

A Song to Mithras by Rudyard Kipling, 1906.

Mithras, God of the Morning, our trumpets waken the Wall!
'Rome is above the Nations, but 'Thou art over all!'
Now as the names are answered, and the guards are marched away,
Mithras, also a soldier, give us strength for the day!

Mithras, God of the Noontide, the heather swims in the heat,
Our helmets scorch our foreheads, our sandals burn our feet.
Now, in the ungirt hour, now, ere we blink and drowse,
Mithras, also a soldier, keep us true to our vows!

Mithras, God of the Sunset, low on the Western main,
Thou descending immortal, immortal to rise again!
Now when the watch is ended, now when the wine is drawn,
Mithras, also a soldier, keep us pure till the dawn!

Mithras, God of the Midnight, here where the great bull dies,
Look on Thy children in darkness. Oh, take our sacrifice!
Many roads Thou hast fashioned: all of them lead to the Light!
Mithras, also a soldier, teach us to die aright!



Mithraeum at Brocolitia. © TOTF Archive.

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 ● Nymphaeum and Mithraeum found
- Coventina's Well discovered at Carrawburgh
- Chesters Estate purchased by Clayton
- 1500
- 1000 ● Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People'
- Oswald defeats Cadwallon at Heavenfield
- 500 ● End of Roman occupation
- Roman forts and Hadrian's Wall built
- AD 1 ● Roman conquest of Britain begins

Links:

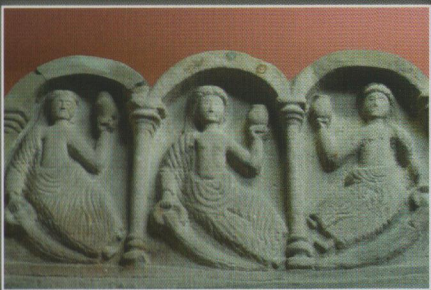
Hadrian's Wall Country: www.visithadrianswall.co.uk
Hadrian's Wall Path: www.nationaltrail.co.uk/hadrians-wall-path
Carrawburgh: www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/temple-of-mithras-carrawburgh-hadrians-wall/
Chesters Museum: english-heritage.org.uk/chestersfort
St Oswalds Church: www.dalbeattie.com/stoswalds-heavenfield

Cover image: Water nymphs from Coventina's Well at Brocolitia.
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Tales of the Frontier

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



No. 6 Moors & Marshes: Northern Spirits and Heavenly Battles

The fort at Brocolitia was a place of great spiritual significance. The Romans adopted local goddesses and created shrines and temples which continue to draw pilgrims today. Further east, the Wall became the focal point for a major event in the establishment of a new religion: King Oswald's victory at the Battle of Heavenfield. Was his choice to raise his cross and fight so close to the Roman Wall a purely military strategy?

Between the temples of Brocolitia and the church at Heavenfield lies the fort of Cilurnum within the Chesters Estate: the home of John Clayton, without whose intervention the Wall would appear very different today.

Follow the journey from native spirits, to Roman gods, and Christian saints in this inspirational landscape



BROCOLITIA

The Roman fort at Carrawburgh was partially excavated by John Clayton in the late 19th century. The name 'Brocolitia' was probably based on the original Celtic name for the area and may translate as 'Badger Holes'.

The northern defences now lie beneath the modern B6318 road - covered by General Wade during the building of his military road in the 18th century. The remaining ramparts can be seen as raised earthworks in the field beside the road. The line of the Vallum passes beneath the centre of the fort, showing that the fort was built on top of the Vallum and is therefore of a later date.

A small vicus (settlement) occupied the low-lying marshy ground south-west of the fort, where three temples have been found: a Mithraeum dedicated to the god Mithras, a Nymphaeum dedicated to local water deities, and a sacred well dedicated to the Celtic water goddess, Coventina.

Hadrian's Wall Path

P Carrawburgh (Brocolitia)

Nymphaeum - Temple of the Water Nymphs

Water nymphs were female deities linked with a particular location, especially a spring. Often, temples began as natural grottoes, perhaps considered the home of the local nymphs.

The shrine at Carrawburgh was discovered in 1957. The structure suggests that it was not intended to support a roof, and was open to the air. An altar with the same inscription on both front and rear, may have stood in the centre.

"To the Nymphs, a detachment of the Sixth Victorious Legion [dedicates this]."

Nothing now remains to be seen of the Temple of the Nymphs. The altar is currently on display at Chesters Museum.

Mithraeum - Temple of Mithras

The remains of a Mithraeum were discovered at Carrawburgh during a dry summer in 1949, when the owner's dog began digging in normally boggy ground to the south of the fort: three altars were seen protruding from the grass. When the site was excavated they were found to be dedicated to Mithras.

