

*EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY*



*Archaeological Assessment Report*

NEWTON ARLOSH AND SKINBURNES



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. Several counties have commenced such projects, funded by English Heritage, including Cumbria County Council that is undertaking the survey of the small towns of Cumbria. The survey is intended to provide an up-to-date view of the archaeological resource in each of the towns building on earlier surveys (e.g. Winchester, 1979) and consists of three phases: Data Collection, Data Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Collection, draws together the accessible history of the town, the archaeological knowledge and historic buildings data. The second phase, Data Assessment, leads to the production of a report which presents a brief history of the town, (this document is not intended as a definitive history), an analysis of the plan of the town, an assessment of the archaeological and historic buildings data, and an assessment of the impact recent development on archaeological deposits. This information informs the third phase of the survey and allows for the identification of areas of archaeological importance to be discussed in the Strategy Report.
- 1.2 The results of the survey are available in hard copy and as a digital database held by Cumbria County Council.
- 1.3 It is intended that the project will concentrate on the historic urban core of each town as defined by the extent of the built settlement as shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey (OS) Map **(Map A)**.
- 1.4 The primary sources consulted in the preparation of this report include the Ordnance Survey (OS) first edition maps and early plans held at Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle. Other documentary evidence, mostly secondary sources, were consulted at the Cumbria Record Office, Kendal and at local libraries. The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) held at County Offices, Kendal was also used. A number of secondary sources were consulted when writing the historical overview of the town.
- 1.5 New information is being added to the Sites and Monuments Record all the time, this study should therefore only be taken as a point-in-time exercise, the SMR should always be consulted for the up-to-date position for any query.

## 2. LOCATION & GEOLOGY

### 2.1 Location

2.1.1. Skinburness is situated on the north west coast of Cumbria at the mouth of the River Waver. Newton Arlosh is situated to the east of the mouth of the River Waver, on the Solway Plain.

2.1.2. Skinburness and Newton Arlosh lie within Allerdale District.



**Figure 1. Location of Skinburness and Newton Arlosh**

### 2.2 Geology

2.2.1. The solid geology of the area around Skinburness and Newton Arlosh consists of red, grey and green mudstones and siltstones with intercalations, forming part of the Triassic Mercia mudstone group (OS, 1976, Sheet 54N 04W, Solid Edition, Moseley, 1978).

### **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS UNDERTAKEN IN SKINBURNESS (Map B)**

#### **3.1 Event 25.01: Skinburness Chapel Site**

- 3.1.1. Archaeological excavations (unpublished) undertaken in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the south west corner of the field in which the chapel is marked, uncovered a large number of interments (cited in Grainger, 1902). The excavations were abandoned, but it is thought that the graveyard was still in use after the abandonment of the chapel in the early 1300s (ibid.).

#### **3.2 Event 25.02: Milefortlet at Skinburness**

- 3.2.1. An archaeological field survey was undertaken by Bellhouse (1954) in October 1954 of the milefortlet at Skinburness. Bellhouse had intended to excavate the site but as the field was then under cultivation he was unable to excavate. Bellhouse had used the aerial photographs taken by St Joseph to identify the location of the milefort (Bellhouse, 1962).

#### **3.3 Event 25.03: Sea Dyke near Skinburness.**

- 3.3.1. Lancaster University Archaeology Unit (LUAU, 1995) undertook work in 1995 on the sea dyke near Skinburness prior to work on the sea defences. LUAU hoped to provide evidence for the nature of the original earthwork and of any subsequent refurbishment (Fletcher et. al., 1997). A metallised surface across the top of the earthwork was possibly associated with the construction of the WWII pillboxes in the area. There was no absolute dating possible for the earthwork, which may have been reconstructed as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was, however, a possibly medieval phase identified at the north end of the earthwork, with a clear stratigraphic development and remains of a timber framework (ibid.).

