

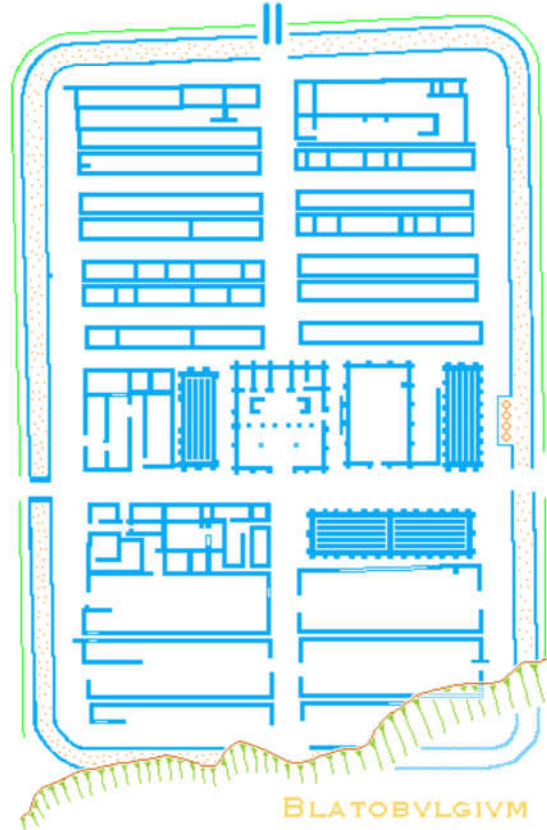


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## BLATOBVLGIVM

Roman Fort & Marching Camps  
Birrens, Dumfries & Galloway

NGRef: NY2175  
OSMap: LR85  
Type: Fort, Camp



Plan of Birrens Fort  
During the Antonine Period.

### Roads

- NW (9) to Ladyward (Dumfries & Galloway)
- Iter II*: ENE (15) to *Castra Exploratorvm* (Netherby, Cumbria)
- Military Road: SE (17) to *Uxelodvnm* (Stanwix, Cumbria)
- Military Road: NW (3) to *Bvrnswark*
- Probable road: ESE (4) to Kirkpatrick
- N (19) to *Raebvrnfoot*

The remains of this fort are quite impressive when approached from the south, where its southern defences, arranged along the edge of a natural scarp above the river are now covered in gorse bushes. The remains of stone-built buildings are visible across the whole of the interior, all beneath an overlying blanket of turf, except at the south-east corner, where several courses of stonework are visible; these belong not to the fort's defences but to buildings in the *retentura* or rear of the camp, the corner-angle itself having been lost to erosion. The extensive ditch system and entrance causeway is especially prominent on the north, and a scatter of shaped stones on the west rampart marks the position of the gateway on this side.



**The South-East Corner Angle**  
showing Roman masonry exposed by erosion



**The Southern Rampart**  
viewed from the Burn

The only classical reference for the name of the Birrens encampment is contained in the *Antonine Itinerary* of the late-second century. *Iter II*, the route from the Entrenchments to the port of *Rutupiae*, four-hundred and eighty-one thousand paces, details the journey from *Hadrian's Wall* to *Richborough* in Kent. In this itinerary the name *Blato bulgio* appears as the northern *terminus*, some 12 Roman miles from *Castra Exploratorum* (Netherby, Cumbria), both stations lying beyond the Wall of Hadrian.

## The *Blatobulgium* Fort

LEGIO XX VICT

The Twentieth [Valiant and] Victorious Legion (made this).  
(RIB 2114)

The fort at Birrens is known to have undergone at least two periods of occupation and was originally built perhaps c.80AD by governor *Gnaeus Julius Agricola* during Domitian's emperorship, or at sometime during the reign of emperor Hadrian, in either case by men from the Twentieth Legion (RIB 2114; not shown). The fort was likely rebuilt in the Antonine period during the governorship of *Julius Verus* (*vide* RIB 2110 *infra*), this time probably by the men of the Sixth Legion stationed at York (RIB 2112/3; not shown).

