vindolanda Trust.

Away from the museum, the summer season of excavations continue unabated. The 2011 programme has again focused on the north-west quadrant of the late Roman stone fort (Fig. 5). The excavators aim to explore some of the earlier levels, so as to better understand them. To date evidence has been found for a total of nine forts: these occupied the present site at different times, and include early wooden structures that pre-dated the construction of Hadrian’s Wall.

A significant announcement was made by Andrew Birley, Director of Excavations, during the Vindolanda session at the Hadrian’s Wall Archaeology Forum. He revealed the possibility of two more forts on raised ground to the north of the present site; this will be further excavated in the future.
The Roman Army Museum

Whilst Vindolanda has been receiving much attention, its sister site should not be forgotten. The Roman Army Museum at Carvoran, on the line of Hadrian’s Wall, has undergone a complete transformation. Like Vindolanda, the dated displays have all been replaced: there are excellent graphic panels outlining all aspects of life for the Roman Army on Hadrian’s Wall; a new presentations of finds; and interesting accounts of travels of Hadrian and the Roman Conquest of Britain (Fig. 6).

However, the highlight of the visit is the award-winning film The Edge of Empire – The Eagle’s Eye, a breathtaking twenty minutes of entertainment in incredible 3D. It focuses on Aquila, a young Roman soldier, as he undertakes his duties as a Roman auxiliary guard along the wall. Sit back and enjoy a piece of Hollywood coming to Hadrian’s Wall!

Tullie House Museum

The Tullie House Museum in Carlisle, one of the North West’s premier attractions, has added a new permanent exhibition to its vast Roman collection. The Roman Frontier Gallery (Fig. 7) was officially opened on 25 June 2011 in the former Millennium Gallery (see http://www.tulliehouse.co.uk/roman-frontier-gallery). At the Hadrian’s Wall Archaeology Forum, held at the Tullie House, Keeper of Archaeology Tim Padley provided a background to the idea behind the Gallery. The Museum aims to help visitors understand the frontier and the areas beyond Hadrian’s Wall, showing how it affected people’s lives over a period of more than four hundred years. A mixture of interactive and static exhibits show visitors what life was like on the frontier, and Carlisle’s role as a frontier town is explored.

The impact of frontiers in Britain and other parts of the Roman Empire is considered and compared to modern boundaries, such as the Berlin Wall and the border between the USA and Mexico. The Museum hopes that by giving the Gallery a broad appeal it will draw in a further fifty thousand visitors each year. The exhibition was three years in the making.

The British Museum collaborated with Tullie House Museum in the creation of the Roman Frontier Gallery, and loaned some of the exhibits now on display. The museums have been working together since 2008, when the famous second-century bronze head of the Emperor Hadrian, found in the River Thames, made its journey to the north. Tullie House Museum also plans to display significant exhibits on loan from other museums. Currently the exceptional Nijmegen helmet can be viewed: it dates from the first century and still retains some of its silver and gilt decoration. To me it demonstrates the wealth and power of the Roman Empire and made for a memorable visit. The helmet is on loan from Museum Het Valkhof in Nijmegen until 24 October.

Conclusion

Every year Hadrian’s Wall surprises us with new discoveries that expand our knowledge of this complex frontier system. The richness of finds that continue to be unearthed at Vindolanda, the added attractions of the site’s new museum, the re-vamped Roman Army Museum and the new Roman Frontier Gallery at Carlisle will ensure that Hadrian’s Wall remains an intriguing part of our understanding of Roman Britain. Each site provides a pleasant, educational and rewarding way to spend time exploring this remarkable Roman frontier.

David Sleep.
Novae and the Valetudinarium of Legio I Italica

As part of the ARA study tour of Bulgaria a full afternoon was devoted to Novae, a legionary fortress situated on the banks of the Danube close to the town of Svishtov. The group was led by Professor Andrew Poulter, with his Bulgarian colleague Professor Dyczek (the Director of the Novae site) on hand to answer questions. This major site has been partially excavated by Bulgarian and Polish universities; work continues. Excavations to date have investigated the defensive perimeter, principia (legion’s headquarters building), thermæ (bath-house), valetudinarium (hospital), part of a probable scannum tribunorum (senior officers’ quarters) and the later Bishops’ complex.

This legionary fort was founded shortly after the Claudian annexation of Thrace (modern day Bulgaria) and formed part of the new line of imperial defence, the River Danube. A wood and earth rampart legionary fortress was constructed and occupied by Legio VIII Augusta c. AD 45. Legion rotation in AD 70 brought Legio I Italica to Novae; this was to be their primary base until the end of antiquity. This legion was raised by Nero in AD 66 with a recruiting ground south of the River Po in northern Italy, the first to be raised in Italy for almost 120 years. Apparently this legion was initially equipped as a Greek-style spear phalanx. It was created with the aim of releasing troops for service in northern Italy, the first to be raised in Italy for almost 120 years. Initially the fortress followed the classic playing card shape, 485 m by 365 m, with a major gate on each of the four sides. During the late 3rd century, following invasion by the Goths, a further 10 hectares were added to the east side in an irregular curve bulging to the south-east. From the early 4th century the fortress gradually changed, as the political and strategic situation on the Danube altered following Hun and Goth invasions. This was particularly pertinent after land grants to the Huns south of the Danube and west of Novae. The settlement of Huns into the empty lands to the west of Novae, Nicopolis and Diocletianopolis would have put Novae in a very strategic position on the north-west corner of the eastern Empire. While Novae was served logistically by the Danube, protecting this northern flank with a reduced garrison thinly spread to the east, whilst ensuring the protection of the local population, would have been a problem for any commander.

To cater for the protection of the local citizenry Novae became a fortified city, with a mixed military and civilian population. In line with Roman Army policy, the field strength of Legio I Italica reduced over successive centuries as the military need changed from heavy infantry to more mobile cavalry forces, particularly in the eastern part of the empire. This inevitably led to the reuse of military buildings within the defended area and the reallocation of space. Associated changes of architecture and building construction frequently robbed older military structures of material.

Vexillations of this legion appear to have been detached eastwards along the River Danube, spreading the defences more thinly as time passed. Tiles stamped ‘LEG I ITAL’ have been found at other military sites east of Novae. During the 5th and 6th century Novae was also a Bishops’ seat. The last known record of the site’s existence was at the beginning of the 7th century, after which the town/fortress seems to have been deserted or abandoned by the authorities.

The fortress is bisected by the modern east/west road, Svishtov to Russe, immediately to the south of the west gate. This road is closely aligned with the fortress’s via principalis (the main lateral road running from gate to gate in front of the principia). The valetudinarium is situated on the western side of the via praetoria (the main road from the primary entrance running up to the principia) almost immediately inside the north gate. It is suggested that the valetudinarium replaced an earlier bath-house which was on unstable foundations. This position for the valetudinarium would have provided easy and rapid access for casualty acceptance from riverine transport.

The valetudinarium (Fig. 1) comprised a large courtyard building of 82 m by 73 m, occupying very nearly a quarter of the western half of the praetentura (the area to the front of the principia). The eastern external wall along the via principalis had a portico along its full length. The main structure was entered through a large doorway in the centre.

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Fig. 1. Floor plan of valetudinarium, with known (black) and assumed (grey) walls. Plan drawn by Nich Hogben based on displays at the site, © Universities of Warsaw and Bulgaria.
of the side facing the via principalis, and comprised a double row of rooms either side of a corridor which runs round the four sides of the courtyard. A porticoed walkway stretched around the inner wall of the building facing into the courtyard. A gravel path led from the entrance to the centre of the courtyard where a shrine to Hygieia and Asclepios was constructed. Small altars found within 10m of this central structure dedicated to the healing deities suggest that this was a sacellum. Inscriptions to other deities were also found in this area.

Of the main structure, the so-called ‘Koenen Threes’ are very evident (Fig. 2). These are groups of three rooms, entered through a single door; they comprise a small antechamber facing the entrance door with a larger room either side, each with entrance through the common vestibule. The inner corridor of the valetudinarium provided access to these suites of rooms on both the left and right hand sides of the corridor. Twelve suites were clearly visible on the outer side of the central corridor and eight on the inner side. This design of rooms was first noticed and reported by Professor Koenen in 1904.

