

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
 - Rev. J Collingwood Bruce visits Maryport
 - Town of Maryport founded
 - William Camden visits the area
 - John Senhouse begins collecting stones
- 1500
 - Norman church built at Crosscanonby
- 1000
 - Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People'
- 500
 - St Patrick is born
 - End of Roman occupation
- AD 1
 - Altars buried at Alauna
 - Roman forts and Hadrian's Wall built
 - Roman conquest of Britain begins

Links:

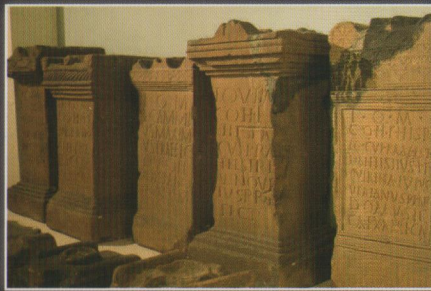
- Hadrian's Wall Country: www.visithadrianswall.co.uk
- Hadrian's Wall Path: www.nationaltrail.co.uk/hadrians-wall-path
- Senhouse Museum: www.senhousemuseum.co.uk
- Discovering Derventio: www.discoverderventio.co.uk

Cover image: Altars in the Senhouse Museum, Maryport, by Matt Symonds.

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Tales of the Frontier

People, places, past and present
around **MARYPORT**



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, Alauna 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.

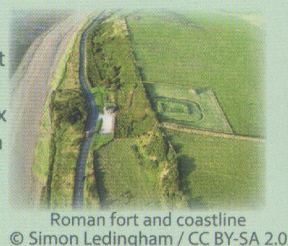
At the nearby fort of Derventio, a 2000 year old 'cold case' remains unsolved: who was the skeleton under the floor in the bath house, and how did he end up there?

**Come and explore the mysterious stones
and strange rituals in this westernmost of all
Roman stations**



ALAUNA CARVETIORUM

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



Roman fort and coastline
© Simon Ledingham / CC BY-SA 2.0

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 him and wrote of the area:

"From hence the shore, drawing it selfe backe by little and little and, as it appeereth by the heapes of rubbish, it hath been fortified all along by the Romans, wheresoever there was easie landing. 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 continuall surges of warre) they flowed and flocked hither by heapes out of Ireland."



William Camden by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, 1609
NPG 528 © National Portrait Gallery.

Algerian town councillor in Cumbria

Camden records:

"a most beautifull foure square Altar of a reddish stone right artificially in antique worke engraven five foote or thereabouts high, with an inscription therein of an excellent good letter."



Maryport altar
© Trustees of the British Museum.

It was dedicated by Gaius Cornelius Peregrinus, tribunus (military commander) of the auxiliary garrison at Maryport. He came from Saldæ (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.

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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 Crosscanonby 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.



Humphrey Senhouse. Courtesy of Maryport Maritime Museum and Allerdale Borough Council.

Cocidius and Belatucadros

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



Maryport (Alauna)

The mystery of the buried altars

'Never before', the Hadrian's Wall scholar Rev JC Bruce declared in July 1870, 'were the antiquaries of this district able to rejoice over such a sudden acquisition of treasure as we have before us to-day. Let us hope', he concluded, 'that next year's ploughing may be as successful as this.'

He was referring to the discovery of 23 altarstones, dedicated to Jupiter, found buried in large pits near the fort of Alauna. The mystery of the Maryport altars has been debated for decades. Some believed they were buried for protection, by a garrison fearful of imminent invasion. Others argued that 'honourable burial' was part of an annual cycle, used to free up space for new dedications. Recent work, however, has revealed that the altars were in fact re-used in the foundations for a large timber building in the 4th century.

DERVENTIO

Two forts are visible at Papcastle, showing as earthworks on slightly different alignments. The first dates from AD 80 to 120, and is overlain by the second, larger one dating from around AD 160 to the late 4th century; this was rebuilt in about AD 293-306. The site is at the junction of Roman roads linking to Maryport, Old Carlisle, Moresby, and Keswick.

The devastating floods of 2009 caused severe damage along the River Derwent. After the water receded, local people reported finding Roman material in fields south of the river. This led to a volunteer project including surveys and excavation (see Links) that showed that the civilian settlement associated with the fort was much larger than previously thought. Important discoveries included a Roman watermill with surviving waterlogged timbers lining the mill race.

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.



The chi rho is one of the earliest Christian symbols. The first two letters, chi and rho (XP) of the Greek word for 'Christ' (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ) are superimposed to form a monogram.



Sketch by W. Hutchinson, 1794.

Was St Patrick born in Maryport?

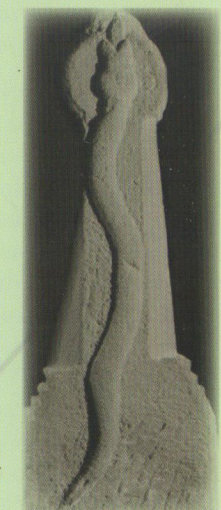
The birthplace of St Patrick in the late 4th century is much debated. In 1878 the Rev. John Cummins, a local Catholic priest, believed it was Maryport, and presented a case to the Literary and Scientific Society.

Patrick's own writings say that his father, Calphurnius, was from the town of Banaven Taurinae. 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 horned 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.



Serpent Stone. © Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport.

The body in the bath house...

In 2012, during excavations of a bath house at the Roman fort of Derventio (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?



Roman skeleton.
© Discovering Derventio.

Papcastle (Derventio)