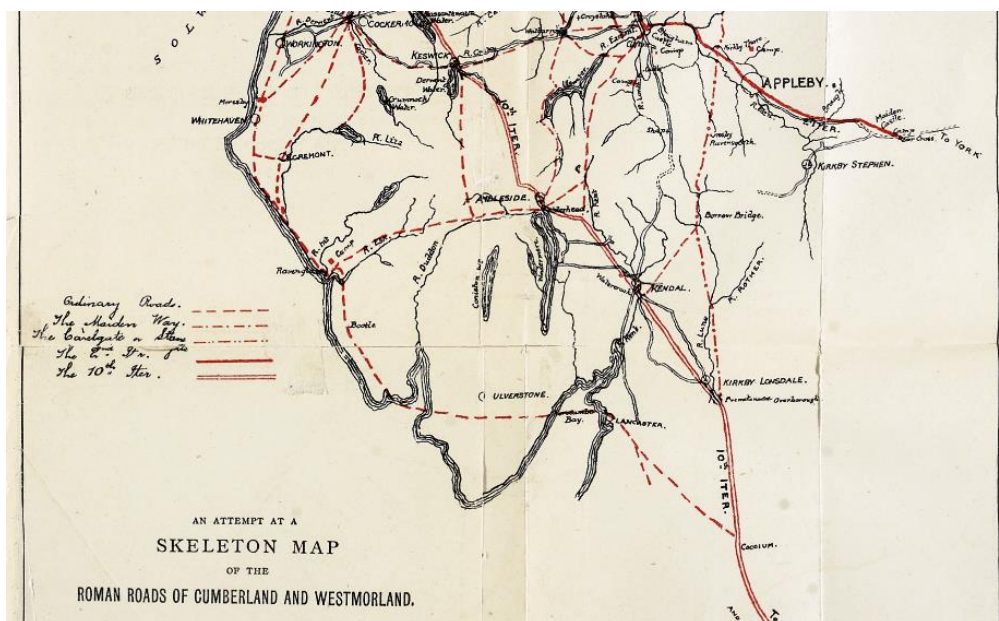


ROMAN MILLOM? Jan Bridget

Several historians of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were convinced there was a Roman presence in Furness and some believed a Roman road crossed the Furness peninsular at Duddon sands, landing in Millom then moved onto Silecroft, Ravenglass and so on. Ferguson in particular:

We must now endeavour to trace Agricola's good road. We find it in a road which starts from Lancaster, a place which is in direct communication by a well-known Roman road with Chester. Starting from Lancaster, this road crosses the Morecambe Bay estuary, entering on the sands at Hest (AEstus) Bank, and leaving them by Pigeon Cote Lane, near Wyke, in Cartmel. It next passes Wraysholme Tower and Flockburgh; at both of these places ancient paved ways, with associated Roman remains, have been found. The road reaches the sands again at Sandgate, crosses the Ulverston estuary, and lands at Conishead Bank, near the ancient priory of Coniston. From this point an ancient road, now called Red Lane from the traffic in hematites, but formerly known as "The Street," runs via Mountbarrow, Lindal, and Dalton, to Ireleth Gate, on the bank of the Duddon estuary. Roman pavement has been discovered at various places on "The Street," a name which generally indicates a Roman road (stratus, a causeway). Crossing the Duddon Sands, this road lands in Cumberland at a point marked by the site of the gallows of the lords of Millom, and by an old lane reaches Silecroft. From Silecroft there runs under Black Combe an ancient road, on which are situated the three ancient parish churches of Whicham, Whitbeck, and Bootle, and the old nunnery of Seaton. This road is also known as "The Street." Hutchinson, in his "History of Cumberland," calls it the "High Street as lying on an old Roman road;" and Denton, in his History, calls it the "common high street." If the sea-level were the same as at the present day, travellers from Lancaster and Chester by this road of Agricola would cross the Esk at the ford marked by the old church of Waberthwaite, and arrive at the great Roman settlement now to be mentioned. (Ravenglass).ⁱ



Extract of Ferguson's Map with suggested routeⁱⁱ

However, 20th century historians rejected these ideas. Elsworth (2007) examines both the early and later views and, utilising more recent finds, suggests there was, indeed, a ‘strong background’ presence in Furness during the Roman period and concludes, “The identification of a road across the Furness Peninsular obviously has implications for claims made of roads to the north, leading up the west coast, and south, across the Cartmel Peninsula.” He tantalisingly finishes his paper by stating the hoard from Millom Castle indicates good Roman connections then suggests Borwick Rails may be significant as it contains two Roman elements meaning burials, often associated with Roman sites.ⁱⁱⁱ

Since Elsworth wrote his paper there have been several finds, some of which are not in the public domain, whilst others are, most notably the stunning silver bracelet dating from 2nd or 3rd centuries A.D. which was found in July 2012 by a metal detectorist in Dalton and which is now in the Dock Museum.

