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CASTRA EXPLORATORVM

Hadrianic Outpost Fort & Minor Settlement

Netherby, Cumbria

NGRef: NY396716

OSMap: LR85

Type: Fort, Minor Settlement

Roads

Iter II: WSW (15) to *Blatobulgivm* (Dumfries & Galloway)

Possible Road: N (7.5) to *Broomholm* (Dumfries & Galloway)

S (8) to *Uxelodvnm* (Stanwix, Cumbria)

possible early road: SE (10) to *Old Chvrch* (Cumbria)

Castra Exploratorum - The Camp of the Scouts

Mentioned only in the *Antonine Itinerary*, the identification of Netherby with the *Castra Exploratorum* of *Iter II* is nonetheless fairly certain. This station occurs near the start of the second itinerary, where it is recorded between *Blatobulgium* (Birrens, Dumfries & Galloway) the northern *terminus* of *Iter II* and *Lugvalium* (Carlisle, Cumbria). The recorded distance from Netherby to both of these posting-stations is the same, namely twenty-two Roman miles, however, this does not fit the actual measured distances very well at all, though it is feasible that at the time the *Antonine Itinerary* was produced, the Roman road between Netherby and Carlisle took a dog-leg east along the *Stanegate* to *Old Church*, in order perhaps to avoid the marshes of the Solway Estuary.

The name *Castra Exploratorum* is easily translated as the Fort or Camp of the *Exploratores*. These were part-mounted auxiliary units recruited from among tribes noted for their tracking and hunting skills, and used primarily to reconnoitre enemy territory, akin to the Scouting service of colonial America.

The Roman Outpost Fort(s)

N.G.Ref	Dimensions	Area
NY 3965 7162	unknown	c. 7½ acres? (c. 3 ha?)

The site of the Netherby Roman fort is now completely obliterated by the monumental living-quarters and landscaped gardens of Netherby Hall, a 15th century Tower House which is thought to have been built directly upon the site of the fort's principal buildings, re-using a large quantity of Roman construction material within the fabric of its own seven-foot-thick stone walls. Over the years, extensions to the original mansion house and additional outbuildings such as the coach-house, stables, ice-house, coop-house and outlying gardens and orchards, have gradually removed all trace of Roman occupation.

Despite the lack of physical evidence concerning the dimensions and alignment of the fort's defenses, we may make deductions based on the type of garrison units it is known to have housed; it would appear from recovered inscriptions that the site must have seen at least two military encampments and we may postulate at least two others. The first recorded garrison was *Cohors I Nervanorum*, a five-hundred strong regiment of foot-soldiers which was probably stationed here c.125AD and would have required a fort of about 3 to 4 acres (c. 1.2 - 1.6 ha); the later resident unit, *Cohors I Hispanorum*, comprised a nominal one-thousand men and about three-hundred horses, which would require an occupation area of anything between 6 to 9 acres (c. 2.4 - 3.6 ha), depending on the frugality or generosity of the living-quarters within its defenses.

It is generally assumed that the known Hadrianic occupation of the site was probably preceded by an earlier establishment during the **Agricolan Campaigns** c.80AD, but the strength and composition of the garrison at this time remains unknown and, indeed, unproven. The location of the associated settlement, in the area to the north-west of the fort, implies that the original camp probably faced in this direction, across the Esk into Dumfries & Galloway. It should also be noted that the Roman name for the site, **The Fort of the Scouts**, itself implies a very small mounted garrison unit during the late-Roman period, perhaps *numerus* or a *cuneus*, which again points to another, much smaller fort or fortlet on the site.

The Builders of the Netherby Forts

Legio Secundae Augusta The Second Augustan Legion

IMP CAE TRA HADRIANO AVG LEG II AVG FEC

For the emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus,
the Second Augustan Legion made this.