LEG VI VIC

The Sixth Victorious Legion (made this).<sup>1</sup>  
(RIB 2112)

1. The same text is repeated on another legionary building stone RIB 2113.

A lead sling-shot was uncovered during excavations at Birrens within a layer tentatively dated to the mid-second century, which likely means that the auxiliary garrison were trained in the use of this weapon, possibly at the suspected training camp at *Burnswark* nearby.

## Antonine Building Inscription

IMP CAES T AEL HADR ANTONINO AVG PIO  
PONT MAX TRIB POT XXI COS IIII COH II  
TVNGR MIL EQ C L SVB IVLIO VERO LEG AVG  
PR PR

Imperator Caesar Tito Aelio Hadriano Antonino Augusto Pio Pontifex  
Maximus Tribunicia Potestas viceni singuli consule quater Cohortis Secundae  
Tungrorum milliaria equitata civium Latinum [posuit] sub Julio Vero Legati  
Augusti pro-praetore.

For the Emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius, High Priest of Rome, in the twenty-first year of his holding tribunician power,<sup>1</sup> four times Consul, the **Second Cohort of Tungrians**, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, citizens with Latin rights, [set this up] under Julius Verus,<sup>2</sup> pro-Praetorian Legate of Augustus.

(RIB 2110; text restored; 157-8AD)

1. 157/8AD.

## The Dateable Pottery Evidence

Although there was plenty of pieces of South Gaulish decorated ware dateable to the Antonine period, there was absolutely no Flavian material.

## The *Blatobulgium* Garrison

### Legionary Units at *Blatobulgium*?

...VIII AVG ...XXIIPR

[...] the Eighth Augustan [Legion and] the Twenty-Second [Legion] *Primigenia*.  
(RIB 2116a; *Britannia* xxiii (1992), p.318)

There is one particular stone recovered from Birrens which is extremely interesting as it appears to contain the names of two legionary units not normally found in Britain (*vide supra*); the **Eighth Augustan Legion** is thought to have accompanied the emperor Claudius to Britain during the initial invasion in 43AD and was presumed to have returned to Rome in the emperor's train after spending a little over two weeks in the island, they are also mentioned on a military diploma? (RIB 2426.1; not available); the movements of the **Twenty-Second Legion *Primigenia*** in Britain are almost completely unknown, there being only one other stone bearing the name of this unit (*vide RIB 2216*), found somewhere in Scotland, which ain't very helpful.



The Western Gateway  
looking towards the interior



The North-West Corner Angle  
is the highest standing point

*Cohors Primae Nerviorum Germanorum milliaria equitata*

The First Cohort of Nerva's Germans, one-thousand strong, part-mounted

FORTVNAE COH I NERVANA GERMANOR M EQ

To Fortune, the **First Nervian Cohort of Germans**,  
one-thousand strong, part-mounted.  
(RIB 2093; altarstone; *vide sinistra*)



The first unit to be stationed at *Blatobulgium* was very likely *Cohors I Nerviorum Germanorum Milliaria Equitata*, a one-thousand strong mixed unit of infantry and cavalry originally formed during the reign of emperor Nerva (96-98AD) from among the various Germanic tribes. This unit is attested on three inscriptions from the site; an altar to the goddess Fortune (*vide RIB 2093 supra*), an altar to Jupiter Best and Greatest (*vide RIB 2097 infra*), and another altar bearing a fragmentary dedication to an unknown deity (RIB 2116.B; not shown).



I O M COH I NERVANA GERMANOR M EQ CVI PRAEEST L FAENIVS FELIX TRIB

To Jupiter Best and Greatest, the **First Nervian Cohort of Germans**, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, under the command of the Tribune Lucius Faenius Felix (set this up).

(RIB 2097; altarstone)

This unit is also attested on an undated altar (RIB 2041) at **ABALLAVA** (Burgh-by-Sands, Cumbria), and on another undated altar to *Cocidius* (RIB 966) discovered at **CASTRA EXPLORATORVM** (Netherby, Cumbria) which may also allude to another posting at **FANVM COCIDI** (Bewcastle, Cumbria).

*Cohors Secundae Tungrorum Milliaria Equitata*  
The Second Cohort of *Tungri*, one-thousand strong, part-mounted

The second, and most frequently attested unit to be stationed at Birrens were the Second Cohort of Tungrians, a one-thousand strong part-mounted unit, originally recruited from amongst the Tungri tribe of Eastern Belgium. The name of this unit is recorded on no less than nine out of the twenty-four inscriptions so far recovered from the site.

