

A1

Leeming to Barton

Archaeology discoveries
Cataractonium 2021



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Introduction

The A1 Leeming to Barton improvement scheme was opened in 2018 and has created 12 miles of new motorway-standard road. During the four-year construction period, extensive archaeological excavations were carried out, uncovering an extraordinary level of prehistoric and historic finds. This booklet provides an overview of the archaeology discovered at the Roman town of Cataractonium, and what it tells us about how people used the area over a period of about 4500 years.

While the existence of a Roman settlement was previously known, it was not until the construction of the Catterick bypass in the 1950s, on its current alignment, that the extent and level of survival of the remains was realised. Significant buildings, including a bath house and a high-status mansio, were found to survive to several feet in height. The site was formally designated as a nationally important scheduled monument.

During the development of the proposals to upgrade the road to motorway status, the archaeology in Cataractonium was a significant factor in the design of the road through the settlement. This allowed the archaeology to be protected wherever possible, while still enabling the design of the motorway. At Catterick cutting, techniques to stabilise the slope were used, so that the archaeological remains at the top could be preserved. This used both sheet piles and soil nails.

North of the river, remains were preserved under the road embankment.

Archaeologists began a major programme of fieldwork in 2013 which lasted for four years. The investigations were designed to answer a range of research questions about the area in the Roman period, to determine what life was like for those who travelled and settled along the route of the A1.

The excavation areas are known as, south to north, Fort Bridge, Agricola Bridge, and Brompton East and West.



Landscape context

The route of the A1 largely follows that of the Roman road of Dere Street. Dere Street was constructed in the AD70s. It initially ran from the Roman town of Eboracum in York, to Hadrian's Wall north of Corbridge. The name post-dates the Roman period, and it comes from the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Deria. It almost certainly largely followed a north-south route of earlier date through the region.

To the south of Catterick village, Dere Street diverges from the current A1 alignment, heading eastwards towards Catterick racecourse, before cutting through the Roman town and leading to a crossing over the River Swale.

The Roman fort at Cataractonium was one of a network of Roman forts along Dere Street, with others including Piercebridge to the north, and Boroughbridge to the south. Another potential fort was identified at Healam Beck, 20km to the south. The settlement associated with this site was excavated as part of the A1 Dishforth to Leeming upgrade scheme, and discoveries cast doubt on the interpretation of the enclosure feature as a fort. The site appears to have specialised in horse and mule breeding. However, the possible fort remained unexcavated so its function isn't clear.

Several Roman settlements have been excavated during the upgrade of the A1, including a second Roman scheduled monument around Bainesse

Farm to the west of Marne Barracks. This is a roadside settlement, and previous excavations suggest that it was made up of a mixture of agriculture and small-scale craft activity. This included blacksmithing, copper alloy working and pottery production. Excavations during the A1 scheme have confirmed this picture, although the core of the settlement was avoided through the design of the road. Geophysical survey has demonstrated that the settlement was up to 1km long, and while its focus was on Dere Street, it contained elements that continued back from the road into the area of the new motorway corridor. It appears the settlement at Bainesse supported the settlement at Cataractonium, and may have acted as a hub for the movement of goods from the continent to York, with material reaching Bainesse via the River Swale, and then being moved to Cataractonium and ultimately beyond. The site also seems to have had an intensive agricultural use, with a number of agricultural fields recorded. A large millstone also suggests that a watermill may have been located nearby, and this may have produced grain for the military at the fort to the north. Evidence for smithies were also found throughout the life of the settlement.



The main discovery, however, was an extensive Roman cemetery site. A total of 232 inhumation burials and 17 cremations were identified during the A1 excavations, and it is likely that the cemetery extended outside of the road corridor. The cemetery was long-lived, in use from the late 1st to the mid-5th century AD.

To the north of Cataractonium a new ritual site was identified near Scurragh House, characterised by a group of unusual burials and cremations which suggested that it had belonged to a group with distinct burial traditions. Two votive altars were recovered from pits, one of which was dedicated to the deity Mars Condates, suggesting a potential military link.

Further north, a major new Roman settlement was located at Scotch Corner providing some of the earliest and highest quality evidence of Roman activity in the North of England. The site provides evidence for the formalisation of existing road networks, and Scotch Corner became a key junction between Dere Street and the Stainmore Pass, which aligns roughly with the A66.