The assumption is that these groups of three rooms were in effect the hospital wards, two cubicles to a ward with a storage or baggage facility between. Professor Dyczek estimated that each cubicle was likely to have been capable of taking five patients, giving a hospital capacity of about 220 sick men. This equates to about 4.5% of a legion at full strength of 5,000 men and is probably not dissimilar to the figures expected today for a mixed unit of similar strength (I welcome corrections to this hypothesis). No military person likes being separated from his or, today, her kit – particularly if there is a charge to be accrued for lost items. Many items of kit today get personalised, and it is feasible that this is not a new habit; thus the idea of kit storage whilst hospitalised is akin to modern practice. Items or fragments of armour and other military impedimenta have been found in these rooms and in the central store areas, as well as items of fine and course tableware, amphora sherds and animal bones. Peg holes in the store room walls suggest that pegs supported shelving in these rooms. Clay and bronze lamp fragments and close-stacking mess tin handles indicate soldiers living, eating and storing their kit in these areas. The floors are of fine compacted and trampled sand. Other rooms not in the Koenen configuration have yielded medical instruments.

The remains of the building’s walls are of sufficient height to show that they were covered internally in rose and white plaster, and painted purple at some stage. Window mouldings indicate that the larger ward-type rooms had good light, and the corridor is assumed to have been lit by small clerestory windows in the upper structure of the corridor. In the north-west corner of the structure is the latrine, partly reconstructed for the visual benefit of modern visitors.

Buildings frequently have a change of function over time or are simply not understood fully at initial assessment (which can influence thinking for prolonged periods). New criteria for classification of structure use can call into question the original process and often suggests the requirement for further study. I am grateful that Dr Patricia Baker has kindly provided her thoughts on this on page 20.

A reduction in the size of garrisons, coupled with the introduction of a defended city concept, made some military buildings redundant or meant that their full capacity was not needed; this seems to have been the case for part of the hospital. In the south-west corner of the valetudinarium a courtyard town house was constructed in the late 3rd century. This fine ‘des res’ was built of reused military stone, enriched with some finely carved column bases and capitals from the courtyard. This courtyard townhouse had porticoed entrances on two sides of the courtyard, domestic quarters grouped together, and a service range to the east. It also had a bath suite with a hypocaust and plunge pools. Clearly this was a property of some importance.

**Sources**

On site, from the Novae fortress display and information boards, including the valetudinarium plan and the town house schematic (© Universities of Warsaw and Bulgaria).


*John Bithell.*

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*Fig. 2. South range of the Valetudinarium at Novae, showing a series of ‘Koenen Threes’. © John Bithell.*

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Panoramic view of the Valetudinarium at Novae. *Photo: © John Bithell.*
Re-evaluating the identification of Roman military hospitals

It has recently been questioned whether the Roman military valetudinarium or hospital was correctly identified by Koenen at the beginning of the 20th century (Baker 2004: 83–114). There is no denying the fact that something called a valetudinarium existed, which is evinced by inscriptions and scant references in ancient literature. However, a thorough examination of the inscriptions, literature and archaeological remains of structures identified as hospitals in terms of their location, layout and artefacts has indicated that the buildings might have served other or multiple functions. It was also found that descriptions of Roman hospitals were based on modern perceptions of the design and function of hospitals that are seemingly inconsistent with earlier perceptions of the roles hospitals played.

There are inscriptions that refer to the optio valetudinarii (person in charge of the hospital) and valetudinaria; yet, none have been found in situ. It is, therefore, impossible to link these to a particular structure. The references to these buildings in the extant ancient literature provides little detail of the structures, their organisation or the treatments available in them. According to Hyginus’ description of marching camps (Liber de Munitionibus Castrorum, 4), the valetudinarium was to be constructed beyond the praetorium and 70 Roman feet away from the veterinarium and the fabrica so that the hospital could be quiet. Comparisons of so-called hospital buildings in both legionary and auxiliary fortifications demonstrate that they were not always located in the area that Hyginus suggests.

Archaeologically, the first Roman military valetudinarium identified was that at the legionary fortress of Neuss, located on the lower Rhine. Koenen (1904: 180–2) labelled the building as a valetudinarium because it contained a room with ten probes; whilst four scalpels were found in other rooms of the structure. Besides the instruments, the layout – a building with a number of small rooms, or wards, divided by small hallways – was similar to the plan of German civilian and military hospitals at the time, and this would have influenced his expectations of how a hospital should be arranged. From this classification similar structures in other fortifications were said to be hospitals, even when no medical tools or inscriptions were associated with them.

Thus, a re-evaluation of the archaeological remains of these buildings was deemed necessary. Comparisons of the so-called hospitals have shown that the general layouts may be similar, but they vary in their sizes and the details of their layout. Many were only partially excavated, so their exact plans are based on speculation. Objects found in some so-called hospitals suggest the building, or part of it, was used as a workshop rather than a healing structure: most have no recorded medical artefacts, whilst other buildings located in their fortifications do.

A comparative examination of the distribution of medical tools from fortifications that yielded these artefacts also showed that medical objects were found in numerous structures, including baths, barracks and the headquarters building. Thus, from the evidence available, it is difficult to state whether the identification of buildings as valetudinaria is correct.

Bibliography


Patricia Baker, University of Kent.

Mithras in Scotland: spectacular new altars unveiled

The two Roman altars discovered on the site of a cricket pavilion in Lewisleave Park, Musselburgh, in Scotland in March 2010 have recently been shown to the press. The find was reported in issue 24 of ARA News (pp20–21). The two altars were found face down and laid side by side in a large pit in the position that they were buried in Roman times.

Both had suffered structural damage and were in a delicate condition, being described as ‘brittle’. At the time only the backs and sides could be viewed but they were both lifted with great care and taken to dry out in a laboratory. This March it was deemed safe to turn them over and, although still coated in mud, the result was spectacular. It immediately became clear that these were perhaps the most important Roman finds to be made in Scotland for a century – both for the quality of their execution and for the importance of their inscriptions.

The first, now known as the Mithras altar, has a kithara or concert lyre and its plectrum, accompanied by a sacrificial jug on one of its sides (Fig. 1). The inclusion in the composition of the plectrum, (seen on many Orpheus mosaics in the Empire) is exceptional in Britain. The other side features a sacrificial patera and a griffon resting on his haunches, together with possibly another object still caked in mud. Both the kithara, plectrum and griffon are attributes of Apollo who as the driver of the sun chariot in the guise of the Greek Helios-Apollo has close associations with the Roman sun god Sol, the companion of Mithras. There is a possibility that the animal currently described as a griffon is in fact a depiction of Pegasus, who also had associations with Apollo/Sol. One is reminded of the frieze from the Temple of Dolichenus at Corstopitum (Corbridge), where Sol wearing a radiant crown rides him across the skies. Cleaning should clear up this speculation.

The altar has an elegantly decorated and pedimented top, set between two small bolsters or pulvinari. This is placed above a row of elliptically carved leaves that themselves crown a dentilated zone of leaves set above a band of
ropework. Without doubt this is one of the finest altars ever found in Britain. Its front bears an inscription which reads DAEO INVICTO MY C CAS FLA and translates as “To the Glory of the Invincible Mythras, Caius Cassius Flavius. This inscription is the first reference to Mithras ever discovered in Scotland and thus the most northerly ever found in the country.

The second altar is even more exciting. It has a central circular focus in its top, where the altar fire or offerings would have been made, whilst the side panels of the block are carved with wreaths composed of bay leaves (also sacred to Apollo) and roses. The tying ribbons or lemnisci of these are depicted with their ends shaped into tails, a classical feature often ignored in provincial art. The front face is topped by a decorative frieze of busts of the Four Seasons crowned with the attributes of their calling: Spring flowers, Summer crops, Autumn grapes and a Winter shawl. Below these four female busts is a dedicatory inscription SOL C(AIUS) CAS(SIUS) FLA(VIUS) > ‘To Sol, Caius Cassius Flavius, Centurion’ illustrating that both altars were the gift of the same man.

What is particularly exciting about this section of the stone is that it retains a considerable amount of the red paint with which it was originally adorned. Much ancient sculpture was originally brightly coloured but very few traces survive, particularly in Britain’s climate. It is also quite possible that some of the panels would have been gessoed (plaster coated) originally as they are quite roughly finished and it was common for sculptors to apply colour onto such a surface from the earliest times.

Below this inscription is the real treasure of the piece, a beautifully sculpted face of the sun god Sol. The Unconquerable Sun (Sol Invictus) was an integral part of Mithraism. Prayers were addressed to the Sun three times a day and Sunday was especially sacred. Initiates replicated the feast shared by Mithras and Sol. The latter’s head is surrounded by a nimbus or halo that is decorated by solar rays that are pierced through the stone. Both of the god’s eyes and his mouth are similarly opened. The attribute of a chariot whip might also be expected, but some of the lower part of the stone is still covered by mud. The sides of the altar appear to have been similarly damaged perhaps by a violent hammer blow. The pierced sun rays weakened the stone and this section has thus suffered the greatest damage, but not to an extent that the image has been irreparably defaced.