The purpose of this paper is not to re-examine these ideas but to put together the different finds and sources that suggest a Roman presence in Millom with the aim of generating further interest and research.

The earliest literary evidence of any Roman presence goes back to a reference in the diaries of the Rev. William Stukely, M.D.^{iv}

Millom Castle. 18th April 1759. Sir Hedworth Williamson, of Monkweremouth, told me at Millom Castle, Cumberland, which was a Roman castrum, they dug up two great urns full of silver Roman coins, which they sent up to London, and sold by pound weight. – Diary, vol xviii., 46.

Within the Holy Trinity Church,^v next to Millom Castle, there is a red sandstone slab engraved with ANTEF:



Engraving from Holy Trinity Church, Millom

In his article, *Newly-discovered sculptured and inscribed stones at Millom*,^{vi} Warriner describes the find:

III. Towards the east end of the north chancel wall was found a slightly curved sandstone slag, somewhat weathered, 13½ inches by 15 inches and 4¼ inches thick. On one of the shorter side is incised ANTEF, the letters varying in size from 2½ inches to three inches. It has been inserted above the ambry niche in the chancel.

Mr. R.G. Collingwood writes: “The stone seems Roman to me. I think of CUR]ANTE F[LAVIO...The person in charge of a piece of construction is often mentioned in late inscriptions (say 3rd century), and the lettering here suggests a late date. Roman

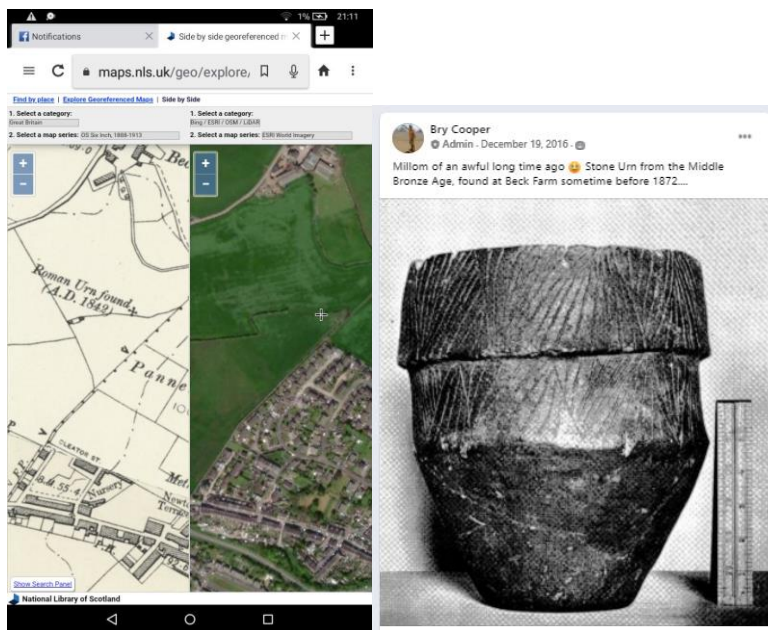
inscriptions cut on the edge, as opposed to the face, of a stone are fairly common. Having regard to the possibility of bringing such a stone from Ravenglass, I should not argue from it to the existence of a Roman site at or near Millom.”

A possible stone sculptured Roman head is held at the Beacon Museum in Whitehaven. It was gifted to the museum in 1976. The gifter had found it in or around St George’s Churchyard in Millom. At one time it was being used as a door stop. It is made of red sandstone and is 300mm l x 200mm w x 150mm d. The curator, Alex Milner says: “*The stone work and design has been seen as Roman but the stylised nature of the eyebrows has been used to suggest it has ‘Celtic’ influence.*”



Roman or Celtic Head, Beacon Museum, Whitehaven

It has been suggested that a Roman urn was found in a field in Millom not far from the Castle in 1842 (see below). However, investigations have not revealed the whereabouts of this urn. Indeed, local legend suggests there were two urns but the only one to be found in the investigation is one that is held at Tullie Museum which has been identified as a Middle Bronze Age urn found at Beck Farm some time before 1872:



Millom of Yesteryear

We learn about a Roman coin, in excellent condition, dating from the time of Claudius II which was found near Swineside stone circle, Thwaites, by Mr Oldfield of Silecroft in 1910. The find was reported in the *Millom Gazette* which states:

The Roman road from the direction of Foxfield viaduct passed by Swineside then took over Thwaites Fell, no doubt the existing road to Bootle and Waberthwaite being at least a considerable portion of it on the site of this old road. In a wood near Lady Hall this Roman road, with the pavement laid down when the Romans held sway in England, still exists. Another of these roads came round by the coast, and for some distance traversed the same ground as the present Millom and Bootle road does today.