Altar found at Scurragh House.



Pre-Roman Catterick

There is no evidence within the Roman town of Cataractonium pre-dating the Roman period. To the south, outside of the core of the town, there have been various phases of archaeological investigation within the Catterick racecourse, and to the south at Pallet Hill Quarry. The earliest evidence found here dates to the late Neolithic to early Bronze Age, and includes a burial cairn. A circular feature originally interpreted as a Roman amphitheatre is more likely to be a henge feature of Neolithic date. Its western side incorporated a chambered burial cairn that was excavated in 1995.

To the north-east, at Scorton, a Neolithic or Bronze Age cursus monument (a long narrow rectangular earthwork enclosure, usually defined by a bank and ditch and presumed to be of ceremonial function) is recorded, along with a pit alignment and a group of possible barrows. Historic 18th and 19th century records of barrows are also noted for the area south of the Roman town, although the exact locations of these is uncertain.

Evidence of Iron Age activity in the form of roundhouses, which acted as dwellings, have been recorded in excavations in the southern part of the racecourse and in advance of quarrying. To the north of Cataractonium an Iron Age farmstead was also recorded 2km to the north-east, while further evidence of Iron Age settlement was found at Scotch Corner and to the west in Brough St Giles. This evidence shows that the area was settled before the Romans arrived. However, there is no evidence within the town itself pre-dating the Romans.



Establishment of the town and the forts

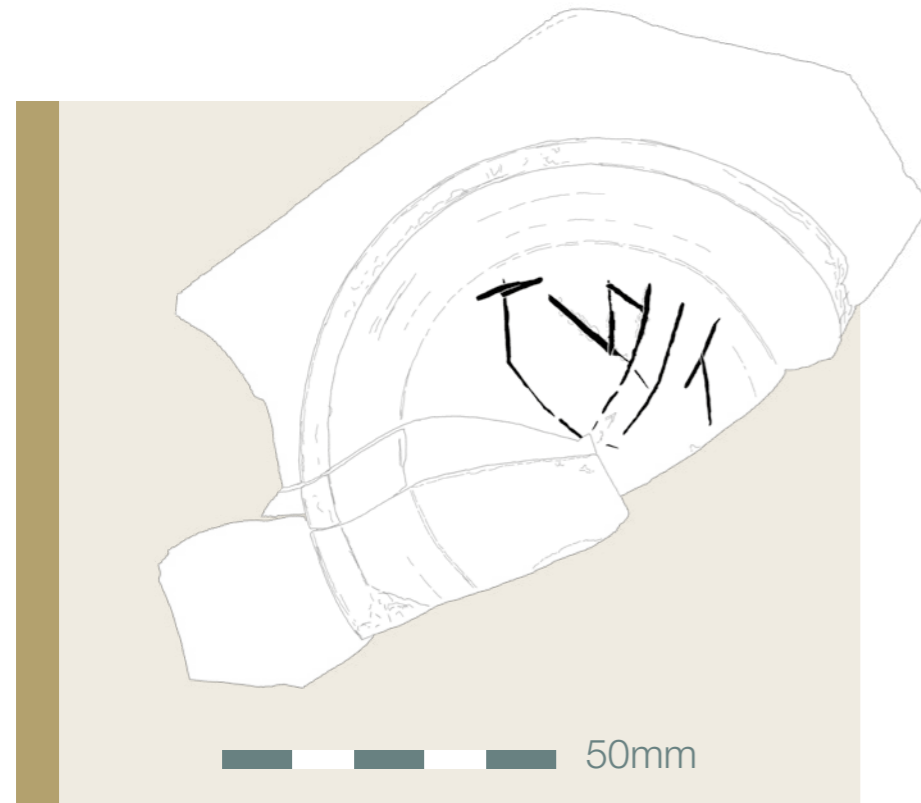
The excavations revealed that Cataractonium had its origins in the AD 70s. The Romans were moving northwards through the north of England and into Scotland under the governance of Agricola. The north of England long remained a frontier and as such continued to experience military occupation, garrisoned by a network of forts.