#### **3.4 There has been no archaeological work undertaken in Newton Arlosh.**

## **4. THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

### **4.1 Placename evidence**

4.1.1. The placename Newton Arlosh (Armstrong et. al., 1971) can be split in two. Arlosh may be compared to certain Cornish place-names, Trelask etc; the second element is interpreted to be either the Welsh 'llosg', or Cornish/Breton losk, losc, meaning 'burning or a burning' perhaps with a reference to an area cleared by fire. The 'Ar' may be a British preposition meaning 'on' or 'upon' meaning a place cleared by burning. The place was called Newtown apparently because it was the new town established by the Abbey of Holm Cultram to take the place of the town of Skinburness, which had been destroyed by the sea. It was also known as 'Kirkebi Johannis' presumably from the dedication of the Church to St John the Evangelist, or 'Long Newton', to distinguish it from Westnewton.

4.1.2. Skinburness (Armstrong et. al., 1971) includes the word 'ness' or point near a lost place. Ekwall derives the name from a Scandinavian form of the Old English Scinnanburg, a 'demon or spectre haunted stronghold'.

### **4.2 Prehistoric Period**

#### **Key Points**

- ❖ There is no known evidence of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of Skinburness or Newton Arlosh

### 4.3 Roman Period

#### Key Points

- ❖ Evidence of Roman activity in the area of Skinburness where structures formed part of the Hadrianic frontier defences
- ❖ Little evidence of Roman activity in the area of Newton Arlosh

4.3.1. Roman remains in the locality have been well testified, and several Roman frontier defence monuments associated with Hadrian's Wall exist along the Solway Coast. Milefort 9 in the Cumbrian series is located at Skinburness, near the northern end of the Holm Cultram Sea Dyke. Aerial photographs have revealed a possible temporary Roman camp predating and underlying the milefortlet (LUAU, 1995, Beresford et. al., 1958).

4.3.2. There is also, to the south west of Grune House in the village of Skinburness, evidence of a small rectangular crop mark feature, which is visible as a hollow, parched outline, fronted on the north west side by a darker positive cropmark, which probably represents a former ditch. Much smaller than the nearby milefortlet, this cropmark could be an earlier military foundation of some kind.

4.3.3. Roman finds in this area include part of an inscribed altar dedicated to the Matres, found in 1866 on the south shore of Skinburness. Other remains may have been destroyed by the encroachment of the sea (LUAU, 1995).

#### 4.4 Early Medieval and Medieval Periods

##### Key Points

- ❖ Holme Cultram Abbey founded in 1150, established new boroughs including the settlements of Skinburness and later Newton Arlosh.
- ❖ Settlement moved from Skinburness to Newton Arlosh in 1304, following the destruction of Skinburness by the sea.
- ❖ Good example of a 14<sup>th</sup> century fortified church at Newton Arlosh.
- ❖ Area badly affected by Scottish raids.