It is claimed that this second road passed over the portion of the Duddon sands between Hodbarrow and Walney. If so, the condition of the road must be vastly different to what it is today. From the claims of old traditions, the feasibility of this road is quite possible, as in these old days the Duddon was understood to be only a sluggish stream, finding an outlet between Barrow and Walney. A very high tide, accompanied by a severe western storm, broke through the sand dunes, giving an inlet to the sea, which, as the years rolled by, made further and further encroachment till the large area now covered by the Duddon sands was converted from marshy land to an estuary of the sea.^{vii}

Moving onto 1916, the *Millom Gazette* tells us about a Roman coin found by Mr Coulton of Holborn Hill when he was visiting his family grave in the Old Church graveyard: It seems he thought it was a button but on closer examination discovered it was a Roman coin that had probably been turned up when a grave was being dug. It is a small, copper, coin with a head on one side and Latin on the other but other than this it virtually illegible.

An article published in the *North West Evening Mail*, 2011, says Mr. Charles Bailey (1925-2007) of Millom was helping out in a potato field near Hodbarrow, Millom, when he made various finds, including a bronze Roman strigil. We do not know when Mr Bailey made the find.



Millom of Yesteryear

Over the past six years Millom metal detectorist Duane Farren has found many items in the area, some of which are Roman. For example, three Roman coins,

Josh Carr, another Millom metal detectorist, has also made many finds in Millom including a silver Roman coin (Marcus Aurelius, emperor 161-180 A.D.):



Josh Carr

And a bronze roman trumpet brooch (75-175 A.D.):



Josh Carr

Both were found in 2020.

Another metal detectorist has recently found six Roman coins in Silecroft.^{viii}

Conclusion

If we omit the urn, the dubious Roman head and the Swineside coin that leaves sixteen pieces of evidence which suggest a Roman presence in Millom: the silver hoard, the inscription, six Roman coins, the strigil, a shield boss, five weights and a Roman brooch. This begs the question, what was the Roman presence in Millom? Does the evidence confirm a Roman road passed through Millom? Was there a mile fortlet in Millom? Was the castle built on a Roman ruin of some sort? Was Holy Trinity church built with stones from a previous Roman construction? Could Borwick Rails have been a Roman port or was there a naval signal station nearby?^{ix} Are there other features which suggest a Roman presence, for example, could the field behind the school next to the castle be a parade ground, or the interesting shape of Gypsy Field^x, across the main road by the castle? Does the bivallate site^{xi} add weight to a Roman presence? Does the fact that there were salt pans add weight to any of these

suggestions? Might the fact that iron ore has been mined in the area be an indication that the Romans would have been attracted to the area?

Certainly, the evidence we have suggests, at the very least, the need for further investigations. Who will take up the challenge?

ⁱ Ferguson, Richard S., History of Cumberland, 1890, London: Elliot Stock; p37-38

ⁱⁱ Ferguson, Richard S., A n attempt at a Survey of Roman Cumberland, and Westmorland; with remarks on Agricola line of March, and on the importance of the camp at Old Carlisle, and on the 10th Iter of Antoninus. By R. S. FERGUSON, M.A., & LL.M. Read at Kendal, December 11, 1876, Transactions, Vol 13, 1878.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elsworth D W, 2007, 'The "Streetgate" at Conishead, the "Castellum" at Dalton, and Roman Furness', TCWAAS 3rd Series vol 7, 31-48.

^{iv} Stukely, W., Rev. William Stukely, M.D. and the Antiquarian and Other Correspondence of William Stukeley, Roger and Samuel Gale, etc., 1883, Vol 2, p. 113.

^v <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnZEUTtqpq5xvLIKf9KgAjw>

^{vi} Warriner, Frank, ART XIII, Newly-discovered sculptured and inscribed stones at Millom, Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 002, 1931, Vol 31.

^{vii} Need date.

^{viii} Personal correspondence, Duane Farren.

^{ix}

<http://www.dockmuseum.org.uk/Romans#:~:text=In%20July%202012%20a%20fabulous,the%20Romans%20controlled%20%22Britannia%22>.

^x Go towards Millom for a few hundred yards from the castle, cross the main road and there is a gate and a lane at the edge of a fascinating field which goes down to Aggie's Lonning and towards the salt pans. On the maps this is called Archer's Field.

^{xi} Jones, B. The North West and Marginality Their Fault or Ours? A Warning from the Cumbrian Evidence, 1998, https://www.archaeologyuk.org/cbanw/CBANW_ANW_1998_90-95.pdf Bivalette: a pair of defensive ditches and earth embankments, usually concentric, that surround a mound or medieval fort.