

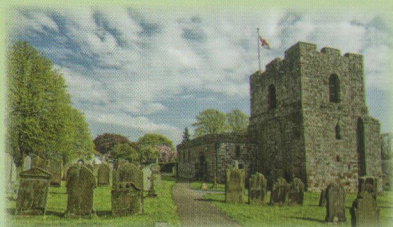
Burgh-by-Sands Church By Eunice Barnett, 2001.

The Romans came
With armour shining in the mid-day sun,
With muscles rippling as they heaved the stones
To build a fortress.
Down the coast
They raised an altar to a pagan god.
But they fell.

In later times
The stones were shaped into a house of prayer
That dwelt in soft rain and in calm blue skies;
A tower of love
To live down through the years,
Gently blessing those who lie
Forever safe in warm earth,
Under the stones reflecting sunlight
And the gift of peace.

Swords into ploughshares,
Rest after battle,
Through eternity

© Executors of the late Eunice Barnett



St Michael's Church, Burgh-by-Sands © Richard Speirs

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 ● Headless genius found at Beaumont
- Altar found at Beaumont
- Rev. J. C. Bruce visits Solway
- Battles of church bells
- Border Reivers' raids
- William Camden visits Solway
- Two 'gret bells' recorded at St Michaels
- John Leland visits Solway
- 1500
- Edward I dies on Burgh Marsh
- Border wars
- Roman stone re-used to build churches
- 1000
- Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People'
- 500
- Gildas writes about 'foul hoards'
- End of Roman occupation
- Altar set up by Flavius Vibianus
- Roman forts and Hadrian's Wall built
- Roman conquest of Britain begins
- AD 1

Links:

Hadrian's Wall Country: www.visithadrianswall.co.uk

Hadrian's Wall Path: www.nationaltrail.co.uk/hadrians-wall-path

Three Solway Churches: www.eastsolwaychurches.org.uk

Tullie House Museum: www.tulliehouse.co.uk

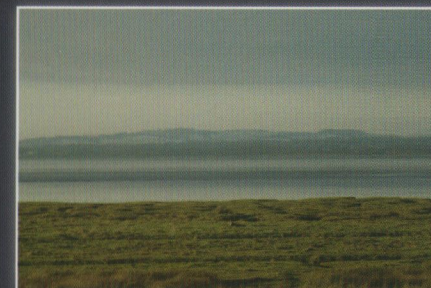
Solway Coast AONB: www.solwaycoastaonb.org.uk

Cover image: View across the Solway Estuary. © TOTF Archive.

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Tales of the Frontier

People, places, past and present
around the SOLWAY ESTUARY



No. 2 The Northern Shore: Borrowed Stones & Troubled Times

The Solway provided a natural northern frontier to the Roman Empire, and was the western end of Hadrian's Wall. Three forts here were garrisoned by soldiers from all across the Roman world. They brought with them their own gods, but also adopted the native deities they found in this remote outpost.

Later, the Roman stones were re-used for building, including the three churches along this length of Hadrian's Wall. Boundary disputes continued throughout history, and some Border churches built defensive towers for protection.

Come and explore the historic churches, the wild shores, and fascinating stories of this remote Roman outpost



MAIA ('the larger')

The fort at Bowness on Solway marked the western terminus of Hadrian's Wall. Little is now visible but the main road through the village passes through the centre of the fort using the Roman east and west gates. In the 18th century, antiquarian John Horsley wrote:

"The village now stands, and the fort has stood, upon a rock or promontory, on the edge of Solway frith; and it is not to be doubted but the church, and what other stone buildings are in the village, have been raised out of its ruins..."

The Solway was a dangerous outpost during the Roman occupation. Hadrian's Wall scholar Rev. J. Collingwood Bruce wrote:

"The hills have the aspect which they formerly bore, the waters of the Solway ebb and flow as they were wont, the same clear skies spans the vault of heaven which was outstretched in Roman days; but then, the occupants of the opposite shores scowled upon each other with deadly hate, and planned the means of mutual slaughter."

Bowness on Solway (Maia)



The battle of the bells

In 1552 Edward VI's commissioners listed 'two gret bells' at St Michael's Church, Bowness. Tradition tells that these bells were stolen by 'Scottes armyes' in 1648, but were dropped in the Solway, their ghostly chimes still heard on quiet evenings.