The Romans used the existing topography of the landscape to their advantage in constructing their defensive infrastructure. The fort at Cataractonium was built on a high point of land overlooking the River Swale, surrounding the area where Thornbrough Farm is now located. It appears to have been constructed in around AD 80 to guard the crossing of Dere Street over the River Swale. There is no evidence to tie a particular military unit to the fort at Cataractonium. It was most likely mainly occupied by auxiliary troops, but there is artefactual evidence to suggest that it had accommodated legionaries and cavalry at various times. Although not dating from the earliest period, evidence included harness beads, fragments of leather saddle covers, spearheads, a gilded spur and an iron horse bit. Graffiti on a dish also indicates the presence of cavalry.

At this time, the vicus (the civilian settlement associated with the fort) comprised timber buildings, and appeared to be extensive on the ridge of ground above the river adjacent to the fort – the A1(M) now cuts through this area. It developed along the alignment of Dere Street, and on the north bank of the River Swale some of the earliest evidence encountered was linked to an episode of gravel-quarrying, possibly related to the construction of Dere Street. This was followed by the raising of a large bank associated with a gate across Dere Street during the late 1st century, apparently to control access to the river crossing-point. The vicus later developed as a small town, independent of the military.



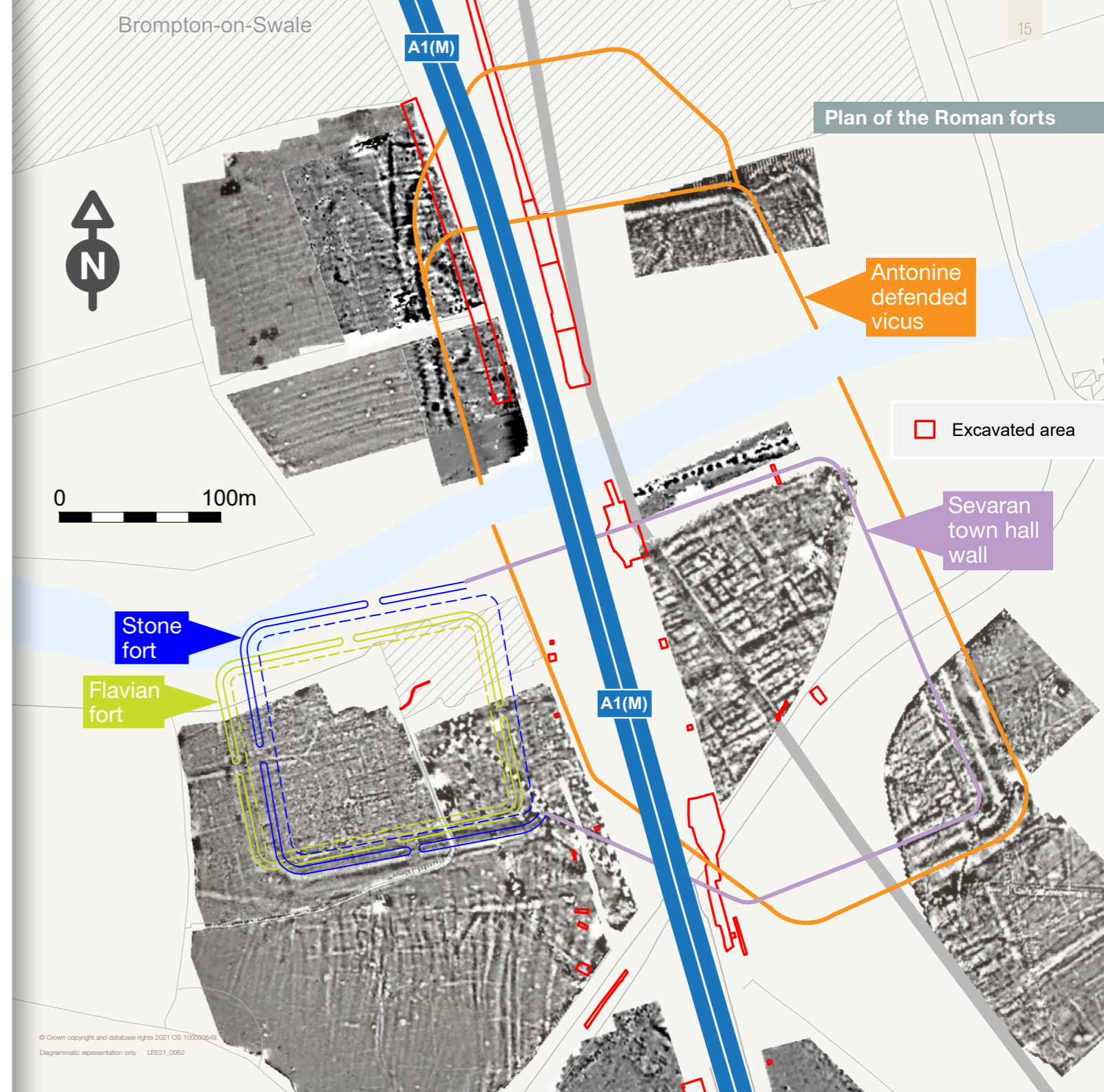
The fort was abandoned in the AD 120s when Hadrian's Wall was built and the military were needed further north to defend the frontier. Hadrian's Wall was in turn partially abandoned with the construction of the Antonine Wall in Scotland. However, the fort was re-established in about AD 160 following the abandonment of the Antonine Wall and the restoration of Hadrian's Wall. This probably meant that extra safety measures were required to defend Roman towns further south. The fort was again abandoned by AD 200, probably representing a more peaceful period. However, it