When it was first discovered, it was evident that the stone had a strange rectangular niche cut into its back. The reason for this has now become clear. It occupied the area behind the face of the god and it was the place where candles or lamps were placed so that the light would shine through the piercings in the front of the altar like an elaborate pumpkin lantern. The same feature is found in an altar (now in the Great North Museum at Newcastle) that was discovered in the Mithraeum at Carrawburgh on Hadrian’s Wall. This however pales to insignificance when compared with this new example. The Seasons were closely linked to Sol Invictus in iconography as he could be seen to be the reason for their existence. On mosaic floors they often occupy the spandrels revolving around a central panel occupied by Sol.

The Musselburgh altars would not be out of place in the most civilised towns of Britannia and are the work of a first rate provincial sculptor; indeed they exceed in style and execution much that does survive in the south of the Province. It will be extremely interesting to learn the origin of the stone in which they are sculpted and whether they are carved by a sculptor in a local stone or had been imported to the site from elsewhere. In any event they are notable new treasures of Roman Britain.

The project to lift, examine and conserve the altars is being carried out by AOC Archaeology Group (www.aocarchaeology.com/) and funded by East Lothian Council Archaeology Service (www.eastlothian.gov.uk/archaeology).

Anthony Beeson.

The Scotsman – 17. 3. 2011
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-12771243
ARCHEOLOGICAL ROUND-UP

ROME'S "TUNNEL OF WONDERS" YIELDS MORE TREASURES

Excavations in a tunnel under the 2nd century AD Baths of Trajan on the southern slopes of Rome's Oppian Hill have unearthed a section from an extensive wall mosaic featuring an image of the god Apollo. The newly discovered area of mosaic is 33 feet wide and at least 6 feet high. A previous excavation in 1998 found the first 18 feet of it. This depicted a male figure, identified as a philosopher and a female figure believed (but with little evidence) to be a Muse. These, like the newly discovered figures, stand before an elaborately columned and niched portico reminiscent of a theatre's scena frons or a palace façade. Columns are decorated with tendrils and leaves alluding to those fantastical examples that appear on the wall paintings of the villa of Oplontis. It is suspected that the figures may occupy only the top register of a wall that may stretch as much as 30 feet down.

The so-called Tunnel of Wonders predates the construction of the baths in AD 109, but was built after the nearby Domus Aurea (Nero's Golden House) that was completed in AD 64. This firmly dates the mosaic to some time within that 45 year span. At the moment there seems to be confusion over whether the Tunnel was a cryptoporicus (basement walkway), used as a subterranean support for a large building, or part of an elaborate fountain court. Certainly in its first stage the latter seems most likely because of the high quality of the mosaic work and for the fact that the wall it decorates runs parallel with the nymphaeum (fountain).

The tunnel has so far revealed some wonderful art treasures, including a unique fresco and several stunning mosaics of the same period. In February 1998 the Painted City fresco was discovered; it shows a real or idealised city bordering a river and painted from a bird's eye perspective. Many saw the city fresco as a view of first-century Rome itself. May 1998 saw the above-mentioned Philosopher and Muse mosaic brought to light. In November 2004 another wall mosaic showing a vintage festival and the treading of grapes was unveiled. The following month brought to light a frescoed ceiling.

The new discovery was announced at a press conference that was both informative and a plea for more funds to continue the work. 200,000 euros are needed to continue the excavation and to make the gallery accessible to the public for guided tours by next October. Then a further 480,000 euros is needed to ensure that the entire cryptoporicus area is fully explored and stabilized.

The Mosaic is being commonly, but fancifully, called 'Apollo and the Muses' but at the moment the choice of characters featured seems random and might just as well be a mosaic representation of an actual scena frons and its statuary. If one may judge by the photographs so far released, apart from the philosopher and the woman there is a centaur, another bare-chested male, and of course the figure identified as Apollo. He is a sensitively modelled figure executed in various shades of bronze coloured tesserae. He carries a lyre but it is held at an angle to the viewer and not shown square-on as is often the case in mosaic. It will be of great interest to see what further work on the mosaic reveals and if a new identification of its subject matter can be found.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14356604
http://www.thehistoryblog.com/archives/12157
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/scienceotech/article-200423/Archaeologists-unearth-2-000-year-old-mosaic-depicting-Greek-god-Apollo-surrounded-muses.html

YORK'S STATION BATHS ARE FOUND AGAIN

The remains of a large bathing complex that served the civilian population of Roman York have been rediscovered in the north-western part of the Colonia during excavations preceding the construction of the new council headquarters building. Three phases of buildings, dating from the late 2nd to early 3rd century AD, have been found in good condition on land just inside the city walls, where York's first railway station was erected. Parts were originally found during this construction in 1839; more was revealed a century later with the building of a bomb shelter. It is the first time that a proper archaeological excavation has been possible on the site. On-Site Archaeology, who conducted the excavation, claim that the discovery is very significant and will give new clues as to the layout of the civilian town. They say that the remains are far less damaged by the construction of the station than they would have imagined. One of the buildings had an apsidal end that is believed to be part of a caldarium. Whether this is the same caldarium found previously has not been stated. That apse was 9m wide and at least 10.5m in length and indicates the importance of the structure. It is hoped that finds from the excavation will be exhibited in the new headquarters building when it opens late in 2012.

http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/9095702.Roman_baths_found_on_site_of_new_councilHQ/
Excavations conducted prior to the building of Musselburgh’s new primary care centre have uncovered the ditch and ramparts of a fort together with a cemetery with about a dozen bodies dating back to the Roman era. Some of the skeletons had had their heads removed after death, a strange, presumably religious, procedure not previously discovered in Scotland but found occasionally in cemeteries in Roman Britain. This discovery sheds more light on the civilian settlement around the fort at Inveresk Village. The project manager for the excavation (Bruce Glendinning of CFA Archaeology) has stressed the importance of the decapitated skeletons.

"Some of the skeletons have been buried with their heads chopped off, for some unknown reason. This appears to have happened after they died, in some sort of burial ritual. We know of decapitated Romans found in York – thought to have been gladiators – but there have been none found in Scotland that we know of."

All of the skeletons are believed to have been male and they are currently being studied to confirm their age and possible origins. The position of the cemetery suggests that there may be a road leading from the fort down to the River Esk towards Musselburgh’s ‘Roman bridge’ that is actually much later in construction. Its position may, however, echo the area where the Romans crossed the river. Mr Glendinning said "At the moment there is no evidence of a Roman road, but this may provide some indication that there was a road in this general location." The skeletons are believed to date from around AD 140.

Completed in AD 128, the Pantheon’s giant hemispherical dome is punctured by a 30ft-wide circular hole known as the ‘oculus’ (Fig. 1) that provides the building with its only source of daylight. Rainfall is drained away through piercings in the marble floor. During the winter months the beam illuminates only the vaulted dome, the coffers of which would have glistened with a firmament of gilt bronze ornaments, but at noon on the equinoxes it reaches lower in the building. The precise calculations made in the positioning and construction of the Pantheon mean that the size and shape of the beam perfectly matches, down to the last inch, a semicircular stone arch above the doorway and on 21st April the beam fully illuminates the entrance at midday when it strikes a metal grill above the entrance and bathes the gnomon of the colonnaded portico with sunlight through the entrance.

If the emperor arrived at this moment or made an appearance from within, he would have been gilded by the sun’s rays and divinely welcomed as he entered or left the building on these auspicious occasions. This dramatic display, the invitation of the sun to enter the temple, would have been seen by the populace as elevating an emperor into the divine and divinely welcomed as he entered or left the building on these auspicious occasions. This dramatic display, the invitation of the sun to enter the temple, would have been seen by the populace as elevating an emperor into the divine and as a cosmological confirmation of his divine power as he entered or left the building, which was used as an audience hall as well as a temple.

Throughout Rome’s long history the sun (Sol) had a special significance for the Romans. Emperors wore, and were depicted on coinage wearing the radiate crown of sun rays, and tradition says that Nero was depicted as the Greek sun god Helios in a 33m statue called the Colossus by Zenodorus, which gave its name to the Colosseum where its pedestal still stands after Hadrian had its face altered to Sol Invictus and the statue moved (with the help of twenty-four elephants) from the vestibule of the Domus Aurea to make way for his Temple of Venus and Rome. Some dispute that Nero had intended the reference to the sun and claim that Vespasian actually had it completed and had the rays attached to the head.