(RIB 974; dated: 117-38AD)

The inscription above shows that major building work was undertaken by *Legio Secundae Augusta* at the Camp of the Scouts sometime during the reign of emperor Hadrian. It has been suggested that *Castra Exploratorum* along with other forts positioned at *Fanum Cocidi* (Bewcastle, Cumbria) and *Blatobulgium* (Birrens, Dumfries & Galloway) perhaps acted as a forward buffer zone to protect against native attacks aimed at the construction parties on the curtain wall itself. All of these forts lie about half a days march north of **Hadrian's Wall**, and likely all date to the early Hadrianic period (*vide* RIB 995; **Bewcastle**). The **Second Legion** is also known to have provided manpower for further building work in the third century (*vide* RIB 980 *infra*).

Legio Sextae Victrix Pia Fidelis The Sixth Legion Loyal and Faithful

VEXILLATIO LEG VI V P F

A detachment of the **Sixth Victorious Legion**, Loyal and Faithful, made this.

(RIB 981; front of stone¹)

1. The margin of the stone also contains the legend LEG VI P F.

There was perhaps a further bout of construction during the reign of Commodus, as building work within the fort was dedicated to him (*vide* RIB 975 *infra*), perhaps by contingents of *Legio Sextae Victrix* whose work is also recorded (*vide* RIB 981 *supra*).

IMP COMM COS

Consecrated to the emperor Commodus.

(RIB 975; dated: 180-92AD)

Legio Vicesimae Valeria Victrix The Twentieth Legion, Valiant and Victorious

IM...ANTOIII PII SVSBS COS VEXIL LEG II AVG ET XX V V ITEM COH I AEL HISP EQ SVB CVRA MODI IVLI III EG AVG PR PR
INSTANTE ... AEL NI ...

For Im[perator] Antoninus Pius, forceful consul. Detachments of the **Second Augustan Legion**, the **Twentieth Valeria Victrix** and the **First Cohort of Aelian Spaniards**, part-mounted, during the administration of Modius Julius,¹ pro-praetorian legate of the emperor, in the presence of [the prefect] Aelius Ni[...].

(RIB 980; text recut² and unreliable; dated: c.215-20AD)

1. *Modius Julianus* was the governor of Britain by 219AD.
2. The only surviving original text occurs on line 10, and reads: ...IO TEMPLVM.

Further work was perhaps undertaken by *Cohors I Hispanorum* who left four datable inscriptions ranging from 213 to 222AD. A further inscription dated to c.215-20AD records the work of this auxiliary unit along with vexillations from *Legio II Augusta* and *Legio XX Valeria Victrix*, but the stone has been recut and the reading is unreliable (*Vide supra*).

The Garrison Units

Cohors Primae Nervanorum The First Cohort of Nervians

DEO SANCTO COCIDIO PATERNIVS MATERNVS TRIBVNVS COH I NERVANE EX EVOCATO PALATINO VSLM

Sacred to the god Cocidius, Paternius Maternus, Tribune of the **First Cohort of Nervians**, former veteran of the Praetorian Guard, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

(RIB 966; altarstone)

This unit is named on a single undated altar and were probably stationed at Netherby during its first period of occupation as a Hadrianic outpost fort. This auxiliary infantry unit was a *Cohors Peditata Quingenaria*, a regiment of five-hundred foot soldiers, who are known to have been stationed for a time at *Vindolanda* on the *Stanegate*.

Cohors Primae Aelii Hispanorum Milliaria Equitata The First Cohort of Aelian Spaniards, one-thousand strong, part-mounted

IVLIAE AVG M MATRI AVG NOSTRI M AVRELI ANTONINI ET CASTR ET SENATVS ET PATRIAE PRO PIETATE AC DEVOTIONE COMMVNI NVM EIVS CVRANTE G IVL MARC LEG AVGG PR PR COH I AEL HISP M EQ POSVIT	<i>Juliae Augustae Domnae matri Augusti nostri Marci Aureli Antonini et castrorum et senatus et patriae pro pietate ac devotione communi numinis eius curante Gaii Iulii Marcii Legatus Augusti pro praetore Cohortis Primae Aeliae Hispanorum milliaria equitata posuit.</i>
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To Julia Augusta Domna, mother of our Lord Marcus Aurelius (Severus) Antoninus (Caracalla), and of the Army,¹ and the Senate, and the Fatherland, for the duty and devotion of our common spirit, on the orders of Gaius Julius Marcius, pro-praetorian legate of the *Augusti*,² the **First Cohort of Spaniards**, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, made this.