DISCIP AVG COH II TVNGR MIL EQ C L

To Majestic Discipline, the **Second Cohort of Tungrians**, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, citizens with Latin rights (set this up).

(RIB 2092; altarstone)

This unit was probably in residence for a number of years, and, following losses due to battle or retirement, the garrison had to be bolstered by the addition of several small groups of Germanic tribesmen; many of whom brought their own peculiar deities to the Birrens fort.

MARTI ET VICTORIAE AVG C RAETI MILIT IN COH II TVNGR CVI PRAEEST SILVIUS AVSPEX PRAEF VSLM

To Mars and the Victory of the Emperor, the Raetian<sup>1</sup> tribesmen serving in the **Second Cohort of Tungrians** commanded by the Prefect Silvius Auspex willingly and deservedly fulfilled their vow.

(RIB 2100; altarstone)

1. The province of *Raetia* lay in the region of modern Austria.

DEAE RICAGVM BEDAE PAGVS VELLAVS MILIT COH II TVNG VSLM

To the goddess *Ricagambeda*,<sup>1</sup> (the tribesmen) of the district of Vella serving in the **Second Cohort of Tungrians** willingly and deservedly fulfilled their vow.

(RIB 2107; altarstone)

1. Otherwise unknown.

DEAE VIRADECTHI PAGVS CONDRVSTIS MILIT IN COH II TVNGROR SVB SILVIO AVSPICE PRAEF

To the goddess *Viradecthis*,<sup>1</sup> (the tribesmen) of the Condrustian district serving in the **Second Cohort of Tungrians** under the Prefect Silvius Auspex (set this up).

(RIB 2108; altarstone)

1. Likewise unknown.

The Second Cohort of Tungrians is also recorded on several altars at **Castlesteads** on Hadrian's Wall, including at least one with the suffix *Gordiana* (RIB 1983), dated 241AD.

## Other Deities Worshipped in *Blatobulgium*

DEAE MINERVAE COH II TVNGRORVM MIL EQ

To the goddess **Minerva**,<sup>1</sup> the Second Cohort of Tungrians, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, citizens with Latin rights, under their commander, the Prefect Gaius Silius Auspex (set this up).

(RIB 2104; altarstone)

1. The Roman goddess of wisdom, war and the liberal arts, equates with Greek *Athene*.

BRIGANTIAE S AMANDVS ARCITECTVS EX IMPERIO IMP F

To **Brigantia**,<sup>1</sup> Sextus Amandus, former Imperial Architect, faithful to the emperor (set this up).

(RIB 2091; altar bearing statuette in relief)

1. A native goddess, patron of the Brigantes tribe from the north-east of England.

DIB DEABQ OMNIB FRUMENTIVS MIL COH II TVNGR

To the Gods [and] to the Goddesses, for all of the *Frumentarii*<sup>1</sup>  
serving in the Second Cohort of Tungrians.

(RIB 2109; altarstone)

1. The *frumentarius* was a junior officer in charge of the military grain supply. Their duties led them far and wide in search of grain, and they were often skilled linguists, which led to their being used in clandestine operations towards the end of the empire.

PRIAPI MENTVLA

For the penis of Priapus.<sup>1</sup>

(RIB 2109; bu -sandstone slab bearing image of horned god)

1. The Roman god of male fertility.

## Other Roman Military Sites in the Area

There are several temporary camps in the neighbourhood of the *Blatobulgium* fort; 4 around **Birrens** itself (NY2174), 2 more at **Middlebie** nearby (NY2076) and a further 2 at **Kirkpatrick-Fleming** (NY2870) a short way along the road to the south-east. There is also a Roman fortlet and 2 practice works at **Burnswark** a little distance along the road to the north-west.

See: *Chronicle of the Roman Emperors* by Chris Scarre (Thames & Hudson, London, 1995);

*The Roman Occupations of Scotland* by B.R. Hartley in *Britannia* iii (1972) pp.1-55;

*The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* by R.G. Collingwood and R.P. Wright (Oxford 1965);

All English translations, including any inherent mistakes, are my own. [GoodumnuS](#)