Magli and Hannah have been working on their theory since 2009 but have recently published it in the journal *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*. They believe that their research had shown that the Pantheon was strongly connected to the yearly solar cycle, and that at least one of its main functions was to associate the sun with the power of Rome and to reinforce the emperor’s divine right to rule. Professor Magli says “The role of the Pantheon is poorly understood and its function still remains uncertain, although we believe the sun has a significant role in the building. We have drawn our conclusions by studying other Roman monuments in the city including the Domus Aurea or as it is also known the Emperor Nero’s Golden Palace which also had a similar domed roof. The sun and time were both linked architecturally in the ancient Roman period and they were used as a form of cosmological signpost for them. By bathing the emperor in sunlight this would have a dramatic effect on him and raise him to the status of a god.”

The emperor would have been illuminated as if by film studio lights, a spectacular piece of stagework, so long as it was a sunny day. The Romans believed the relationship between the emperor and the heavens was at its closest during the equinoxes. “It would have been a glorification of the power of the emperor, and of Rome itself.”

![Photo: © Anthony Beeson.](http://www.eastlothiannews.co.uk/news/local-headlines/roman_skulls_find_is_a_first_for_scotland_1_316476)

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**THE PANTHEON AS DRAMATIC ART: A NEW THEORY**

The astonishing Pantheon in Rome, Hadrian’s spectacular temple to the Olympians, has always excited by its design and breathtaking construction, but now Giulio Magli, a historian of ancient architecture from Milan Polytechnic and Robert Hannah, a classics scholar from the University of Otago in New Zealand, have announced a new and intriguing theory. They postulate that the building was designed to use the rays of the sun as a form of sundial and to give the emperor a divine solar blessing at its entrance at midday, three times a year on the March and September equinoxes and on 21st April when Romans celebrated the founding of the city.

Excavations conducted prior to the building of Musselburgh’s new primary care centre have uncovered the ditch and ramparts of a fort together with a cemetery with about a dozen bodies dating back to the Roman era. Some of the skeletons had had their heads removed after death, a strange, presumably religious, procedure not previously discovered in Scotland but found occasionally in cemeteries in Roman Britain. This discovery sheds more light on the civilian settlement around the fort at Inveresk Village. The project manager for the excavation (Bruce Glendinning of CFA Archaeology) has stressed the importance of the decapitated skeletons.

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All of the skeletons are believed to have been male and they are currently being studied to confirm their age and possible origins. The position of the cemetery suggests that there may be a road leading from the fort down to the River Esk towards Musselburgh’s ‘Roman bridge’ that is actually much later in construction. Its position may, however, echo the area where the Romans crossed the river. Mr Glendinning said "At the moment there is no evidence of a Roman road, but this may provide some indication that there was a road in this general location." The skeletons are believed to date from around AD 140.

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Latin epigraphy: How to read and understand Roman inscriptions, Part I

This is Part I of a two-part article on how to read Latin inscriptions. In this part, I discuss the variety of inscriptions that exist and their historic value, and I provide some background information that can help when reading and interpreting inscriptions. In Part II, there will be practical advice on how to read inscriptions, illustrated by specific examples.

Introduction

What do an electioneering slogan painted on a wall in Pompeii, a mosaic warning visitors to ‘Beware of the dog’, an official stamp on a lead water pipe, a letter of discharge to a soldier on a bronze tablet and a grand imperial dedication on a marble monument have in common?

The answer is that they are the subject of the field of study known as ‘epigraphy’ and that they are generally categorised as Latin ‘inscriptions’. Epigraphy is the oldest and most broad-ranging of several disciplines concerned with the written remains from the ancient world. The other disciplines are numismatics, examining coins and the writing on them; palaeography, the study of the handwriting found in manuscript books and in documents written on soft surfaces such as papyrus, parchment and paper; and papyrology, which focuses on the texts written on papyrus in antiquity, studying both their physical aspect and their contents. Epigraphy basically covers all the rest, i.e. any forms of writing found on any kind of support.

In practice, this means writing found on durable, usually hard materials, the most common being stone and metal. Other materials include clay and terracotta, plaster (e.g. walls), bone and ivory, glass, gems and wood (either directly on the surface or on ‘wax tablets’, i.e. wooden tablets coated with wax that could be erased and reused, the note books of the pre-paper age). The shape of the surface can vary: from a flat stone slab or metal plaque, to a cylindrical water pipe, a curved pottery cup or vase, or the irregularities of a piece of jewellery or an ornate lamp.

Epigraphy does not just study the physical writing and appearance of inscriptions, it also aims to decipher and interpret their contents. For a start, inscriptions contain the oldest extant examples of the Latin alphabet and of the Latin language itself, which are precious (and challenging!) to linguistic and literary specialists.

To historians of the ancient world, inscriptions provide information on a host of subjects on which the ancient literary authors are silent or incomplete. Most of what we know of the daily life of the Romans comes from archaeological remains and the contents of inscriptions. Many details of narrative history, including dates, lists of officials such as consuls, titles of emperors, political careers of prominent men, peace treaties, laws, regulations, etc. are only known to us through inscriptions.

Finally, for all of us, one of the most fascinating aspects of inscriptions is the insight it gives us into individual people’s lives: how old they were when they died, what they had done in life, who their loved ones and associates were, what things good or bad had happened to them, what their religious beliefs were, where they lived, what sort of interests they had.

The mere act of making a classification of inscriptions shows how varied they were, and what a precious historical source they are. The list that follows is drawn from the book by Sandys (p59; see bibliography at the end of this article), where one can find further details. First, there are “inscriptions proper… characters inscribed on monuments or other objects to denote their purpose, the essential point in each case being the name of an individual” associated with the object: epitaphs on tombs, sarcophagi or funerary altars; dedicatory inscriptions on vases, altars or temples, and on votive tablets or statues consecrated to gods; honorary inscriptions such as elogia (praises) usually of distinguished statesmen and generals, or simply information of the cursus honorum (public offices) held by a Roman. Other “inscriptions proper” include those found on public works (any kind of public buildings such as temples, theatres, aqueducts, milestones, etc.).

They are also found on smaller, portable objects, articles used in public and private life: a) articles of metal, such as: weights and measures; small tickets or tokens, counters, disks; armour and missiles; vessels, jewellery etc. of gold, silver or bronze; lead water pipes; stamps and seals; b) products of mines and quarries (blocks of marble, pigs of lead); c) tiles (e.g. names of consuls, name of a military unit, decorative trademarks); d) vessels of clay: including lamps, jars of various sizes, with the name of the maker, merchant or owner.

The second main category, according to Sandys, is documents (‘acta, instrumenta, tabulae’), whether public or private, which tend to be incised on tablets of stone or metal. They include: treaties; laws; decrees of the Senate and of the colonies, municipalities and various associations; decrees of magistrates and emperors, including edicts, judicial decisions and military diplomas to veterans; consular diplomas to consuls, name of a military unit, decorative trademarks; sacred and public documents on public and religious matters, including calendars and the fasti consulares (lists of consuls and other senior magistrates) covering more than 700 years until the Augustan era.

As well as these public acta, there are private documents: wills; business transactions; deeds; and curse tablets. Finally, there are graffiti on walls, of which 3,500 were found on walls of Pompeii, with such diverse topics as prices of provisions, names of praetorian guards, or literary quotations.

The British Museum has a nice selection of various inscriptions, mainly in the rooms dedicated to Greek and Roman history, to Roman Britain and in the Classical inscriptions gallery. There are a few examples on the next page to illustrate the variety of types of inscriptions listed above.

The challenges of reading Latin inscriptions

Latin inscriptions pose numerous challenges to whomever wishes to read and interpret them. For a start, damage and erosion means that actual legibility might be problematic. Assuming that one does manage to make out the letters and symbols, the reader then has to understand what they say. This will entail two sets of skills: linguistic ability (i.e. knowledge of Latin) and knowing how to expand the numerous abbreviations into recognisable words that make sense in the context. In turn, this often requires historical knowledge of the specific subject matter of the inscription, so that specialist vocabulary or arcane references make sense. Once the
inscription has been transcribed, and educated guesses made for any missing letters or words, the reader then needs to attempt to date the inscription, place it in its historical context, and interpret it so that the inscription can be added to our store of historical evidence. Some inscriptions, especially those of a formulaic nature, can be interpreted fairly easily; others remain a mystery and the subject of speculation and debate.

However, you do not need to be a specialist historian or even a Latinist in order to have a go at reading inscriptions. In Britain in particular, the vast majority of inscriptions fall into categories linked with the military occupation of the country and its civilian administration, both fields where formulaic language was used. Even the more personal, individual inscriptions, such as epitaphs for the dead or religious votive dedications to the gods, tend to follow a standard pattern.