Drawing of graffiti indicative of military activity.

was reconstructed for a third time in the early 3rd century, when a defensive structure was also built around the town. Further detail on this is contained in the section on the Northern Suburb below.

All three forts were built on the area of high ground overlooking the River Swale on what is now the west side of the A1. However, the orientation of the three forts varied slightly, and they were different sizes. Earthworks in the field south of Thornbrough Farm include the southern defences of the last fort.



Development of the town – south of the river

By the late 1st to early 2nd century, all areas of the vicus had developed into a more formal settlement, with larger timber structures found in all excavated areas. The town may have been supplied from a storage depot, part of which was identified at Fort Bridge. This took the form of two timber granaries, a stock enclosure, and a well. The well contained the remains of a wicker basket and the earliest recorded pistachio nut found in the UK.

The second century was a period of great growth and expansion for the settlement, coinciding with the abandonment of the first fort in the AD 120s.



An extremely rare Roman wicker basket

The vicus came to represent a more formalised settlement or town, with the construction of a series of new timber structures, with the military vicus defined to the south by a ditch. The structures were orientated to the east, with the settlement fronting onto Dere Street.

This area also contained some important buildings in the town, although the majority of the evidence for these were found where the A1(M) cutting is now located. These were excavated in the 1950s when the Catterick Bypass was built. These buildings included a mansio with a bath wing. A mansio was a high-status accommodation block for officials travelling on the Roman road network. The example at Cataractonium was probably built in about AD 160, with the stone building probably replacing an earlier timber building. Although the mansio was probably only in use for around 40 years, the bath wing continued in use for much longer as a bath-house. A substantial stone-lined drain found close to the river during recent excavations probably served the bath-house.

During the mid-2nd the plan of the settlement was restructured. A grid street plan was adopted, with the addition of side streets running perpendicular to Dere Street. This street pattern endured for much of the life of the town on the southern side of the river, and this area was contained within the town defences constructed in the mid-2nd century.



The area excavated near to Fort Bridge contained several new timber structures which flanked the street to the north. One of these was found to have had a flagged floor and raised hearth inside, with an external cobbled yard. Stone buildings were also constructed around this time with one example constructed with a mortar bond. The building continued to be maintained throughout the 2nd century but fell out of use during the early 3rd century.

Closer to the river at the Agricola Bridge excavation, a boundary wall which survived to 1.25m in height was built. Due to the deposits found on either side, this likely formed a boundary between the military

area associated with the fort, to the west, and civilian occupation to the east.

Evidence for the re-modelling was also found here, along with the construction of an impressive town wall and associated gatehouse. The layout of the town shifted slightly in orientation to reflect this. Although no evidence for a Roman bridge across the River Swale was identified, Dere Street widened near the river suggesting a bridgehead leading to a bridge. Stonework likely to have formed part of a bridge structure was also found. The remains of a gatehouse were also identified in this area, adjacent to the course of Dere Street, and it is likely this controlled access across the river.



Town wall



There is evidence from the excavations for widespread burning shortly after AD225, recorded in excavations at Fort Bridge, which most probably represents the accidental destruction of earlier timber structures. The structures that post-dated the burning were initially timber-built but were replaced by stone counterparts after AD250.

By the late 3rd century at Fort Bridge a building constructed of red sandstone had been built. This high-status building contained evidence of painted wall plaster, a stone-flagged floor and a hypocaust (heating) system, providing under floor heating.