##### *Core Settlement*

- 4.4.1. In 1150, Henry, son of David, King of the Scots, founded **Holme Cultram Abbey** for Cistercian Monks and gave a group the monks two thirds of the land of Holme. The monks colonised the forest heath and bogs which made up the north west corner of Cumberland and by 1175 had established five granges (one of which was Skinburne); the first record of a sixth at 'Arlosh' in a papal grant of 1185.
- 4.4.2. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the abbey at Holme Cultram became involved in expeditions against Scotland and a small port near the grange of Skinburgh was used for servicing the English fleets which had assembled in the Solway Firth. At the end of the century, probably instigated by the news of successful borough plantations in the south of the country, the abbot obtained permission to make a borough at 'Wauremuth', that is the mouth of the river Waver. The site seems to have been found impractical perhaps owing to flooding. A year later (1301) this grant was withdrawn in favour of a new charter for Skinburgh, present day Skinburness. This charter was revoked in its turn and replaced by a grant to a third borough, one to be erected at 'Arlosh' in 1304 (Beresford et. al., 1958).
- 4.4.3. **Skinburness during medieval times** appeared to be a place of some consequence. A small fishing town and later a bathing place, Skinburness had a market and a fair. Moreover, it was the chief place for supplying the army employed against the Scots. During the campaigns of 1300-1306 against the Scots, Edward I turned the town of Skinburness into a naval port to supply and strengthen his base at Carlisle. And in 1301 the Abbot and Convent of Holme Cultram were given the right to have a free borough and a market (Curwen, 1913). Also in 1301 the Bishop of Carlisle granted a licence for a building of a parish church to serve the proposed new borough of Skinburness. The chapel, St John's, was erected but had a very short life as the licence was cancelled in 1304 when the charter was transferred to Newton Arlosh. The remains of the chapel were still visible in 1703 when Bishop Nicholson visited the area (Birley, 1950). The transferral of the charter was due to the borough of Skinburness being destroyed by the sea, sometime between 1301 and 1304 (Holmes, 1880). The exact location of Skinburness in the medieval period is still unclear (LUAU, 1995). Excavations conducted early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the south west corner of the field in which the chapel is marked, had to be abandoned because of the large number of interments which were found. Therefore indicating that the burial ground probably remained in use after the chapel had ceased to exist and also suggesting that there was still some occupation in this area (Grainger, 1902 and LUAU, 1995).
- 4.4.4. Although no definite proof has come to light, it has long been assumed that the **sea dyke at Skinburness** was originally a coastal defence feature following the destruction of Skinburness in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest documented reference to the dyke was in 1570 when it was described as running 'from the now dwelling house of Robt Tayler att Skynborneys unto one place called John Askews hoole' (cited in LUAU, 1995).

- 4.4.5. **The settlement of Newton Arlosh** consists of two parallel streets, only one being metalled and in regular use, the second street forming a back lane. The uniform length of the burgess plots between these two streets still shows in the crofts. The church stands on the left of the principal street near the pronounced bend. The examination of the modern plan on the OS map shows that the settlement lay out is far from uniform. The plots to the north of the medial street range from 306 to 350 yards in length and from 40 to 100 yards in width. Those to the south are from 166 to over 350 yards in length and from 40 to 77 yards in width. Together these plots range in size from a little under one and a half to over seven acres (Beresford and St Joseph, 1958). The documentary evidence therefore, according to Keen (1999), points to deliberate urban settlement and planning with surviving topographical features at Newton Arlosh.
- 4.4.6. **The church of St John the Baptist** was built under licence in 1304 (Slater, 1998). The charter giving the licence to build the new church, transferred from Skinburness after the encroachment of the sea, does not mention either the flooding or the name of 'Newton Arlosh'. For some time the hamlet within the territory of Arlosk was known as Kirkeby Johan after the new church. A fresh charter of 1305 transferred the market charter from Skinburness to Newton Arlosh (Holmes, 1880 and Curwen, 1913). The church was intended to be defensible having a vaulted tower with a turret on corbels at the top, and originally only entered by a narrow doorway with a drawbar slot. A modest single chamber has small windows in the east and south walls (Cory, 1874 and Slater, 1998). After the dissolution of the monasteries the church fell into disrepair. The church was extended in 1844 when a chamber was added to the north side. The aspe was added to the east side of this extension in 1894 (Pevsner, 1967).
- 4.4.7. **Decline:** The decay of the borough can be attributed partly to the precariousness of its undefended border situation, and partly to the limited opportunities for coastal trade in north west Cumberland. Something of the uncertainty of the project appears in the words of Bishop Halton's grant of 1304: the depredations of the Scots have made it impossible for the brothers of Holme Cultram to work their own lands and a lay population has grown up at the grange of Arlosh; they may therefore build a parish church with a cemetery and a house for secular priest. 'But if', the grant ends, 'the district is depopulated, the abbey may then remove the chantry elsewhere' (Beresford et. al., 1958). On the Dissolution of the monasteries, Holme Cultram Abbey was surrendered to the Crown in 1538, as the abbey had held all the power in the area, its dissolution created a huge administrative vacuum. The manor became vested in the crown and remained so until 1693, when the local administration was gradually undertaken by a range of much smaller, more localised bodies of people (LUAU, 1995).