Inscriptions carved on stone, in fairly neat capital letters, are accessible to most people, with a bit of practice. In the following sections, I will give some background information on the areas that tend to confuse the novice – Roman names, abbreviations, and numbers and dating systems – and explain how scholars try to date inscriptions.
Roman naming system

By the beginning of the Republican period, Roman male citizens had three names. There was a first name (praenomen), which was drawn from a choice of only 17 names in all in classical times, of which only half were commonly used. Each praenomen had its standard abbreviation, usually of one letter, e.g. M for Marcus or Q for Quintus (note C for Gaius, dating from early days when the sound ‘g’ was written with the letter shape C). This was followed by a family name (nomen) which was shared by all members of the same family or clan, e.g. Julius, Claudius or Tullius. Finally, there was the cognomen, the most personal of the names; it could be a

or clan, e.g. Julius, Claudius or Tullius. Finally, there was the cognomen, the most personal of the names; it could be a nickname which could be transmitted down the line. Thus the cognomen, ‘Magnus’, ‘the Great’. The praenomen started falling out of use in the 2nd century AD, then the family name

of an ancestor’s nose, whereas Pompey was granted the ‘(chickpea) probably referring to the shape

Cicero, with ‘famous late-Republican orator was known as Marcus Tullius

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or clan, e.g. Julius, Claudius or Tullius. Finally, there was the cognomen, ‘Magnus’, ‘the Great’. The praenomen started falling out of use in the 2nd century AD, then the family name gradually got dropped as well, and as Christianity gained ground, most individuals just had one name (the ‘Christian name’). It was only in the late Middle Ages that the use of a hereditary family name (our ‘surname’) started reappearing in Western Europe.

Freeborn women often only had one name, commonly a feminised version of their father’s family name or surname. Thus Cicero’s daughter was Tullia. Their names were always associated with their birth family, usually their father, sometimes other ancestors, not with their husband.

Slaves had one name, often reflecting their foreign origins. If freed, they would take on the first name and family name of their former master, and tack on their own name as the cognomen. Thus Cicero’s secretary and freedman had as his full name Marcus Tullius Tiro. Inscriptions with freedmen’s names usually contain the letter ‘L’, standing for ‘libertas’ (freedman).

This is a vastly simplified summary. Naming habits varied throughout the centuries of Roman history, and inscriptions are our main source for this. Thus we can use our knowledge of trends in naming patterns when attempting to date inscriptions; conversely, inscriptions help us identify such trends in the first place.

Abbreviations

Latin inscriptions are heavily abbreviated, but it need not necessarily have been so. There are many fewer abbreviations in Greek inscriptions. Scholars can only conjecture as to why the Romans used abbreviations so much. Did it start with the habit of shortening the praenomen in the tripartite naming system? Was it to save space in the numerous ‘fasti’, the lists of consuls and of triumphant generals, which were often written in narrow columns? Space saving does appear to have been a consideration, as abbreviations are often accompanied by ligatures, where two or more letters are linked together, or small or tall letters are squeezed together.

Many of the most common abbreviations correspond to words that come up time and again in certain types of inscriptions, in particular men’s first names, official titles, standard phrases (such as the equivalent of ‘RIP’ on tombstones) and specialist vocabulary (e.g. military information). Thus a reader who studies inscriptions will soon acquire a basic understanding of the most common abbreviations. Even without being an expert Latinist, such a reader can learn that ‘leg’ stands for ‘legion’, or ‘pont max’ for ‘pontifex maximus’ (chief priest), even if he is not sure how to inflect the word ending! However, there must be sufficient linguistic understanding, or at least familiarity with the standard wording to be found in a given type of inscription, for the reader to interpret the abbreviation correctly, in cases where the same letter (or combination of letters) stands for more than one abbreviated word. For example, ‘leg’ can mean both ‘legion’ and ‘legate’; ‘d’ can represent the name Decimus, a denarius (a coin), or the words ‘dominus’ (master), ‘dat’ (he gives) or ‘domo’ (from the town of). Only the context will enable one to work out the correct interpretation.

Some commonly used phrases are drastically abbreviated to their first letters: most people know of ‘SPQR’ (senatus populusque romanus), the Senate and People of Rome. Religious dedications very often end with the expression ‘v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)’; ‘willingly and deservedly fulfilled [his/her] vow’, and tombstones usually start with ‘DM’ for ‘dis manibus’: ‘to the departed spirits’.

Numbers and dates

Another challenge is to read numbers correctly. Fortunately, the Roman system of numbers using letters is still used today, so most of us are familiar with I for one, V for five, X for ten, etc. However, we are less familiar with the ways that Romans showed very large numbers, or with the variants used for some smaller numbers (e.g. IIII for IV, VIIII for IX). In antiquity, ‘M’ was not used as the symbol for 1000 (though, coincidentally, M can stand for ‘mille/milia’, the word for ‘thousand(s)’), but another symbol that looks more like circle divided in half by a vertical line, like Ø, or a figure like an 8 on its side, like ≈. It is sometimes transcribed as ‘(j)’, but one should bear in mind that there are many variants on this basic shape. In some periods, numbers were written with a bar over them to distinguish them from normal letter combinations; however the bar might also be a way of multiplying a number by a thousand! Linked to this, we also need to familiarise ourselves with the abbreviations for units of currency (the most common was HS for sesterces) or other forms of measurement. (See the books in the bibliography for detailed explanations.)

Numbers can also be found in dating clauses. Our year and months are based on the Roman calendar, but Romans did not use the seven days of the week as we do, nor did they number days of the month from one to 30 or 31. Instead there were three particular days each month which served as the fixed dates from which other days were calculated. The Kalends (Kalendae, in the plural) was the name of the first of the month (from where we get ‘calendar’). The Nones (Nonae) fell on the 5th day of the month, except in March, May, July and October when they fell on the 7th. Their name means ‘the ninth’, as they were the 9th day (in the Roman way of counting) before the Ides, the last of the fixed dates. The Ides (Idus, feminine plural) fell on the 13th of the month (or the 15th in March, May, July and October). Thus the famous Ides of March would be, in modern parlance, the 15th of March. Days in between these three points were calculated as a number of days (with the first and the last day included in the number) before the date. So the 13th of March would be called ‘the 3rd day before the Ides of March’ (we would call it the 2nd before the Ides), counting the 13th, 14th and 15th as the ‘three days’: in Latin, that gives ‘ante diem III’, heavily abbreviated of course, so the entire date would look like ‘a. d. III Id. Mar.’ The ‘day just before’ the dating day is ‘pridie’, so the 14th of March would be ‘pr. Id. Mar.’
Establishing the age of an inscription

This is very tricky if there is no specific date indicated on the inscription. Even if there is, the modern reader has to convert the year to our current Christian system (AD: Anno Domini, the Year of our Lord), which was only invented by Christians in late antiquity and only came into general use during the Middle Ages. One dating system sometimes used by the Romans was to count the years from the foundation of Rome (ab urbe condita – written AUC), calculated by a later Christian author. This is very tricky if there is no specific date indicated on the inscription.

Establishing the age of an inscription carefully measured letter heights (they get smaller the lower column, a masterpiece of beautifully balanced letter shapes, monumental capitals is the inscription at the foot of Trajan’s column, a masterpiece of beautifully balanced letter shapes, carefully measured letter heights (they get smaller the lower down the line is, to give the optical illusion to the beholder who stands below the inscription that all the lines are of the same size), impeccably planned layout and well executed carving.

In parallel with the splendid monumental capitals, most documents (acta) were written in a more compressed form of capitals, still with serifs, called actusaria or ‘rustic’ capitals. We encounter this script mostly in documents inscribed on metal, although it also exists on stone. It was also the main script used for copying manuscript books.

Properly executed capitals were obviously expensive to design and inscribe, so many cheaper inscriptions end up with simpler, often sans-serif, capitals. As the Roman empire ran into difficulties in its final centuries, the quality of inscription carving, like so many other art forms, deteriorated, despite an attempt at revival in the 4th century. Whilst calligraphy in manuscript books survived into the Dark Ages, the art of fine public inscriptions did not.

We should not forget that most ordinary Romans would not have written in capitals much if at all – this would have been the domain of professional scribes and stone carvers – but in a ‘cursive’ (i.e. running or flowing) script. Personal letters, some curse tablets, notes on wax tablets, accounts, some private documents, and most graffiti, were written in a script that even Romans mocked as being illegible, comparable to marks scratched by a chicken! During the early centuries of the empire, people used ‘old Roman cursive’, a script with disjointed letter strokes such as those found in the Vindolanda tablets near Hadrian’s Wall (whose excellent website has more details for those who are interested). In the later centuries, ‘new Roman cursive’ was used, a loopy joined up writing which was ultimately the ancestor of the script we use nowadays. We see examples of these cursive in some informal inscriptions, and they even creep into the odd formal stone carved inscription. This may be because the text of an inscription was probably drafted in cursive handwriting, and the person transcribing it into capitals for the final inscription may occasionally have accidentally copied the cursive letter forms.

