

THE NORTHERN ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

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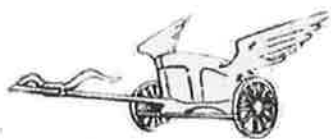


TEES AREA NEWS

An Update

by

Dave Shires



*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
(T.S.Eliot)*

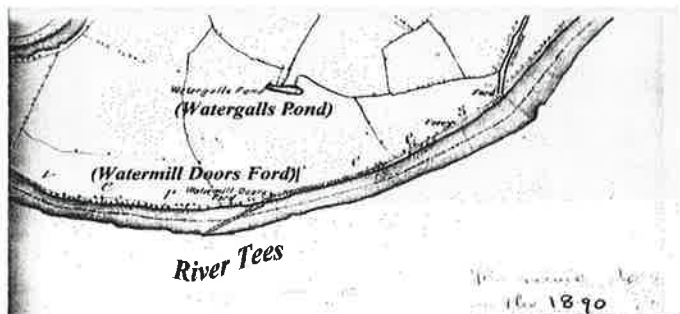
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I will start by saying thanks to Alan for writing last month's TEES NEWS when I had too many commitments to write it myself. I would also like to thank everyone at the last meeting for the warm welcome, and support during my talk. It can't have been easy having to listen to someone who was fighting the effects of a severe cough.

It is no easy task for Alan producing and editing our journal, especially when my contribution is always submitted at the last minute. Sorry Alan (yet again). This month for the first time I have logged the time spent on archaeology, the result is staggering, being in excess of 250 hours. Beaufort, my colleague and collaborator, has probably done more.

My main topic for this issue was to be the follow up to an idea that was mentioned in the last issue. However, eleventh hour developments impose a postponement so that my theory can be presented in the right context, and be able to stand the scrutiny it so richly deserves.



Extract of the 1890 map showing the Watermill Doors Area of The River Tees.

M.D. Anderson wrote a book entitled Imagery of British Churches. There is a statement within it that is both a caution and an encouragement that reads: "To assume certainty is to court disillusion, but to weigh possible alternatives is to achieve a richer understanding." This statement came to mind when Vera Chapman reminded me of Watermill Doors on the TEES. On re-examination of the map I daren't believe what I was seeing. A frantic checking session was on. First, was the need to establish if there was any etymological significance or evidence for either the dam or the neighbouring Watergalls Pond. The reply from D. Beaufort was amazing with two of the four words submitted

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that the stone wall took a different alignment to its turf predecessor in many places along its length. However, one must ask the question, 'Was the eastern half also originally in turf?' The explanation of archaeologists that the western half was built in turf because of lack of stone in the area does not really hold true because there is an abundance of stone there, which could easily have been quarried.

Another question is "How was the wall used?" If you wish to keep a people out, then one would build a wall similar to the Great Wall of China with no gates, but our Roman Wall was built with 79 gates along its length with a small fortlet built around each gate to protect it (or control it). These fortlets are known as mile castles and are one Roman mile (1620 yards) apart, accommodating up to 40 soldiers. In between each mile castle were two equi-distant turrets which had an upper and ground floor, but it would appear from excavation that these were little used. Built into the wall at approximately equal intervals were 16 large forts of about 3 to 5 acres, which housed infantry cohorts of 1000 men and cavalry 'Alae' of 500 men, about 15,000 men along the whole wall. Apart from the senior ranks, all of these soldiers were auxiliaries, not crack legionary troops. Evidence has been found of inscribed gravestones and altars of cohorts from Spain, France, Holland, Germany, the Middle East, the Danube, etc. Many of these troops would be Celts and could well have spoken a similar language to the native Britons.

To the north of the Wall was a massive ditch, except where it was built on the cliffs of the Whin-Sill which obviously made a ditch unnecessary and to the south was a military road, then a further south ditch known as the 'Vallum'. It would be logical to look on this wall as a controlled frontier rather than a straight barrier, especially when it must be remembered that the Romans still maintained a group of forts north of the Wall. In the event of an attack, signals could quickly be flashed along the wall and troops could quickly sally forth through the many gates to counter trouble. There are many interesting finds from Hadrian's Wall in the museum at Chester's fort and at Corbridge. Also the Museum of Antiquities at Newcastle houses an excellent model of the wall and a replica of a Mithraic Temple found at Brocolitia.

When Hadrian died in 138 AD, the new Emperor Antoninus Pius changed the frontier policy in Britain and after only 16 years occupation of Hadrian's Wall, it was abandoned and the troops moved north again to the Clyde-Forth frontier.

More of this in Part V.

Developers Problems

This is an extract from an article by Martin Weller, in *The Times*, 5th of April 1999.

