

Roman Wreay

Roman armies reached Luguvalium, on the site of Carlisle, around AD 72 in the time of Emperor Vespasian. It was the most north westerly outpost of the Roman Empire.

The main Roman road from Voreda (Old Penrith at Plumpton) followed the line of the Petteril Valley and the present A6 to the east of Wreay. Remains of substantial Roman tile kilns dating from the 1st century AD have been found on the site of Scalesceugh Hall alongside this main Roman route. There were about 25 kilns in fields to the south of the Hall. One kiln was excavated in 1970-71 and pottery was uncovered which dated from AD 80-130. Tiles with the stamp of the Ninth Legion had been found in Scalesceugh in 1921.

Gold coins have also been found in the area. There were reports of Roman coin hoards from as early as 1762: 'WEDNESDAY, August 18. From Wreay, in the parish of St. Mary, Carlisle, we are informed, that a few days ago about 700 pieces of old Roman coin were found in a sort of trough in a ford in the river Petterel, near Newbiggen, in that neighbourhood, by some boys who were bathing. They appear to be of eleven different reigns, some very fresh, and some of them are 1650 years old. Many of them are as large as crown and half-crown pieces, and others the size of a farthing. They are composed of a mixture of brass and copper, and are sold to the curious at a pretty high rate.'

The excavations for the construction of Scalesceugh Hall uncovered quantities of gold coins and Samian ware. A coin bearing the head of Emperor Nero was found at Scalesceugh in 1844 and another in 1927. In 1994 a sesterius coin of the Emperor Hadrian was found close to the tile works.

A Roman signal station or patrol post was found in 1930 on Little Barrock Fell to the east of the main Roman road and a second station was excavated in 1951 to the south east of Wreay Hall, when 4th century pottery was uncovered. Together these two fortlets guarded the exposed road south across Wragmire Moss.

To the west of the River Petteril a Roman fort was discovered in 1953 at Park House Farm. Evidence was found of wooden buildings with clay floors. It is thought that these buildings, linked to the main Roman road by a track, were occupied for only a short period.

The warm yellow sandstone that we see today in Wreay came from Shawk Foot quarry, about ten miles west of the village at Cumdivock. The Romans had taken stone from the same quarry to build their fort at Carlisle. A gazetteer of 1847 explained: 'Free stone, of an open grit; another of very white free stone, of a close body; and a seam of limestone . . . There is, on a protuberant cliff, seven or eight yards above the rivulet, the following Roman inscription - *Legionis Secundae Augustae milites Posuerent Cohors tertia Cohors quarta*. The fact of this rock retaining an inscription since the Romans were in Britain, proves the durability of the fine free stone of these quarries.'

In Sarah Losh's day a Roman tombstone, decorated with pinecones, was found at Gallows Hill to the south of Carlisle. To the Romans it was a symbol of regeneration, fertility and inner enlightenment, a symbolic meaning that Sarah carved into the structure of St Mary's.