One big difference between Roman writing and our own is that the Romans did not use word separation; all letters were run together like this: ‘allletterswereruntogetherlikethis’. However in inscriptions, there was often an aid to the reader: interpuncts, little dots between each word, often placed half way up next to the last letter. In some larger stone inscriptions, this dot might be embellished to become shaped like an ivy leaf.

The lettering of inscriptions and special symbols

The actual writing on inscriptions can vary from beautifully crafted capitals carefully chiselled by a master carver to rough scratches made by a semi-literate person. Palaeographers and epigraphers distinguish several main types of lettering in the Roman period, used both in books and in inscriptions. The highest grade is ‘monumental’ capitals, also called ‘square’ capitals. These are easy for us to read, as they correspond to the capital letters still used in upper case today, because Renaissance Italian printers inspired themselves directly from the Roman capitals. The widest letters, e.g. M or O, can be visualised as fitting into a square. The tops and bottoms of the letters have serifs, slight projections that finish off the strokes, still found in fonts such as Times New Roman today (as opposed to ‘sans-serif’ fonts such as Arial where the letter I just appears as a plain straight line). The reason for this is that around the Augustan time the lettering for inscriptions was first painted with a brush before being carved, and a serif is fairly inevitable when starting and finishing a stroke with a pen or a brush filled with ink. The most admirable example of monumental capitals is the inscription at the foot of Trajan’s column, a masterpiece of beautifully balanced letter shapes, carefully measured letter heights (they get smaller the lower
The letters in stone inscriptions were sometimes coloured in with red paint to make them stand out more; the same could be done to bronze inscriptions, this time with white lead. Some inscriptions on stone had metal letters affixed onto the background, for which sometimes only the fixing holes survive to give us clues as to the original letters.

Some more examples of inscriptions, with commentary on their appearance and historical context

The Museo delle Terme (in Diocletian’s Baths) in Rome has recently been modernised and is a wonderful place in which to discover the importance of inscriptions and all the social history and private life stories that they reveal to us. Information boards and captions are in English as well as Italian, and the artefacts are beautifully displayed and explained. The following pictures illustrate the wide range of this fascinating collection, in both physical characteristics and historical content.

Tacitus monument (Fig. 8): a nice example of large monumental (or ‘square’) capitals, with clearly defined serifs and contrasting thick and thin strokes. Note the small triangular interpuncts (dots) separating the words. The archaeological and historical context, together with modern experts’ knowledge of typical official careers, has enabled a reconstruction of the text from fragments, of which this is the largest (the entire inscription was four metres wide).

Note the editorial conventions: square brackets surround reconstructed missing text, and dashes indicate that it is uncertain how many letters are missing. If dots had been used instead, each dot would represent a missing letter. Round brackets surround the letters omitted in an abbreviation and reinstated by the modern editor.

[Tacit]us c[---]: the name Tacitus
[decem]viro stilit[i]bus iudicandis]: a title of office
[quaestor]ri Aug(usti) tribu[no plebis]: two more titles of office.

Bronze table of the Ligures Baebiani (Fig. 9): this sort of official document would be posted on the walls of public places for the people to see. It is written in the slightly more informal script, with narrower capitals, typical of official documents (acta), hence the name scriptura actuaria (also known as rustic capitals). There would have been many documents written on bronze, but most have been melted down. Published in CIL IX 1455 (see bibliography) and elsewhere.

Curse tablet (Fig. 10): another metal used was lead, in particular for curse tablets on which aggrieved persons asked some divinity to punish whomever had harmed them, for example a rival in love. These tablets would be written on by ordinary people; their spelling and grammatical idiosyncrasies give us an insight into standards of education and of spoken Latin which we do not get from literary texts. Once the curse had been inscribed on the tablet, it would be folded and placed in a sacred place, often water (many have survived from Bath).

Graffito (Fig. 11): this informal graffito was probably scratched on wet clay with a stylus, using the informal cursive script that was the standard handwriting of Romans in the early centuries of the empire. It is the same basic script (old Roman cursive) as used on the Vindolanda wooden tablets found near Hadrian’s Wall.

Tombstone (Fig. 12): a relatively rare example of a stone inscription carved using letters from the informal cursive script (old Roman cursive). Note the shape of the M in ‘D. M.’ on line 1; the uncrossed A in ‘annis’ at the end of line 4; the ‘lower case’ D and B in ‘diebus’ in the middle of line 5.

Published in CIL VI 8531: D(is) M(anibus)/ Fruto Aug(usti) n(ostrorum) adiu(torii) / tabul(a)rii) a rat(iobus) m(armorum) f(isci) / ca(strens)/ qui vivitannis/ XXI diebus XVII/ Fortunatus fra/ter et conlega / fecit.
In the next instalment in Part II, I shall go into detail on how to transcribe and interpret individual inscriptions, using examples from the British Museum, the Museo delle Terme and Libya. I will provide a list of the most common abbreviations and expressions, so that you have some tools with which to decipher inscriptions for yourselves. In the mean time, this article concludes with a brief bibliography of books on Latin epigraphy which would be useful for the beginner. Next time, there will be a reading list of books on the inscriptions in Britain.

Select bibliography: introductions to epigraphy

**Lawrence Keppie,** *Understanding Roman Inscriptions* (Batsford, 1991) (in print). A good first book for the layperson, with most chapters concerning the social history for which inscriptions are a major source. Introductory chapters on how the stones were cut, how to read inscriptions and how to date them. Useful appendices: a list of Roman emperors with the full names they used; a list of common abbreviations; the Roman voting tribes and their abbreviations; the contents of the 18 volumes of the massive Corpus of Latin Inscriptions (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, always referred to as CIL); some epigraphic conventions used when editing transcriptions. Select bibliography.

**John Edwin Sandys,** *Latin Epigraphy* (Cambridge University Press reprint, 1969) (available second hand). An old classic, parts of which are out of date, but which still has useful and full information about the alphabet, numerals, abbreviations, how inscriptions were made; detailed classifications of types of inscriptions which gives an idea of their extraordinary variety; appendices including lists of Roman names, emperors and abbreviations, and specific examples of inscriptions.

**Arthur E Gordon,** *Illustrated Introduction to Latin Epigraphy* (University of California Press, 1983) (in print). Aimed more at an academic audience, but with plenty of detailed material useful to the interested layperson. The lengthy introduction has particularly useful details on Roman names, how to reproduce an inscription, problems linked to the physical aspects of the text (e.g. damage, punctuation, letter forms), Roman numerals; very detailed information on the contents of the CIL volumes and other important collections of material; bibliography. This is followed by a selection of 100 inscriptions, all photographed at the end of the book, with a detailed commentary on their historical context and epigraphic elements: this is a teaching book to train professional epigraphers. Detailed appendices: long list of archaic and unusual forms of words found in inscriptions; complete list of all the abbreviations found in his selection of inscriptions; comprehensive explanation of Roman dating and calendar; conventions in printing epigraphical texts. Concordance with CIL and other major collections; various indices. 100 black and white plates.

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**Cato’s cup** (Fig 13): inscriptions could be found on more unusual objects. This cup was used as part of the election campaign in 62 BC, and informs the beholder that Marcus Cato was seeking the office of tribune of the plebs. It would have been filled with food or drink and offered to people in the street. This particular candidate was duly elected: he was Cato ‘the Younger’, the implacable enemy of Caesar.

Published in *CIL VI* 40904: M(arcus) Cato quei petit tribunu plebei.

The commemoration of a great historian, social welfare in action, witchcraft against a love rival, electioneering by one of the last great defenders of the Republic – this is just a sample of the fascinating variety of Roman inscriptions.

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**Fig. 11.** Graffito on wet clay in old Roman cursive script. Museo Nazionale Romano (Museo delle Terme), Rome. Photo: © Marigold Norbye.

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**Fig. 12.** Tombstone engraved with cursive script. Museo Nazionale Romano (Museo delle Terme), Rome. Photo: © Marigold Norbye.

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**Fig. 13.** Propaganda cup for M. Porcius Cato, 62 BC. Museo Nazionale Romano (Museo delle Terme), Rome. Photo: © Marigold Norbye.
A NEW ROMAN SETTLEMENT WEST OF EXETER

Nearly 100 Roman coins uncovered by two metal detectorists have led to the discovery of a Roman town, much further west than any were previously believed to have existed. The settlement is buried under fields some miles west of Exeter, Devon. Common belief (although without real proof) has held that Roman culture hardly spread in this most westerly region through fierce resistance from local tribes to Romanitas.

