

ANNUAL REPORT: Ribchester Revisited 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Dr Sayer talks to a school group during lunch. Ribchester was visited by over 1992 people in 2017 taking our overall all visitors to nearly 5,000 in three years.

Ribchester revisited is a month long, residential, field work project that provides the opportunity for students to learn archaeological excavation and participate in a world class field school while working on and contributing to an internationally important site.

Ribchester is located in the Ribble Valley in Lancashire, one of the UKs most picturesque landscapes. The IFR field school took place between 14th June and the 17th July 2017 with students arriving on the Wednesday afternoon followed by four days of university based learning. The students were welcomed with a BBQ during which they got to meet the project staff, some UCLan students and the caterer, with whom they could discuss any dietary concerns. The project team was a manageable size and offered a really international experience with US, Australian and UK students and staff members. In total there were around 45-50 participants on the project that is – 20 UCLan students, 10 ANU students, and 5 IFR students, and volunteers but importantly each learning experience was supported by 13 members of project staff, giving the project a ratio of 1 staff member for every 2.8 students. The research and pedagogic learning aspects were led by Dr Duncan Sayer and Dr James Morris from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), Dr Ash Lenton from Australia National University (ANU), and Dr Matt Symonds editor for Current Archaeology. This year we were very pleased to welcome Vicki Le-Quelenc onto the project as a post-graduate research student, dedicated to Ribchester. Her

responsibilities include the project database, she first joined our excavations on the IFR funded project at Oakington, before working on the Island of Jersey on a 60,000+ coin horde. This year we also played host to visits from 14 local primary schools, and we were proud to welcome for a third year running, the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) young archaeologist prize winners, who won a national competition to join us for the day. Casey the first winner in 2015 was back with us this year as a volunteer for the final two weeks and plans to study archaeology when she finishes high school.

In the first three days of the project IFR students learned about Roman archaeology, archaeological recording techniques, and about Roman artefacts during the course of twelve hours of lectures and seminars focused on the end of the Roman period in Britain. The final seminar is structured as a parliamentary style inquiry, where Dr Morris, and Dr Sayer present different evidence of the decline and or continuity of Roman Britain. The Students are split into teams and are allowed to interrogate each presenter before coming to a conclusion. Did the Romans really leave Britain?

On the Saturday students undertook an expedition to archaeological monuments in Cumbria, to further their understanding of British Archaeology. This included Mayburgh Henge, a Neolithic monument, where students explored how the banks and ditches enclose the landscape. Castlerigg Stone circle, which is a standing monument set in the magnificent Lake District National Park. Lunch was had in Keswick, a small and very traditional English Lake District market town with stone buildings and a busy market. In the afternoon the trip visited Brougham Castle and Roman fort and were led by Dr Rachel Askew, a Castle expert who demystified the space and explained that Dungeon comes from the French word donjon meaning keep. Brougham Castle is special in having a Roman fort in the grounds, and at least one Roman grave stone is still visible in the castles construction. On the return trip we visited Old Heysham to see the Viking rock cut graves in and two 8th century chapels.

The excavation started on June 19th when the Taram protective cover was removed revealing a well preserved trench. Work started at 8.30am every morning and ended at 6pm with stops for lunch and tea. Dinner was delivered each evening by local caterers Janice and Wendy, who surprised us with a different dish every night, but the food highlights were Thursday evenings with the return of Matthew's artisan pizza, fresh and hand made to order for each team member. Over the course of the project we entertained 14 school visits and over 1,992 visitors, to whom the student volunteers delivered site tours. The archaeology stand at the UCLan Lancashire Science festival attracted enormous attention because it challenged visitors to build a Dolman. Additional public engagement activities included the Roman festival with cavalry, medical tents, infantry, arms and armor and of course an archaeology tent.

Evening activities included Tuesday night quizzes set by Rachel Askew. Wednesday night film night and late night film club, showed a number of excellent films. Research resources included access to the Bath House, Granaries and Museum, with the site data available on an up-to-date rolling database, photo archive and a modest library of books accessible by each student to help with their own research projects. Fourteen additional classes were organized during the excavation which included the weekly highlight – Justine Biddle's finds talk which was a much anticipated round up of the key artifacts from that week. Other activities included an introduction to identifying animal bones, also attended by Alfie the Ribchester cat, Dr Webster's introduction to Roman Pottery, Dr Lenton's surveying and geophysics courses, Don O'Meare's hands on environmental archaeology course, and Dr Sayer's weekly survey of progress and interpretation, as well as regular finds updates.

A highlight was Dr Symonds tour of Hadrian's wall, with a particular focus on the mile castles, and Birdoswald Roman Fort, a site which has been excavated in exactly the same way as the Ribchester site, with a focus on the granaries, barracks and guardhouse areas. Like Ribchester Birdoswald has evidence of large post-roman structures. Seeing this laid out at as a visitor experience allowed students and staff to put our own 30x10m trench into context.

The excavation itself was very successful taking our small finds up to 479, including 70 coins, and this year silver 2nd century coins from the Road. Other finds included beads, hobnails (enough for several shoes), crucible fragments, horse fittings and stamped pottery. There were 5,017 bulk finds including 1,683 animal bones, 48 fragments of Roman glass, 710 sherds of pottery and 445 pieces of metalwork slag, taking out total to over 1000 piece and providing strong evidence of late Roman and post Roman metal working activity. One of the key scientific innovation this summer was the 700+ samples taken from the workshop floor surfaces, which in a pilot investigation showed evidence of gold, lead and silver – suggesting prestige object making. We have high hopes for next season! A star find this year was made by Dr Sayer, who uncovered a seal box for sealing written documents, and evidence that below our workshop floors is a residence important enough for official documents to have bene prepared in it.

This year we identified a second unexpected threshold stone (see IFR video) which was either part of the door way at the entrance to the western guard house, or an earlier version of the eastern guard house door. Excavating the guard house floors in this year was a real highlight and showed evidence of how the floors had been patched, repacked and used. The environmental evidence was also fascinating showing domestic oats, a rarity in late Roman Britain and associated directly with Cavalry diet. We also 3D located every object from the guardhouse allowing us to detail the development of the these floors, a project which will continue into 2018. Over all the results have given us an unprecedented insight into the routines of Roman solders at the edge of empires, and end of imperial authority. The project was filmed for a BBC4 TV special on migration and the Roman Military.

Over all the 2017 season has been an important year of for project making real progress into the later Roman layers. The occupation of the fort by Roman cavalry is attested by their food and their artifacts. Most interestingly perhaps is the changing use of the Fort interiors with temporary structures and Fabrica workshops, taking over from important command buildings, and showing how versatile the Roman military was in adapting to their new situation and needs by changing their built environment. The seal box, and the trace evidence of gold and silver, point to a higher status environment to the one we expected and bode well for the excavation of a significant well feature next year.