#### *Outlying Settlement*

- 4.4.8. Numerous traces of both kinches (salt extraction pit) and salt pans can be traced along the Solway shore, and their former existence can be traced in such places names as Salt Coote Hill and Salt Coats (McIntire, 1942). Varty-Smith (1913) describes the find of a 14<sup>th</sup> century pitcher north of Newton Arlosh, found after digging several feet down through 'layers of burnt clay, charcoal and salt-glazed clinker, proving that the place in which it was found was the site of an old salt pan'. The salt pans were leased to the abbey at Holme Cultram and the industry lingered on until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Martin, undated).

## 4.5 Post Medieval and Modern Period

### Key Points

- ❖ Small scale development in the post medieval period.

### *Core and Outlying Settlement*

- 4.5.1. Small scale development in the post medieval period led to the growth of the present day settlements at Skinburness and Newton Arlosh.
- 4.5.2. A World War II pillbox is located at Grune Point (SMR 4946). Known as a ‘Cumberland Machine-Gun and Anti-Tank Rifle Emplacement’, this design of pillbox is thought to be unique to north Cumbria. It features in the Inland Anti-invasion Defence list. The cairn was added later as a memorial. The features of the pillbox include: a central support pillar, an anti-ricochet device, concrete filled sandbag and embrasure construction ([www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/defence/grunept.htm](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/defence/grunept.htm), 2000).

## **5. THE TOPOGRAPHY OF NEWTON ARLOSH AND SKINBURNES**

### **5.1 Introduction**

- 5.1.1. Each of the identified components has been given a unique reference number, which relates to the associated map. For example, the reference numbers 21.001 and 25.001 are comprised of a town code (21 for Newton Arlosh and 25 for Skinburness) and a unique number, .001 for the medieval church in Newton Arlosh and the Roman fortlet in Skinburness. See Appendix A for a list of all components.

### **5.2 Roman Components (Map E)**

#### **5.2.1. Milefortlet (Skinburness)**

##### *Component 25.001*

The component contains Milefort 9, one of the Roman frontier defence monuments associated with Hadrian's Wall. Aerial photographs have revealed a possible temporary Roman camp predating and underlying the Milefortlet. The Milefortlet is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

### **5.3 Medieval Components (Maps E and F)**

#### **5.3.1. Chapel Site (Skinburness)**

##### *Component 25.002*

In 1301 the Bishop of Carlisle granted a licence for the building of a parish church to serve the proposed new borough of Skinburness. The chapel of St John's was erected but had a very short life as the licence was cancelled in 1304 when the charter was transferred to Newton Arlosh. Excavations undertaken in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the south west corner of the field in which the chapel is marked, had to be abandoned because of the large number of interments which were found. Thus indicating that the burial ground probably remained in use after the chapel had ceased to exist.

#### **5.3.2. Church (Newton Arlosh)**

##### *Component 21.001*

The church of St John the Baptist was built under licence in 1304. The church was intended to be defensible having a vaulted tower with a turret on corbels at the top, and originally only entered by a narrow doorway with a drawbar slot. After the dissolution of the monasteries the church fell into disrepair.

#### **5.3.3. Tenements (Newton Arlosh)**

##### *Component 21.002*

Due to the scarcity of early sources for Newton Arlosh, it is difficult to judge with certainty the extent of the medieval town. However we judge that it was similar to the extent of the town as shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1865.

## **5.4 Post Medieval Components (Maps E and G)**

### 5.4.1. Tenements (Skinburness)

#### *Component 25.003*

Extent of post medieval settlement, mapped off the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map. Documentary sources suggest that the medieval settlement was situated closer to Grune point and has now been destroyed by the sea.

### 5.4.2. Church (Newton Arlosh)

#### *Component 21.003*

The church of St John the Baptist fell into disrepair following the dissolution of the monasteries. The church was repaired and extended in 1844, when a chamber was added to the north side. The apse was added to the east side of this extension in 1894.