ARA Board Member, Sam Moorhead, the national Finds Adviser for Iron Age and Roman coins for the Portable Antiquities Scheme at the British Museum, said it was one of the most significant Roman discoveries in the country for many decades. "It is the beginning of a process that promises to transform our understanding of the Roman invasion and occupation of Devon," he said.

Following the discovery of the coins by the local men out using metal detectors, Danielle Wootton, the University of Exeter’s liaison officer for the Portable Antiquities Scheme, was given the task of investigating the site. Following a geophysical survey last summer, she was astonished to find evidence of a huge settled and worked landscape, that included at least 13 round-houses, quarry pits and trackways covering at least 13 fields. This settlement is the first of its kind for the western part of Devon, but surely is not the only undetected one.

Danielle Wootton carried out a trial excavation on the site, and uncovered evidence of extensive trade with Europe, a main road that may have linked the settlement to Exeter (Isca Dumniorium) and some “intriguing structures”, as well as many more coins. In addition to these finds two burials were found located alongside the main road of the settlement, perhaps hinting at the location of one of the population’s main burial grounds. Pottery and amphora fragments recovered suggest the town had the normal trading contacts with the rest of the Roman empire as were enjoyed elsewhere. A fragment of a Roman roof tile may hint that more Romanised structures than round-houses once stood on the site. The excavation has so far not been extensive enough to date the settlement’s period of maximum prosperity, but the coins that were found range from slightly before the start of the Roman invasion up until AD 378.

The Romans reached this part of the country during the invasion of Britain in AD 50–55, and the Second Legion, commanded by Vespasian, built a fort overlooking the River Exe with impressive buildings including a great bath-house. The legion stayed for the next 20 years before moving to Caerleon in Wales. Following this the fort was converted to become the centre of a thriving civil settlement, the Civitas Capital of the Dumnonii, with the usual trapping and buildings associated with a regional centre. Around AD 75 work on the town’s forum and basilica had begun on the site of the former principia, and by the late-second century the town walls were built, 10 feet (3 metres) thick and 20 feet (6 metres) high, enclosing the same area as the earlier fortress. The town seems to have been in decline by the late fourth century but one of the major public buildings continued to be occupied into the seventh, and it is known that a colony of ‘Britons’ who lived together in a quarter of the old town were expelled by the Saxon king Aethelstan in the tenth century.

Isca was the principal town for the Dumnonii tribe, who inhabited Devon and Cornwall. Historians have always assumed that they had on the whole rejected Roman cultural influences and that Exeter marked the most westerly limits of this, with military finds in the region being interpreted as from units based in the area solely to protect supply routes for natural resources such as tin. It is, however, more than likely that the population adopted any Roman ways that suited them in much the same way as others did in Britannia’s countryside, and that more settlements await discovery in the region.

The recent excavations were funded by the British Museum, the Roman Research Trust and Devon County Council Archaeology Service. Future excavations at the site are being funded by Devon County Council, Earthwatch and the University of Exeter, and will be directed by Danielle Wootton in conjunction with the University’s Roman archaeology specialist, Dr Ioana Oltean. The project will provide the wider community and University students with an exciting opportunity for fieldwork experience and training.

EXCAVATIONS YIELD NEW FACTS CONCERNING ROMAN SHEFFIELD

Archaeologists from Derbyshire-based Archaeological Research Services who planned the excavations at Whirlow Hall Farm on the edge of Sheffield expected to find evidence of an Iron Age or Romano-British farmstead, but the work carried out with the help of over 100 volunteers has revealed a far larger settlement – providing a rare insight into a little-understood period of Sheffield’s history.

Site director Dr Clive Waddington said a whole new layer of history had been unearthed and taken them by surprise. "There have not been any Roman discoveries made anywhere in Sheffield for many, many years, and this is really helping to fill in that historical jigsaw and help flesh out what has been a poorly understood period."

The enclosure is quite large at about 70 metres square, and would have been home to a wide variety of activities. The team believes the site dates from the second century AD, the era of emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius.

The excavations discovered Roman pottery and evidence of substantial gatepost holders near the entrance that suggest the enclosure would have had large gates and been a big and complex site. Pottery discovered was both British and imported from Gaul. Lead fragments found suggest that the site may have had an industrial side to it. The site lies alongside what was a packhorse route from Sheffield to Manchester, and the location of this farmstead suggests the route was also in use during the Roman period. The excavators are surmising that the inhabitants would have sold their produce to travellers using the road. It is now planned to extend the project, with further test pits planned for November. Checks are to be made on what could be Roman coins found on the site.

Yorkshire Post – 5.8.2011
BBC News – 4.8.2011
CAERLEON'S LOST CITY BEGINS TO YIELD UP HER SECRETS

One of the most exciting excavations currently taking place in Britain this year is the investigation at Caerleon in South Wales of the monumental buildings discovered between the amphitheatre and the riverside during a geophysical training exercise last year, and reported in ARA News 25 (March 2011, p.26). The excavation is set to take place between 4 August and 1 September; at the time of writing it is almost a fortnight in, and already proving to be as fascinating as was predicted.

Nine sampling trenches are being dug across the enormous site and already a wealth of finds and information have been obtained. Trenches 7, 8 and 9 are positioned to examine the remains of the two courtyard complexes on the western side of the monumental suburb, both of which are reminiscent of forum marketplaces with buildings attached on their northern sides. Some parts of the complexes have been subject to stone robbing; others have not. The rooms themselves are choked with rubble above opus signinum floors that seem in good condition. Such floors were often used in public buildings such as basilicas, which is raising speculation that perhaps this was their intended function. Large pieces of wall plaster in red, white, blue and green survive. Blue was a particularly expensive colour to produce and perhaps is a clue to the importance of the building.

In Trench 1, just metres from the river Usk, the team have uncovered a wall constructed from either re-used or purposefully broken tegula tiles, surviving to its full height. It had capstones and was linked to other walls running both inland and towards the river.

Gerald of Wales writing of Caerleon as it stood in the 12th century was amazed at the structures still standing within and without the walls when he visited it. He believed that it had been the seat of King Arthur in its later days. His description when stripped of its imaginative flourishes is one of the very few historic ones that we have of a Romano British settlement: "There are immense palaces, which, with the gilded gables of their roofs, once rivalled the magnificence of ancient Rome. They were set up in the first place by some of the most eminent men of the Roman state, and they were therefore embellished with every architectural conceit. There is a lofty tower, and beside it remarkable hot baths, the remains of temples and an amphitheatre. All this is enclosed within impressive walls, parts of which still remain standing. Wherever you look, both within and without the circuit of these walls, you can see constructions dug deep into the earth, conduits for water, underground passages and air-vents. Most remarkable of all to my mind are the stoves, which once transmitted heat through narrow pipes inserted in the side-walls and which are built with extraordinary skill."

A decorated antefix, part of a stone inscription and a tile stamped with the LEG II AVG abbreviation are just some of the finds reported so far. The monumental suburb of Caerleon is likely to be one of the major archaeological finds of this century.

The biggest collection of early Roman coins ever found in the West Midlands and the second largest in Britain, has gone on display in Warwick. The collection of 1,146 silver denarii which was discovered in a small Roman pot with a metal detector in summer 2008 in a field on Edge Hill near Banbury, Warwickshire, is unique in that it contains coins from the Republican and Imperial periods with a date range from 190 BC through to AD 63/4.

The hoard exhibition at Market Hall Museum in Warwick was opened on the county museum’s 60th anniversary

(Fig. 1). The coin hoard contains many rare and unusual pieces. Some, for example, bear the head of the Emperor Caligula and were recalled by the Roman government after he was murdered in AD 41, possibly as part of an attempt to remove the memory of his unstable rule from the minds of the population. The hoard also contains two ‘De Britann’ coins from the reign of Claudius which were minted to celebrate his ‘victory’ over the Britons in AD 46.

Other examples known as ‘tribute’ coins, date from the reign of the Emperor Tiberius. The latest coin in the hoard is a Neronian example from AD 63/4.

Archaeologist David Freke has suggested that whoever buried the coins – then around five years’ pay for a Roman soldier – did so in the reign of Nero, at the time when the emperor recalled the coins so that he could devalue them by reducing the silver content (a crude method used to put more money into circulation).

http://www.bajrfed.co.uk/showthread.php?74597-Caerleon-Lost-City-excavations&p=67963
http://twitter.com/#%21/CaerleonDig
http://www.britarch.ac.uk/caf/wikka.php?wakka=CFBblog6

South Warwickshire Roman Hoard

The collection of 1,146 silver denarii which was discovered in a small Roman pot with a metal detector in summer 2008 in a field on Edge Hill near Banbury, Warwickshire, is unique in that it contains coins from the Republican and Imperial periods with a date range from 190 BC through to AD 63/4.