(RIB 976; dated: c.213AD?)

1. The title *Mater Castrorum* and the following two titles are also confirmed on other inscriptions, notably one found in the *Forum Boarium* (the Pig market) at Rome.
2. Possibly the dual emperors, the brothers Caracalla and Geta, though the term *Augusti* may have been applied to Caracalla and his mother Julia, following Geta's murder in 212. This may account for the fact that Geta is not mentioned, hence the date given above.

This part-mounted unit is named on several stone inscriptions including five dated to the first quarter of the third century. It would seem that the regiment occupied the Netherby fort during the campaigns of Severus and Caracalla into Scotland between 208AD and 212, and were perhaps stationed there more or less permanently afterwards.

... COH I AEL HISP M EQ ANTONININIANA EX SOLO EXSTRVXIT SVB CVRA G IVL MARCI LEG AVG PR PR INSTANTE ...R
MAXIMO TRIB

[...] the **First Cohort of Aelian Spaniards**, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, Antonines own,¹ reconstructed [this building] from the ground up, under the administration of Gaius Julius Marcus² the pro-praetorian legate of the emperor, in the presence of the tribune [...]r
Maximus.

(RIB 977; dated: 213AD³)

1. This title was likely awarded for service under the emperor Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla during their British campaigns between 208AD and 210.
2. The propraetor *Gaius Julius Marcus* was governor of Britain c.213AD.
3. The RIB gives a date 214-16AD without saying why it is not 213. *Vide etiam RIB 976 supra, et RIB 1235 Habitanicum* (Risingham, Northumberland).

...IS COH I AEL HISP M EQ SEVERIANA [ALEXANDRIANA] TEMPLVM NVPER NIMIA VETVSTATE CONLABSVM RESTITVIT ET AD
PRISTINAM FORMAM CONSVMMAVIT IMP D N

[...] the **First Cohort of Aelian Spaniards**, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, Severus [Alexander's] own,¹ restored to its former beauty this temple which had recently collapsed though extreme old age. Completed for our lord the emperor.

(RIB 979)

1. The emperor Severus Alexander came to power in 222AD and was murdered at *Vicus Britannicus* (Bretzenheim, Germany) in 235. It is likely that this stone was dedicated sometime during this period.

The *Axelodunum* entry in the *Notitia Dignitatum*

Tribunus cohortis primae Hispaniorum, Axeloduno

The tribune of the **First Spanish Cohort** at *Axelodunum*

(*Notitia Dignitatum* xl.49; 4th/5th C.)

There is apparently some confusion in the *Notitia Dignitatum* concerning the Wall fort at **Stanwix** which is listed in the N.D. under the name *Petrianis*, after the garrison unit the *Ala Gallorum Petrianum*, even though its official name was *Uxelodunum*. **But**, ... there is another entry in the N.D. for a fort named *Axelodunum*, obviously, meaning the Stanwix fort, but listing the garrison unit as *Cohors I Hispanorum*, which is the attested garrison of the Netherby fort. In light of this, it seems likely that the N.D. entry for *Castra Exploratorum* was mistakenly named *Axelodunum*.