Gatehouse for the bridge crossing

It appears that the building was extended to the south, with the addition of an open-fronted room that may have functioned as a workshop. Ovens or kilns were found in this area.

The substantial level of re-planning and the construction of high-status stone buildings and defences demonstrate that a substantial investment was dedicated to the development of the town. The town must have had significant resources and was becoming consciously more urban.



Area of burning during the early 3rd century



Overhead view of a substantial building constructed using red sandstone within the late 3rd or 4th century

The town continued to develop and be occupied by the Romans long into the 4th century. There was a resurgence in building activity in the late 4th century, with further substantial stone structures identified. Excavation of the northern red sandstone structure revealed that it was sealed by rubble and demolition layers, suggesting that it had stood until the latest stage of the settlement. The remains of a further two stone structures also provide evidence for ongoing building work into the late 4th century. This discovery provides further evidence of continued large-scale civic construction.

Archaeological investigations revealed that while Cataractonium on the south side of the River Swale was initially established as a vicus associated with the first fort, its continued growth demonstrates that it quickly became a distinct urban unit. The settlement isn't thought to have been an administrative centre but gained a regionally high status as one of the most significant Roman towns north of York. Its proximity to Dere Street incorporated the settlement into the transport network. The wealth of the archaeology discovered in the latest investigations show that Cataractonium was much more than a stopping point, with construction of high-status buildings continuing well into the 4th century.



The Northern suburb and the defences

To the north of the River Swale was a northern suburb to the town of Cataractonium. The northern suburb settlement was likely established around AD 85 and ran alongside Dere Street, flanking the road. This area was excavated in sections, as a large part in the centre of Brompton East was unexcavated and preserved under the motorway embankment.

The earliest evidence was industrial in nature, and included gravel quarries for the construction of Dere Street at Brompton East, located east of the A1(M), and in Brompton West, workshops that made iron objects. Material called hammerscale was found, which suggests that iron smithing was taking place here, probably in the open air. The ironworking here was probably to serve the military for the construction and supply of the fort.

After the quarries were infilled, partly by domestic refuse, two buildings were constructed fronting onto the street in this early phase. The settlement rapidly extended, running for at least 200m northwards along Dere Street. The height of Dere Street suggested that it had originally crossed the river on a bridge.

At Brompton East, large, although ephemeral, timber structures dating to the 2nd century were recorded. Side roads were constructed that ran west from Dere Street, which itself saw significant reconstruction throughout this period, perhaps in response to increased traffic on the road to the north. Settlement further north at Brompton East contained fewer

structural remains, although this may have been due to its distance from the roadside. Several ovens were situated throughout this area, perhaps to serve travellers on Dere Street, and a smithy may also have sought custom from traffic upon the main road.

When the new fort was constructed in the mid-2nd century, a massive ditch and rampart defences were built around the northern suburb. The suburb at this time formed an area of rectangular timber buildings that faced Dere Street, with a number of side roads between them. The defences went out of use by the end of the 2nd century, and were built over by more timber buildings and side streets.

In the mid-late 2nd century, the northern suburb of the walled town, although now unenclosed, continued to develop with new construction taking place. At Brompton East large timber buildings were erected, perhaps in response to a shift in the location of Dere Street to the east and further north existing structures were refurbished. The back plots of these buildings extended westwards into Brompton West. As with the earlier period, a number of large ovens were discovered in Brompton East. The land where the defences had been located, and land to the north, became increasingly settled with the construction of at least one new stone building, and a group of ditches suggest that Dere Street, situated at a distance to the east, was still settled along its flank.



In the 3rd century the northern suburb continued to be occupied, although the importance of this area seems to have decreased, with many of the building plots on the street front vacant. Burials were discovered in the back-plots, often in the boundary ditches. This suggests that this area was seen as being outside the main settlement in this period. One burial was of a possible family group and contained an adult male, an adult woman, and three children.



The family burial group.

The northern end of Brompton East contained evidence to suggest occupation fronting onto Dere Street had extended northwards further still than that seen earlier. Many of the buildings of this date remained in use into the late 4th and early 5th century. The area appears to have been redeveloped early in this period, in line with the period of rebuilding seen south of the river. Evidence included two two-storey buildings of this date. That these structures were constructed in the unenclosed northern suburb, fronting Dere Street, suggests that defence, although perhaps desirable, may not always have been paramount. This resurgence was relatively short-lived, however, and by the late 4th or early 5th century the town went into decline. The evidence from Brompton West suggests the area had been given over to agriculture, although the presence of boundary walls and ditches demonstrated some partitioning was retained that referenced buildings fronting Dere Street to the east. Some of these boundaries have been retained in the field pattern that survives today.