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Mr Freke, who was involved in excavations near the site of the hoard find in 2008, believes whoever buried the coins was a “financially astute” individual effectively gambling on the currency market.

Dr Stanley Ireland of Warwick University, who is studying the coins and is in the process of producing a full catalogue, has suggested that the hoard may have remained above ground for some time – possibly until the reign of Trajan (AD 98–117).

Martin Elvery.
VENTA ICENORUM ACQUIRED FOR THE NATION

The site of the Roman town of Venta Icenorum, modern Caistor St Edmunds, that lies a few miles outside of Norwich has been acquired for the Nation in order to protect it from plough damage and looting by metal detectorists. The land has now been purchased with grants of £374,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, which is administered by the Heritage Lottery Fund, £40,000 from English Heritage and £20,000 from South Norfolk Council. Added to this was money raised by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust. This purchase is a rare move to bring an archaeological site into public ownership, and the first time the NHMF has bought a site purely for the value of its archaeology. The land will be added to the 49 hectares (120 acres) of the site acquired by the Trust in the 1990s, which is let for sheep grazing and interpreted by information boards explaining the buried town to walkers.

"We believed the danger to the buried archaeology from ploughing and metal detecting was very real," Peter Wade-Martins, director of the Trust, said. "Our priority will be to return the whole site to grass and gentle countryside enjoyment for the public." Incredibly, a large part of the site, some 22 hectares (55 acres), until earlier this year did not even have the protection of scheduled ancient monument listing. This section has been ploughed regularly for arable farming; each ploughing not only endangered the buried remains but attracted unauthorised metal detectorists. The River Tas flows by the town and the purchase now has secured the land to either side of this waterway.

Venta is particularly important as, like both Silchester and Wroxeter, it did not survive beyond the Saxon period and into the Middle Ages. It remains a greenfield site, without its remains having been destroyed by later constructions. Much of the circuit of the walls is still visible, with those on the northern side surviving in places almost to their full height. Crop marks at dry times of the year allow one to trace the street grid even from the ramparts. The Caistor Roman Project, a continuing programme of excavations led by Will Bowden of Nottingham University, was founded in 2005. The Project is aimed at understanding the rise and fall of the Roman town and the relationship between the town and its surrounding area. It is intended that the results of the research be used to enhance the value of the site as a cultural and educational resource for the region. ARA members (some of whom visited the site in 2010 during the Roman East Anglia study tour – see Fig. 1), are directed to the Project’s website given below. Part of the site was excavated in the early 1930s when the first aerial photographs showed the buried structures, but most of it remains unexplored. In 2007 Dr David Bescoby (University of East Anglia and University of Nottingham), with the assistance of Dr Neil Croston, carried out a survey of the entire walled area of the Roman town. In 2008 and 2009 the survey was extended to the fields to the north and south of the walled area, eventually encompassing the total area then owned by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust. More than 40 hectares have been surveyed to date affording spectacular information about the town and its hinterland. The name Venta Icenorum, means ‘Market place of the Iceni’.

http://caistorromanproject.com/index.htm

RESTORATION PROJECT FOR A MALTESE VILLA

Malta has always seemed surprisingly lacking in Roman archaeology and it has only four surviving Roman residential or industrial sites. The most famous is the Roman Domus in Rabat, but then there are San Pawl Milqi and Ta’ Kaccatura in Birzebbuga. The fourth is the first century villa at Żejtun, discovered more than 50 years ago. This is located in the school grounds of St Thomas More Junior Lyceum School for Girls.

In 2006 excavation was resumed by the University of Malta. Four trenches were opened incorporating parts of the 1972–76 excavation limit as well as previously unexcavated areas. The primary aim of the project was to assess, record and publish the architectural remains and cultural material revealed in past excavations and to recover data in an attempt to reconstruct the economic and environmental history of the site and its environs.

However, the exposure of the site to the elements over the last 30 years has led to a serious deterioration of the tiled floors and the painted plaster walls within the residential area of the villa. The site itself is heavily overgrown and rubbish strewn. A generous grant from HSBC Malta Foundation has made it possible to start the first phase of the two-year project which includes emergency conservation treatment and the erection of a temporary shelter. The historical site will be saved through a programme carried out by Din l’Art Ħelwa and the University of Malta with the help of HSBC Malta Foundation. The programme will protect the ruins from water infiltration, invasive vegetation, and exposure to weather. Urgent conservation measures are scheduled to take place after a protective tent is built this summer.

**Recent ARA Grants**

**Southwick Roman Villa, West Sussex**

**April 2011, grant of £250**

ARA member Giles Standing, along with local archaeological societies, has been conducting a research project since 2008 to place the first-century Roman villa at Southwick into a broader landscape and socio-economic context. The focus for his work has been the playing fields of Eastbrook Primary School, 50 metres from the main villa.

The ARA contributed towards the cost of evaluation trenching carried out by Giles to determine features identified in the area of the outer courtyard of the villa, where a geophysical survey in 2010 had suggested further possible buildings of Roman date. Earlier test pits had revealed an unmortared Romano-British wall, pottery, early roller-stamped tiles and daub from timber-built structures.

**Teffont Archaeological Project, Wiltshire**

**May 2011, grant of £600**

The Teffont Archaeological Project has been undertaking a community research excavation on a Roman settlement site in an area where, owing to the pre-eminence of the county’s prehistoric sites, very little investigation into the Romano-British period has been undertaken. Work on the possible farmstead at Teffont may hold an extra dimension of interest, with a suspected link with an adjacent shrine site in Upper Holt Wood. The Association’s grant was made towards expenses for post-excavation research, in preparation for publication.

**Dorset County Museum, Dorchester**

**May 2011, grant of £250**

Excavated in 1937–38, the Colliton Park Roman townhouse is one of the best preserved buildings of its type displayed in Britain. It was extensively embellished with mosaic floors. Unfortunately, the fine mosaic from room 15, originally depicting the Four Seasons, had already decayed badly by the time it was excavated; the faces of Spring and Summer had been lost. Since then, more than half of the face of Autumn has been lost, and Winter has gone completely.

Fortunately, fine tracing were made of the mosaic when it was excavated; these are now the only surviving record of the lost images. The tracings are in a very friable condition and in need of specialist conservation. With the aid of grants from ARA and other organisations this work is now being implemented, and the intention is to eventually put the tracings on public display.

**Box Roman Villa project, Wiltshire**

**July 2011, grant of £250**

The Roman villa at Box, near Bath, was dug sporadically throughout the 19th century. It was excavated more extensively in 1902–3, being published by Sir Harold Brakspear in 1904 in the Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine (vol. 33). An extensive and elaborate villa, it sits on a plateau above a steep cliff; water from the site’s prolific spring descends into the valley of Box Brook. As the villa is covered by the present village, none of its remains are visible to the public. The Kobra Trust is endeavouring to produce an accessible permanent exhibition, along with a popular publication for visitors wishing to learn more about what is one of the more elaborate villas near the great sanctuary at Bath. An ARA grant has been given towards the cost of educational facilities that teach local school children about the villa.

**Truckle Hill Roman bath-house, North Wraxall, Wiltshire**

**August 2011, grant of £1,000**

Truckle Hill Roman bath-house is a detached structure some 150m north of North Wraxall Roman villa. The 2007 excavation of the bath-house was described by Phil Andrews, Director of Excavations, in Issue 19 of *ARA*, the Bulletin of the Association for Roman Archaeology (pp10–13). An account by David Sabin and Kerry Donaldson of the 2008 geophysical survey of the villa and land to the south appeared in the same issue (pp45–48). Wessex Archaeology has continued to work on this site with the support of Wiltshire County Council Archaeology Service, the Association for Roman Archaeology, Chippenham Civic Society and English Heritage.

Excavations in 2008 and 2009 produced evidence for two earlier periods of construction on the bath-house site. The period one building appears to be of a high status, given the exceptional quality of the painted wall-plaster that was found in situ. An interim note on the 2008 and 2009 excavations at the bath-house will be provided in *ARA* Issue 20 (forthcoming), with a more detailed report in the following issue.

The ARA continued to support work at this important site with a grant of £1,000 in 2010 (mentioned in *ARA News*, Issue 24). A further grant of £1,000 towards the cost of excavations, due to take place in September/October 2011, was awarded to Wessex Archaeology in August this year.