The *Basilica Equestris Exercitatorius*

IMP CAES M AVRELIO SEVERO ALEXANDRO PIO FEL AVG PONT MAXIMO TRIB POT COS P P COH I AEL HISPANORVM M EQ
DEVOTA NVMINI MAIESTATI QVE EIVS BASELICAM EQVESTREM EXERCITATORIVM IAM PRIDEM A SOLO COEPTAM
AEDIFICAVIT CONSVMMAVIT QVE SVB CVRA MARI VALERIANI LEG AVG PR PR INSTANTE AVRELIO SALVIO TRIB COH IMP D N
SEVERO ALEXANDRO PIO FEL AVG COS

For Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Pius Felix Augustus,¹ High Priest, holder of tribunician power, consular, Father of his Country, the **First Cohort of Aelian Spaniards** one-thousand strong, part-mounted, in devotion to his majestic spirit, now, as previously, the *Basilica Equestris Exercitatorius*² was begun from its foundations, built, and completed during the administration of Marius Valerianus,³ the pro-praetorian legate of the emperor, in the presence of Aurelius Salvius, cohort tribune of the emperor our Lord Severus Alexander Pius Felix Augustus, [sole] consul.¹

(RIB 978; dated 222AD)

1. The emperor Alexander Severus, who succeeded Elagabalus following his murder by the praetorians in March 222AD. He was the junior colleague of Elagabalus as ordinary consuls for that year (222), and was consul for the second time in 226 with Gaius Aulus Marcellus, and for the third - and last - time in 229 with the historian Cassius Dio (himself for the second time). It is very likely that this stone should be dated to the latter half of 222AD.
2. Literally a large hall for the training of horsemen.
3. **Marius Valerianus** was governor of Britain c.221/222AD.

When the above inscription was first discovered archaeologists and historians greeted it with great enthusiasm as it gave the actual name the Romans employed for the large riding-hall attached to the front of the *principia* in many auxiliary cavalry forts (see note #2, above).

The Gods of *Castra Exploratorum*

Over the years a number of stone altars have been unearthed at Netherby, some of which were dedicated to the familiar gods of classical Roman mythology although almost half over thanks to gods of Germanic origin. The classical deities are; **Apollo** the sun-god and patron of music, the goddess **Fortune** (*vide supra*), **Silvanus** the god of the forest, **Mars** the war god and **Jupiter** the leader of the Roman pantheon. The Germanic gods represented are **Cocidius** (*vide RIB 966 supra*), **Huetirus**, **Moguntus** and **Belatucader**. There is also one altarstone to an unknown deity (RIB 967; not shown), which has been considerably damaged.

Altars to the Military Deity *Hueterus* or *Vitiris*

DEO MOGONT[i] VITIRE SAN[cti] AEL[ius] SECVND[us] V[otum] S[olvit] L[ibens] M[erito]

To the venerable god **Mogons Vitiris**,¹ Aelius Secundus willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

(RIB 971; altarstone)

1. *Moguns* or *Mogons* is a Germanic mountain god, after whom *Moguntiacum* (Mainz, Germany) was likely named. The suffix *Vitiris* is fairly commonplace, though this particular combination is unique in Britain.

I O M V S L M

For **Jupiter Best and Greatest** [...] willingly and deservedly fulfilling a vow.

(RIB 969; altarstone; primary inscription)

D H V E T E R

To the god **Hueterus**.

(RIB 969; secondary inscription)

DEO HVETIRI

For the god **Huetiris**.

(RIB 973; altarstone)

Other Deities of Roman Netherby

Altar to Fortuna Conservatricis

DEAE SANCTAE FORTVNAE CONSERVATRICI MARCVS AVREL SALVIVS TRIBVNVS COH I AEL HISPANORVM M EQ VSLM

To the virtuous goddess **Fortune the Preserver**, Marcus Aurelius Salvius, Tribune of the First Aelian Cohort of Spaniards, one-thousand strong, part-mounted, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

(RIB 968; altarstone)

Altar to the God Apollo

DEO APOLLINI ... AVRELIVS MATERNVS PRO SALVTE SVA ET MI...IANANISA MA...VSLM

For the god **Apollo** [...] Aurelius Maternus, for the well-being of his family and Mi[lonia P]lanasia¹ his mother, willingly and deservedly fulfills his vow.

