To a Friend (on visiting the Roman Wall). Selected verses.
By Robert White, 1867.

Now stand we on the ruined mound;
Before us all is hallowed ground!
You cannot raise a single sod
But there a martial Roman trod.
Here did he live, here cast his eye
Around on dale, on hill, and sky;
Here mark in June the flowerets blow,
And shiver in December’s snow.
Behold, again, how acts of worth
Could draw his veneration forth;
With deities he classed the name
Of him who scaled the steep of fame,
Severed a fragment from the rock,
His story graved upon that block,
Shaping it in proportion fair.
Then all devoutly worshipp’d there.
Still farther — if a vow he made,
As he implored the gods for aid.
Again its head the altar reared,
The record on its front appeared.
Destroying Time hath not effaced
From yonder stone the words he traced;
Go, read them in the classic tongue
That Tully spoke and Virgil sung!

Roman altar ©Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport.

This leaflet is one of a series covering the length of Hadrian’s Wall. They were inspired by the ‘Tales of the Frontier’ project undertaken by Durham University. We hope they encourage you to visit new locations and to explore the Wall and its influence on people and places through history.

To view and download other leaflets in the series and an accompanying booklet, or to find out more about ‘Tales of the Frontier’ please visit
www.talesofthefrontier.org

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Timeline

2000
• Skeleton found in bathhouse at Derventio
• Chi-Rho stone lost

1500
• Rev. J Collingwood Bruce visits Maryport
• Town of Maryport founded
• William Camden visits the area
• John Senhouse begins collecting stones

1000
• Norman church built at Crosscanony

500
• St Patrick is born
• End of Roman occupation

AD 1
• Altars buried at Aluna
• Roman forts and Hadrian’s Wall built
• Roman conquest of Britain begins

No. 1 Western Defences: Symbols, Saints, and Very Big Snakes

A line of forts and watch towers formed a western extension of Hadrian’s Wall as far as the harbour at Maryport. The fort here, Aluna Carvetiorum, has many tales to tell, of mysterious rituals, of very large snakes, and of African commanders and Spanish cavalry.

In this western outpost, we can also witness the beginnings of Christian worship, with symbols and stones, and legends of St Patrick.

At the nearby fort of Derventio, a 2000 year old ‘cold case’ remains unsolved: who was the skeleton under the floor in the bath house, and how did he end up there?

Links:
Hadrian’s Wall Country: www.visithadrianswall.co.uk
Hadrian’s Wall Path: www.nationaltrail.co.uk/hadrians-wall-path
Senhouse Museum: www.senhousemuseum.co.uk
Discovering Derventio: www.discoverderventio.co.uk

**ALANIA CARVETIUM**

The Roman name for the fort at Maryport may be derived from the Celtic words for 'beautiful' or 'for shrine' or 'altar'. The suffix 'Carvetium' is used today to distinguish this particular site from others also named Alanua, and indicates possible links to the local tribal of the Carvetii.

From AD 124-140, the fort was garrisoned by the Cohors I Hispanorum Equitata, a cavalry unit recruited from the tribes of Roman Spain.

Recent excavations indicate the site of the fort was occupied into the 6th century, perhaps until AD 600. The burial ground of a Christian church is thought to have remained in use throughout the period – a rare example of an early post-Roman Christian religious site.

The fort at Maryport formed part of the 'Western Sea Defences', a line of forts and watch-towers strung along the north-western coastline of Cumbria. It may have been the administrative centre for the west coast.

In 1570, John Senhouse, Lord of the Manor of Ellenborough, began collecting inscribed Roman stones from the area and, as was the practice at that time, set them within the walls of the family mansion Netherhall. Historian William Camden visited and wrote of the area:

> "From hence the shore, drawing it selfe backe by little and little and, as it appeareth by the heapes of rubbish, it hath beene fortifed all along by the Romans, whereabouts there was ease. For it was the outmost bound of the Roman Empire, and the Scots lay sorest upon this coast and infested it most, when (as it were with continual surges of warre) they flowed and flatted hither by heapes out of Ireland."

**Alerian town councillor in Cumbria**

Camden records:

> "most beautiful four square Altar of a reddish stone right artificially in antique workr engraven five foote or there abouts high, with an inscription therein of an excellent good letter."

It was dedicated by Gaius Cornelius Peregrinus, tribunus (military commander) of the auxiliary garrison at Maryport. He came from Saldae (now Bejaia, Algeria) in North Africa, where he was a decurion (town councillor). Ritual objects carved on the altar include an axe and a knife used in the slaughter of sacrificial animals. The altar is now in the British Museum.

**Maryport and the Senhouse family**

The modern town was founded in the 18th century by Humphrey Senhouse (1706-1770). He changed the name of the existing settlement from Ellenfoot to Mary Port after his wife. Much of the town was constructed following wholesale removal of stone from the Roman Fort. Senhouse employed a man to record any inscribed stonework brought to light. The north-east gate of the fort was re-erected to form the chancel arch of Crosscanoby Church, which may be a very early Christian site. The present building dates from 1130. The Roman road from Carlisle to Maryport passes nearby, and Roman stones were used in its construction. Part of a Roman altar was found in the churchyard.

**Cocidius and Belatucadros**

These two carvings from Alanua are thought to represent native gods. Belatucadros is shown in relief (above); Cocidius is depicted as a simple engraved stick figure (below; © Conchie & Co.). They can be seen at the Senhouse Roman Museum.

**Mussolini and the missing symbol**

A stone bearing the chi rho symbol was originally part of the Senhouse Collection. The stone disappeared, under mysterious circumstances, in the early 20th century. It is said that a stone from the collection was returned to Italy during the 1930s, at the request of Mussolini.

**Was St Patrick born in Maryport?**

The birthplace of St Patrick in the late 4th century is much debated. In 1878 the Rev. John Cummins, a local Catholic priest, believed it was Maryport, and presented a case to the Literary and Scientific Society. Patrick's own writings say that his father, Calphurnius, was from the town of Banavie Taurnaiae. He was of Celtic descent, but with a Roman education. As a boy, Patrick was taken captive to Ireland. The dates are uncertain, but at around the same time, the garrison at Maryport suffered a disastrous raid.

Later in his life, Patrick is said to have banished all snakes from Ireland after they attacked him during a 40-day fast. However, there is no evidence that snakes ever lived there.

The story perhaps draws on Biblical stories where the prophet Aaron has a staff that turns into a snake, but may also relate to serpent symbolism in the Celtic world. At the Roman site in Maryport, a large sandstone sculpture was found which, on one side bears a hooded serpent. The opposite side shows a stylised face as found in the Celtic 'head' cult. The shape of the pillar is undeniably phallic – a third form of cult worship.

To a Christian, this 'snake cult' would have been extremely offensive. If Patrick grew up aware of the Serpent Stone and its cult, perhaps he was moved to banish such activities when he later encountered them in Ireland.

**The body in the bath house...**

In 2012, during excavations of a bath house at the Roman fort of Derwentio (Papcastle), archaeologists found part of a male skeleton in the hypocaust. Carbon dating showed that the man, who was in his 30s when he died, had lived during the Roman occupation. Scientific analysis of his teeth indicates that he was born and grew up in the area. So how did he end up underneath the bath house?