London, like other British cities of any age, is a palimpsest of past cultures and their archaeological remains. Dig down a few feet and you are in another era. Pity the poor property developer, therefore, who comes across a priceless relic from our history in the course of business.

A couple of weeks ago builders on the Spitalfields development north of the City of London came across a stone sarcophagus. This was the last resting place of an unknown but clearly very rich and powerful inhabitant of Roman London and had been lying undisturbed, and for much of the time unknown, for the past 1,800 years.

Michael Bear, chief executive of Spitalfields Development Corporation, which is redeveloping the site, said this discovery, unlike some that developers have stumbled across in the past, was at least portable, so minimising disruption to work on the site, and could simply be moved to the Museum of London.

There are, in all 3,000 different archaeological remains at Spitalfields, including plague pits and Roman graves as well as the priory, and the site is especially rich for being outside the City walls.

Everyday Signs

By

Alan Richardson

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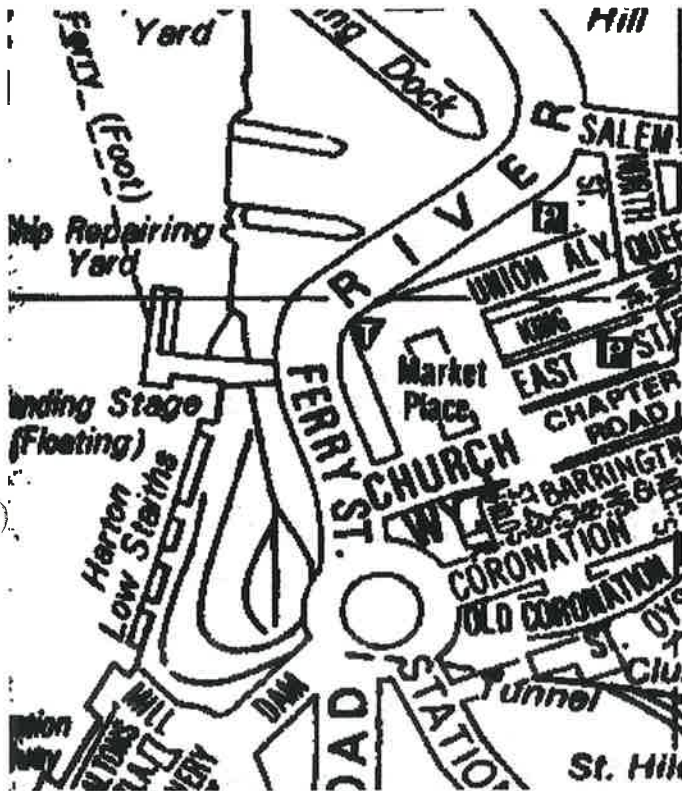
Every one of us passes hundreds of signs of our history, both recent and distant, every day. All that we have to do is leave our homes and move around. I live in an area that even I take for granted, but within only a half a mile radius of my home I am aware of the locations where there were three different collieries, the last of which closed in the 1930's. Within that same circle is a disused railway line (now a country walk), which was one of the first steam railways in the world. There is a very nice pub in the centre of the village where I live, although it is a relatively new building; it is on the site of an old coaching inn. It is the only pub in the village now, but copies of old maps decorating its walls inform me that at the turn of this century there were another three licensed houses with 100 yards of my home (sounds like heaven). All that we have to do is open our eyes and ask questions of what we see. All of this can be truly fascinating and I have only mentioned features from the last two hundred years.

With a little interest, a little more reading and some enthusiasm it is amazing just what else you can see.

I have observed some more ancient features in places I visit almost daily. In particular, I will draw your attention to a

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small area in South Shields. The Roman Fort at South Shields is always worth a visit, but it is not the only place with Roman evidence in the town. Looking at another part of the town, some distance from the fort, there are several tons of evidence just lying around. I am talking about Mill Dam.



Map showing relevant part of South Shields, with the River Tyne to the West.

Mill Dam, the name alone tells us something interesting. It seems that the name is derived from a dam and a mill that were once in that location. The main shopping street, King Street, is a straight line connecting the old market place with Ocean Road, which itself continues the straight line of King Street towards the sea front. Old records tell us that Ocean Road was once a river, which means that the Roman Fort stands on top of what was a large island, because that river continued all of the way through to the area now known as Mill Dam.