(RIB 965; altarstone)

1. The restoration of this name is entirely conjectural.

Altar to Mars Belatucader

DEO MARTI BELATVCADRO RO VR RP CAII OR V S L L M

For the god **Mars Belatucader**, [...] willingly, gladly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

(RIB 970; altarstone)

1. The dedicator's name is difficult to reconstruct, primarily because it is entirely non-Roman, probably German.

Altar to the God Silvanus

DEO SILV

For the god **Silvanus**.

(RIB 972; altarstone)

The Civilian Settlement of *Brocara*?

It has been mooted that the *Brocara* entry in the *Ravenna Cosmography* (RC#156), which appears between the entries for *Fanocodi* (Bewcastle, Cumbria) and the unknown station *Croucingo*, may refer to the civilian settlement outside the Camp of the Scouts; there is no corroborative evidence to support this. The *Brocara* entry in the RC is now thought to apply to the fort

at [Brougham](#) (Cumbria), which was named *Broccavum*.

Even though nothing remains of either the fort or its associated civil settlement, we are lucky in that the site has been visited over the years by several antiquarians, historians and amateur archaeologists who recorded a number of Roman features in the area. Stukeley reported that the mansion house was surrounded by the buildings of a Roman fort; Stukeley, Gale and Goodman reported that a Roman *vicus* settlement lay outside the north-west defences of the fort extending down towards the River Esk, where Leland observed monumental buildings and evidence of a river port, now silted-up. Stukeley also saw a Roman cemetery outside the fort, although he does not state on which side, but this probably lay to the south-east, farthest away from the settlement site.

A Roman bath-house lying on one of the side-streets in the *vicus* was discovered and investigated by antiquarians in 1732 but the exact location was not recorded. It may be postulated, however, that the bath-house was supplied with fresh water *via* the stream issuing from Friar s Bush and if this was the case, the baths building probably lay in the north-eastern part of the settlement just to the north of the fort, thereby to avoid having to convey the fresh water needed by such an establishment over the line of the road leading north-westwards into Scotland.

Tombstone of Titullinia Pussitta

The *RIB* records a single tombstone from Netherby which is, oddly enough, that of a woman, named Titullinia Pussitta (*vide infra*). It is possible that she was the wife of one of the unit commanders stationed at the fort, who would be the only woman (apart from domestic slaves in her household) you would normally expect to find in a military camp. The inscription however, does not name the bereaved husband let alone his rank, which would be expected if she was the wife of a senior officer.

D M TITVLLINIA PVSSITTA CIS RAETA VIXSIT ANNOS XXXV MENSES VIII DIES XV TV

To the Spirits of the Departed and Titullinia Pussitta from Raetia,¹ she lived thirty-five years, eight months and fifteen days. Farewell to you my wife.

(*RIB* 984; tombstone)

1. The Roman province of Raetia lay mostly in south-east Germany, extending into eastern Austria and the south-western part of the Czech Republic.

The absence of the husbands name and titles from her memorial indicates that Titullinia was more likely the wife of an ordinary soldier or perhaps even a native merchant, and as such would not be entitled to live inside the fort, but in a street-settlement or *vicus* positioned outside the defences of the camp. These small villages were normally located along each side of the road issuing from the main gate of a Roman fort, and the *vicus* at Netherby has been identified to the north-west, between *Castra Exploratorum* and the River Esk, where there was probably some sort of crossing in Roman times. The site of the 19th century steel suspension bridge, built solely for the benefit of the folk at Netherby Hall in order to attend the Church at Kirkandrews on the opposite side of the river, is no indication of the site of the postulated Roman crossing, which probably lay a little further upstream.

Castra Exploratorum Bibliography and Links

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

Chronology of the Ancient World by E.J. Bickerman (Thames & Hudson, London, 1980);

The Roman Inscriptions of Britain - Vol.1 - Inscriptions on Stone by R.G. Collingwood & R.P. Wright (Oxford 1965);

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www.pastscape.org.uk

ads.ahds.ac.uk

Link to maps of the area from: [StreetMap](#) [Old-Maps](#) [MultiMap](#)