Industry

The investigation of the remains of the Roman town and its suburbs provided a wealth of potential evidence of industry. The archaeology of craft and industry shed light on the skills and roles of the inhabitants of the town and potential exports and trading opportunities.

As discussed above, the earliest industrial evidence was of metal working and quarrying in the northern suburb. It seems probable that the blacksmiths would have been employed in the manufacture of the significant quantities of ironwork and nails that would have been required for construction of the Flavian fort, and within the developing vicus, while the quarried material was likely used for the construction of Dere Street.

Metal working, particularly iron smithing, was an important activity in Cataractonium with remains located throughout the excavated areas. As there is no evidence for iron smelting, that activity must have taken place elsewhere, with the smiths

working metal brought in from elsewhere. A key focus was in Brompton East, north of the River Swale. Here, five consecutive hearths were identified, dating to the early 2nd century. The quantity of debris recovered suggested this smithing operation was extensive. Although this was not within a building, as would normally be expected, it is likely that the blacksmith was afforded enough shelter from the adjacent structure to operate effectively, or that an open-fronted timber lean-to type building may once have been appended to the adjoining structure, although no evidence for this survived. While the smithing here could have fed into the military supply northwards to garrisons stationed upon Hadrian's Wall, it would more likely have served local demand.



Evidence for processing of crops was also recorded, likely associated with the supply of the military. A substantial kiln was constructed to the south of Cataractonium at Brough Park during the early 3rd century, which fronted a road that provided access to the south gate of the fort from

Dere Street. No evidence for the function of the kiln was found, but was likely to have been a drying oven. Two ovens found at Brompton East likely had a similar function.



Possible drying oven.

There was some indication of a small-scale tanning industry suggested by finds recovered from a large midden deposit at Fort Bridge, which had accumulated behind a mid-3rd century stone building, and from an adjacent pit associated with the midden. Both contained significant quantities of horn cores and phalanges and limb bones were well-represented. The quantities of horn and bone recovered do not constitute an organised industry but reveal that this process was being carried out in the town on a small scale.

Further evidence of leather working was found in a ditch and the well at Fort Bridge. This included a shoe, stitched sheet leather from tents and items of horse gear, implying a significant military presence. Leather had been found in a substantial midden dated to the early 2nd century at excavations during construction of the Catterick Bypass. This included a similar range of leather items to those recovered from Fort Bridge. The waste material found here was indicative of shoemaking. It is likely that the focus of any 'industry' related to leather working or shoe making was located to the west of Fort Bridge and closer to the fort.



Leather shoe found at Fort Bridge.

Finds

The areas excavated at Cataractonium have all revealed large numbers of finds ranging from everyday items such as pottery, to complex and rare items such as incense burners. A total of over 62,000 items have been recovered from the town, along with 2.8 tonnes of animal bone and 2.5 tonnes of pottery. These finds also represent the civilian and military components of the town, and the analysis of these items, along with the deposits from which they were recovered, have been used to tell the story of this important town on Dere Street. More detailed information can be found in the final report available for free at the [Archaeological Data Service](#).



Hare brooch.



Near complete vessel.





Bone dice.



Intaglio found at Cataractonium.



Rock carved with phallic symbol, likely part of the bridge structure.



Jet bead.



Sword pommel made of bone.



Iron bolt head.



Iron socketed projectile.



Iron pyramidal bolt head.



Iron spearhead.



Iron key.



Decline

The latest stages of the Roman occupation of Cataractonium most likely occurred during the late 4th or the very early 5th century. The northern suburb may have been largely abandoned as a fully functioning part of Cataractonium by this time. Evidence from coins suggests a reduction in activity on the north bank of the river during the second half of the 4th century. The pottery evidence also suggests that the latest evidence for Roman occupation at Cataractonium is the late 4th century. The discoveries made during the A1 scheme have provided significant evidence for occupation of Cataractonium during the Early Anglo-Saxon period. Evidence has included four sunken-featured buildings inside the walled area of the former Roman town at Fort Bridge and Agricola Bridge, as well as in the northern suburb. This builds on earlier evidence from previous excavations, when a Grubenhaus was discovered in 1972. However, evidence north of the river was more limited, suggesting post-Roman occupation here was more dispersed.