Mill Dam, as an area, is on the edge of the town centre, just upstream from the old ferry landing. I say old ferry landing because a lot of money has just been spent on constructing a new ferry landing, albeit that it is not yet open. There is a traffic roundabout at the junction of Mill Dam, Commercial Road, Station Road, Coronation Street and Ferry Street. Apart from the River Tyne itself (which is to the West of Mill Dam), the lowest area in that vicinity is the large public car park alongside Coronation Street. The car park must be very close to sea level and probably gives us one of the best clues as to the location of the old river between Mill Dam and Ocean Road.

Last year, when driving around the roundabout for the X-hundredth time, I suddenly realised what was left decorating its centre, as it had done for as long as I can remember (I was born in South Shields so I can remember a long time). There are several large blocks of stone. The roundabout has always been badly overgrown, but even so I observed several classic Roman features. Then, a little more recently, and for the first time that I can remember, the council had the roundabout tidied up. The stones were left alone, but the undergrowth (or was it overgrowth) was removed.



Just a selection of stones on the roundabout

In some ways I could not believe my luck, because the clean up operation allowed me a clear view of all of the stones and their features. Those features included Lewis Holes, typical chisel facing and drill holes. Several of the stones were incomplete, as though only recently quarried before being abandoned. The visible drill holes also expose the quarrying technique, which involved drilling a line of holes, not too different from the perforations at the side of notepaper, before the stone was split along that line.



This stone has clear drill holes on the side, showing how it was split.

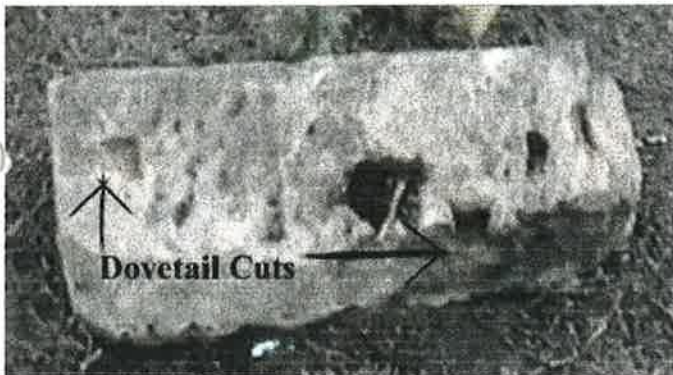
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This damaged stone still has a Lewis Hole on an upper surface.

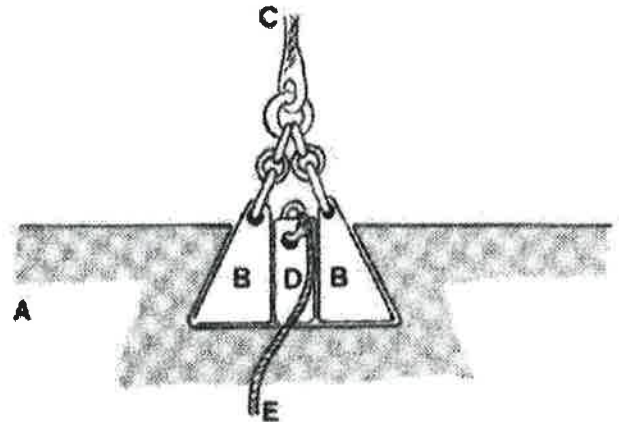
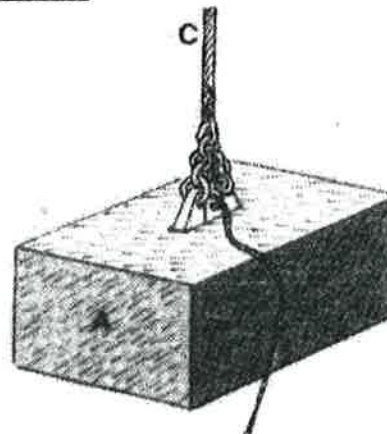


A car park stone showing a Lewis Hole.



Another stone on the roundabout, displaying dovetail cuts for locking to adjoining stones.

Lewis Holes



Much more recently again, while walking in the Coronation Street car park, I observed several dozen complete stones, many with visible Lewis Holes. These were bordering the flowerbeds at one side of the car park. These are substantial construction stones, measuring approximately one foot square in cross-section, but at varying lengths (some several feet long). I suspect that even these stones became visible when the council cleaned away the excessive undergrowth.



Some of the stones lining the car park.

Roman cranes often lifted heavy stones with "Lewis Devices." Two triangular iron wedges (B) and a spacer (D) fitted in a dove-tailed hole in the top surface of the stone (A). After the stone had been lowered into place, which could be underwater, the spacer was withdrawn with the lanyard (E). The crane-hoist (C) then lifted the lewis away and the process was repeated with another stone.

Diagram and legend are from *On The Trail Of The Legions*, by Raymond Selkirk.