A Mithraeum was a place of worship for the followers of the religion of Mithraism, popular with Roman soldiers. Worshipers had a complex system of initiation with ritual meals. Temples often featured images of the god slaughtering a bull.

The restored temple remains visible today, though the altars are replicas. People still leave offerings.



Offerings © TOTF Archive.



Coventina. Woodcut by Robert Charles Hope, 1893.

Coventina's Well

In 1876 lead miners discovered a well at Carrawburgh. John Clayton (see below) quickly excavated the site which produced over 13,000 coins, 22 altars, vases, incense burners, and brooches - all gifts to the water goddess Coventina, who is shown on a stone carving dedicated to her by the fort commander.

Finding so many coins may have made Clayton a little complacent. At the end of the day's excavation he left them in a pile beside the well. Returning the next day he found a large number missing! Local farmers had pocketed as many coins as they could!

Around 3,000 very worn examples were melted down to produce a bronze eagle for the bookcase of Clayton's fellow antiquarian John Collingwood Bruce. The remaining coins were sent to the British Museum in the 1960s.



Coventina's Eagle. © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums.



Clayton excavates at Coventina's Well Watercolour by F. Mossman, 1878.

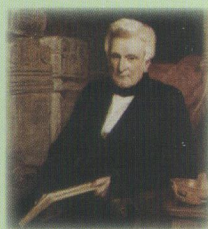


M Chesters (Cilurnum)

Chollerford



P Heavenfield



John Clayton © EH and the Trustees of the Clayton Collection

'The man who saved the wall'

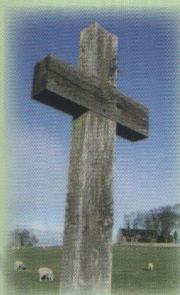
John Clayton (1792-1890) was a solicitor and Newcastle town clerk. He was also a keen antiquarian, and his dedication to Hadrian's Wall proved invaluable to its later preservation.

When John was four years old his father purchased the Chesters Estate, on the line of Hadrian's Wall, and containing the site of Chesters fort. John took a passionate interest in the fort, and in Roman remains in the nearby countryside. From 1834 he began buying land to preserve the Wall, at a time when it was being systematically destroyed by quarrying. He restored some sections and helped preserve that central stretch that includes Chesters and Housesteads, now known as 'Clayton's Wall'.

Clayton also brought early tourism to the area, establishing Chesters as an archaeological site open to visitors.

A painting by William Bell Scott (1857), on display at Wallington Hall is said to feature Clayton's likeness in the guise of a Roman centurion.

The Battle of Heavenfield



Cross at Heavenfield. © TOTF Archive.

This important battle was fought in AD 633 or 634 between a Northumbrian army under Oswald of Bernicia and a Welsh army under Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd, and resulted in a decisive Northumbrian victory. Bede referred to it as the Battle of Deniseburna near Hefenfelth:

"The place is shown to this day, and held in much veneration, where Oswald, being about to engage, erected the sign of the holy cross, and on his knees prayed to God that he would assist his worshipers in their great distress."

It is further reported, that the cross being made in haste, and the hole dug in which it was to be fixed, the king himself, full of faith, laid hold of it and held it with both his hands, till it was set fast by throwing in the earth and this done, raising his voice, he cried to his army, "Let us all kneel, and jointly beseech the true and living God Almighty, in his mercy, to defend us from the haughty and fierce enemy; for He knows that we have undertaken a just war for the safety of our nation."

All did as he had commanded, and accordingly advancing towards the enemy with the first dawn of day, they obtained the victory, as their faith deserved."

As a place of memory, Heavenfield is closely connected with ideas of the victory of the Christian religion in the early medieval North. However, it is important to bear in mind the influence of Bede's writing on later generations. The extent of any elaborations, changes, or omissions in his story - written around 100 years after the events took place - can never be known, and the exact site of the battle remains unclear.

CILURNUM

The fort at Cilurnum marks the point where the Wall crossed the River North Tyne. A succession of finely engineered timber bridges with stone piers spanned the river, and the Wall continued right to the water's edge. The remains of the bridge can still be seen, especially during dry summers when the footings of the western abutment and the two remaining stone piers become visible.

The regimental bath-house at Chesters is one of the most impressive on the Wall, and one of the best preserved examples in Britain. In another bath-house, belonging to the commanding officer, a fine statue was found: this bearded figure is thought to represent the River God of the North Tyne.



Chesters River God. © EH and the Trustees of the Clayton Collection

Course of Hadrian's Wall

2.5 km

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