### 5.4.3. Tenements (Newton Arlosh)

#### *Components 21.004*

The area of post medieval occupation is judged to have remained the same as the identified area of medieval occupation (21.002). However it is not clear if any shrinkage of the settlement occurred in this period.

## **6. RECENT DEVELOPMENT (Maps H and I)**

*Recent development is defined as development that took place post 1945.*

There has been some development post 1945 within the historic core of Newton Arlosh, mainly bungalows and some farm buildings, which may have had a detrimental effect on the possible archaeological deposits. There has been very little recent development in the defined historic core at Skinburness.

## **7. LISTED BUILDINGS (Map J)**

There are no listed buildings within the defined study area at Skinburness and only one listed building at Newton Arlosh, St Johns church which dates to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Listed Building is represented on **Map J** and in Appendix C. The data set is based on the listing descriptions provided by the Department of Culture Media and Sport and its predecessors.

## **8. THE POTENTIAL OF NEWTON ARLOSH AND SKINBURNESS**

The primary aim of the Data Collection and Data Assessment phases of the project is to enable the identification of areas of archaeological importance within each town to inform the strategy phase of the project. The areas of archaeological importance are shown in the strategy report part D, **Maps E and F**.

### **8.1 Research Framework**

- ◆ The identification of the lost settlement of medieval Skinburness and the site of the chapel of St. John.
- ◆ The identification of the extent of the Roman fort site at Skinburness.
- ◆ The extent and full nature of the medieval settlement at Newton Arlosh.

### **8.2 Archaeological Preservation**

Limited archaeological work in Skinburness has revealed well preserved archaeological deposits. However no archaeological work has been undertaken at Newton Arlosh, however work in similar settlements suggests that there is potential for Newton Arlosh to contain buried archaeological deposits.

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MAPS

Enclosure Map, 1814, QRE/1/148 SR DBW/1

1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS map 1865

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition OS map 1898

**APPENDIX A**

**LIST OF COMPONENTS**

**Newton Arlosh**

<b>Component number</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Type of Site</b>	<b>Page number</b>
C21.001	Medieval	Church	9
C21.002	Medieval	Tenements	9
C21.003	Post Medieval	Church	10
C21.004	Post Medieval	Tenements	10

**Skinburness**

C25.001	Roman	Fort	9
C25.002	Medieval	Church	9
C25.003	Post Medieval	Tenements	10

**APPENDIX B****LIST OF SELECTED SMR ENTRIES**

<b>SMR No.</b>	<b>SITE NAME</b>	<b>SITE TYPE</b>	<b>PERIOD</b>
371	Newton Arlosh Shrunken Village	Shrunken Village	Medieval
3730	Church of St John the Baptist	Church and Pele Tower	Medieval
352	Silloth Milefortlet 10	Frontier defence	Roman
353	Skinburness Milefortlet 9 and Camp	Frontier defence, Roman Camp, Finds	Roman
359	Silloth Turret 10	Frontier defence	Roman
372	Skinburness Altar Find	Temple, Find	Roman
4413	Skinburness Roman Tower 9a	Frontier defence	Roman
4798	Silloth Turret 9b	Frontier defence	Roman
9608	Grune House Enclosure cropmark	Cropmark	Roman
345	Skinburness Chapel	Site of Chapel	Medieval
346	Skinburness Sea Defences	Sea Defences	Medieval
373	Silloth Coin Find	Coin Find	Medieval
17589	Skinburness Deserted Medieval Village	DMV	Medieval
15227, 15228, 15229, 15230, 15231, 3893, 15224	Silloth, Holm Low and Skinburness Pillboxes	Site of Pillboxes	Modern (WWII)
10209	Skinburness Pond	Site of Pond	Unknown
19206	Awl, Grune Point	Awl Find	Unknown

**APPENDIX C**

**LISTED BUILDINGS**

**Newton Arlosh**

<b>SMR</b>	<b>REFERENCE</b>	<b>BUILDING TYPE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>CENTURY</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
21772	NY15NE 2/22	Church	Church of St John the Baptist, licence to crenellate 1304	14 <sup>th</sup>	I