South of the river, the settlement evidence from the early Anglo-Saxon period was focused on existing features, including Dere Street and other streets within the town. Structures in the excavated areas were also located close to access points in the walled town, but this may be a result of the locations excavated as part of the A1 scheme.

There is also some evidence for smithing at Fort Bridge in the post-Roman period. The Early Anglo-Saxon material recovered from sunken-featured buildings is typical of settlement finds of this period. It includes equipment for household cloth production, such as bone pin-beaters and a ceramic spindle whorl, which suggests textile making took place inside the buildings. A dog burial was found at Agricola Bridge, and the dog may have worn a collar, as the corner of a bone weaving tablet with a drilled hole was found adjacent to its neck. This may have been reused as a tag, possibly representing identity and, or ownership of the animal.



Anglo-Saxon dog burial.

0  50cm



Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured building.

Although there is no direct evidence for continuation of settlement, due to a lack of dateable material between the early and late 5th century, it seems unlikely that the town would have been completely abandoned between the Romans leaving and the Angles from southern Denmark and northern Germany arriving. Dere Street would have remained a visible route, and the river crossing at Cataractonium would likely have been maintained. Cataractonium seems to have been abandoned by, or soon after, the mid-6th century, most likely in favour of the modern village of Catterick. The archaeological evidence from earlier investigations

has demonstrated the presence of dispersed Early Anglo-Saxon settlement at Baines Roman roadside settlement, at the centre of the modern village, and to the south at Castle Hills within Marne Barracks. Catterick is mentioned in the poem *Y Gododdin*, as *Catraeth*, when an attack may have taken place in the late 6th century. The next mention is of St. Paulinus undertaking mass baptisms in the River Swale c.AD627 at Catterick. This suggests some importance of the site at this early date, and Bede indicates that Catterick was one of the royal vills of Northumbria during the 7th century.

What is happening now?

The results of the excavations have been analysed, the finds examined and reports have been written up. This booklet has been produced to provide information about the huge quantities of material excavated as Cataractonium as part of the Highways England Leeming to Barton improvement scheme. A booklet of this nature can obviously never cover all of the archaeology in detail, and a number of publications have been produced between 2018 and 2021 looking at the sites and finds in more detail. The publications include a series of detailed monographs, available for free online, answering the key research questions established as part of the archaeological work. They consist of a volume on death and burial (2018), Scotch Corner and the Contact Period (2019), and Cataractonium (2021).

The finds from the excavations are now held by the Yorkshire Museum in York, where the artefacts will be kept, displayed as appropriate and made available for future research and learning.

The successful completion of archaeological excavations on this kind of scale is only possible through collaborative working, and a number of

organisations and stakeholders have been crucial to this process. These include Neil Redfern, formerly the Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Yorkshire and Humber at Historic England, who was assisted by Dr. Andy Hammon and Dr. Pete Wilson as Science Advisor and Roman Specialist respectively. Support was also received from Lucie Hawkins and Dr. Peter Rowe at North Yorkshire County Council, as well as the team at the Carillion-Morgan Sindall Joint Venture who were commissioned by Highways England to construct the road. Works on site were facilitated by Matt Clements, the Joint Venture Archaeology Package Manager, and Dr. Steve Sherlock and Dr. Jonathan Shipley the AECOM Archaeological Clerk of Works. Helen Maclean of AECOM and Blaise Vyner undertook the overall archaeological project management throughout the scheme. This booklet was written by Helen Maclean, Katy Murray and Dr Jonathan Shipley. All archaeological excavations were undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates, and thanks must be paid to the many archaeologists who worked tirelessly on the scheme in all types of weather.



Open day at Catterick 31st May 2014 - visitors watch the excavation.

Final thanks must go to the public, who have shown such keen interest in the archaeology throughout the project. A number of open days were held during the excavations, which attracted over 2,000 visitors, while temporary exhibitions were well attended at the Richmondshire Museum, Bowes

Museum and Bedale Museum. The archaeological excavations undertaken have provided an important window into the people who lived and died along the line of the A1, and the future work and research on the excavated remains will continue to enhance our understanding of the past.

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