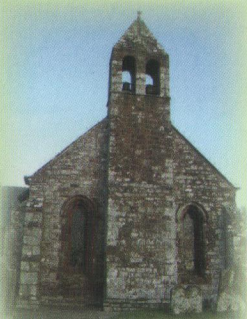
The Bowness parishioners undertook reprisal raids into Scotland. The story of the stolen bells was also told north of the border but there it was the English who supposedly lost them. The minister of Dornock wrote:-

"I have often heard old people speak of [the bell] as having been stolen by certain Englishmen, or, as sometimes designated, Coomberland Scots; who, being chased, threw it into a pool of the Dornock burn, returning for it at some subsequent ebb tide. The pool to this day bears the name of the Bell Pool."

When a new vicar came to St Michael's there was a request from the minister at Dornock to please return his bell. The reply:-

"When ours come back from the sea."

Whatever the truth, two bells still hang in the tower at St Michaels Church, Bowness.



St Michael's Church © TOTF Archive.



CONGABATA

The main road makes a right-angle turn in the middle of Drumburgh village, preserving the outline of the south-western corner of this Roman fort. Drumburgh Castle was built here in 1307 by Robert le Brun but the present house was constructed in the time of Henry VIII, using stones from the fort. John Leland, 'the King's Antiquary', commented in 1539:

"(at) Drumbuygh the lord Dakers father builded upon old ruins a prey pyle for defens on the contery...The stones of the Pict Wall were pulled down to build Drumuygh. For the Wal ys very nere yt."

'Like tawny worms'

In the 6th century the monk Gildas (himself born in Scotland) wrote a scathing account of British history from the time of the Roman conquest: "On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain". He vividly describes the terrible enemy north of the estuary:

"Foul hordes of Picts and Scots, like tawny worms coming forth in the burning heat of noon out of the deepest recesses of their holes, hastily land from their curraghs in which they had crossed the Tithican Valley; differing in manners, but all sharing the same thirst for blood, and more eager to shroud their villainous faces with beards than to cover with decent clothing those parts of their bodies which required it."*

*From Tethys, a goddess known as 'wife of the ocean', thought to be the Solway Estuary.

*"Once a wood and once a sea,
Now it's a moss, and aye shall be,"*
(Local rhyme)

Drumburgh (Congabata)



Return to Aballava

"Many centuries have passed since I was stationed on these shores but my spirit is still drawn here from time to time. The grey waters and heavy skies were a world away my villa in the heat and dust of North Africa - but there is still a wild beauty here that cannot be denied. We built a fine fort here on the marshes."

"These days there's nothing but a few banks and ditches - but at least all those stones weren't wasted. I spotted some in those fine temples built long after we left Britannia. I can't find my altar though. Perhaps someone moved it somewhere safe. I hear that our Genius was taken to a great place of learning in Luguvalium; a suitable home. He was no great work of art but the local masons did their best."

Flavius Vibianus, tribune of the cohort and commander of Numerus Maurorum Aureliorum. (Imagined reflections)

St Michael's Church. Burgh-by-Sands

Built in the 12th century, on the site of the Roman fort and from its stones, the fortified tower provided refuge for the villagers during the violent Border Reiver raids. The body of King Edward I, 'Hammer of the Scots', who died on Burgh Marsh in 1307, lay in state in the church and was visited by his heir, the future King Edward II and the Court, when for ten days the little church was at the centre of national events.

ABALLAVA ('apple' or 'orchard')

The village church marks the southern defences of the fort of Aballava at this strategic location. Antiquarian William Camden observed in the late 16th century that:

"The station has been a little to the east of the church, near what they called the old castle, where there are the manifest remains of its ramparts...it was very proper to have a station at each end of the marsh, which, if the water flowed as high as some believe, would at that time make a kind of bay; and then the station here, and the next at Drumburgh castle, would be the more necessary."



Drawn by RG Collingwood, 1936.

The fort was garrisoned by units from across the Roman world, including the Numerus Maurorum Aureliorum from North Africa. An altarstone found nearby, dated AD 253-258, says:

"To Jupiter, Best and Greatest, and to the Divinities of the two Emperors and the Genius of the unit of Aurelian Moors, Valerian's and Gallienus' Own, Flavius Vibianus, tribune of the cohort and commander of the unit mentioned above, (set this up) under the direction of Julius Rufinus, princeps"

The stone was found in 1934, in the wall of a cottage at Beaumont. It is now privately owned.

The genius who lost his head!

A broken (headless) statue of a 'genius' was found near Burgh-by Sands in 1976. In Rome, a genius was a guiding spirit of a person, family, or place. In Latin, genui means 'to bring into being, create, produce'. Because great achievements suggested the presence of a powerful genius, the word came to mean 'inspiration', or 'talent'. The statue is now on display at Tullie House Museum in Carlisle.



Headless genius. © Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Trust, Carlisle.

Beaumont (Milecastle)

Course of Hadrian's Wall

Burgh-by-Sands (Aballava)

Hadrian's Wall Path