

THE Roman fort at Ravenglass (Fig. 1) has for many years excited the interest of archaeologists and antiquarians alike. Speculation about the role of the fort in the history of the northern frontier abounded (Birley, 1958) until Lancaster University's excavations in the 1970s (Potter, 1979). These excavations firmly established that the fort originated in the Hadrianic period and remained occupied until the very end of the Roman period. Since Potter's excavations there has been a decline in interest in the fort site and its environs.

The authors were fortunate enough to recover a number of Romano-British pottery sherds, which included plain *terra sigillata* forms Dr. 18/31 and Dr. 27, from the beach adjacent to the fort platform. This was followed by the discovery of a large fragment of *tegulae* sticking out of a block of soil which had recently eroded from the cliff face. On examination the *tegulae* fragment (Fig. 2) was seen to bear incised lines making up a grid, thus proving that this piece was in fact part of a gaming board. It sits well alongside other material recovered from the fort in the 1970s which included a sandstone gaming board fragment (Potter, 1979, Fig. 28, No. 73) and a complete set of gaming counters (Potter, 1979, 75-87). The present gaming board is, however, interesting as it bears traces of the "production process". The upper edge of the fragment is flattened and a very slight lip protrudes above the otherwise flat surface of the board. This lip shows that the *tegulae* had its flange removed before firing, suggesting that the piece was originally intended as a gaming board. The fabric of the fragment is similar to the description of the local "Park House" products given by Potter (1979, 118). We happened to show this small assemblage to Mr Tony Warburton, a friend and local resident. He showed great interest in the pieces and told us that his late father, Mr Harold Warburton, had found a number of Roman coins around the fort site and whilst digging his allotment at Muncaster. There were twenty-five Roman *aes* coins as follows:

1. AE *as*, Tiberius A.D. 15-16
Obv. [TI CAESAR] DIVI AVG F AVGVST [IMP?]
Rev. PONTIF MAXIM TRIBVN POTEST XVII S.C.
Draped figure seated.
Slight wear (*R.I.C.* I (Tiberius), 34/36)
2. AE *as*, Tiberius A.D. 22/3-26
Obv. DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER
Rev. S.C. PROVIDENTIA. Closed temple doors.
Moderate wear (*R.I.C.* I (Tiberius), 81)
3. AE *as*, Gaius A.D. 37-38
Obv. C CAESAR AVG GERMANICVS PON M [TR POT]
Rev. S.C. VESTA
Slight wear (*R.I.C.* I (Gaius), 38)

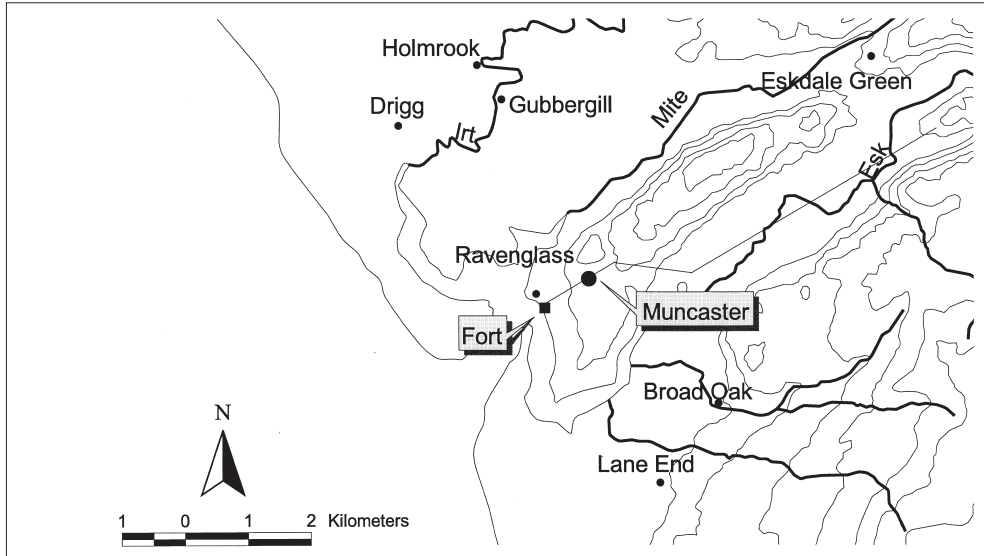


FIG. 1. Map showing the relationship of Muncaster to the local topography.
Map produced using ArcView 3.1 and Bartholomew digital data used under licence.

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| 4. AE <i>as</i> , Gaius
Obv. M AGRIPPA [L F COS III]
Rev. S.C. Neptune.
Worn (<i>R.I.C.</i> I (Gaius), 58) | A.D. 37-41 |
| 5. AE <i>as</i> , Claudius
Obv. TI CLAUDIVS CAESAR AVG PM TRP IMP
Rev. S.C. Minerva
Moderate wear (<i>R.I.C.</i> I (Claudius), 100) | A.D. 41-54 |
| 6. AE <i>as</i> , Galba
Obv. IMP SER GALBA [CAES] AVG TRP
Rev. S.C. Vesta
Slight wear (<i>R.I.C.</i> I (Galba), 375) | Late A.D. 68 |
| 7. AE <i>as</i> , Domitian
Obv. IMP CAES DOMIT [Illegible]
Rev. [Illegible] standing figure.
Very worn (Prob. <i>R.I.C.</i> II (Domitian), 247) | A.D. 84-96 |
| 8. AE <i>dupondius</i> , Trajan
Obv. IMP [CAES NERVA TRAIAN AVG GERM]
Rev. [Illegible] female figure standing
Very worn and corroded (Prob. <i>R.I.C.</i> II (Trajan), 382) | A.D. 99-112 |
| 9. AE <i>dupondius</i> , Hadrian
Obv. HADRIANVS AVG COS III PP | A.D. 134-138 |

- Rev. ANNONA AVG S.C.
Moderate wear (*R.I.C.* II (Hadrian), 796)
10. AE *dupondius*, Hadrian A.D. 117-138
Obv. [Illegible]
Rev. [Illegible]
Very worn probably as No. 9.
11. AE *sestertius*, Faustina I A.D. 141-161
Obv. DIVA FAVSTINA
Rev. [CE]R[ES] S.C.
Very worn (*R.I.C.* III (Antoninus Pius), 1128)
12. AE *dupondius*, Antoninus Pius A.D. 156-157
Obv. ANTONINVS AVG PIVS PP IMP II
Rev. TR POT XX COS IIII. Annona
Unworn (*R.I.C.* III (Antoninus Pius), 969)
13. AE *sestertius*, Antoninus Pius A.D. 145-161
Obv. [ANTONINVS PIVS AVG PIVS PP TRP COS IIII]
Rev. [FELICITAS AVG]
Very worn. Portrait suggests identification is correct
(*R.I.C.* III (Antoninus Pius), 770)
14. AE *as*, Lucius Verus Dec A.D.163-Dec A.D. 164
Obv. L. VERVS AVG [ARM]ENIACVS
Rev. [TRP IIII] IMP II COS II S.C.
Slight wear (*R.I.C.* III. (M. Aurelius), 1392)
15. AE *as*, Commodus A.D. 183-184
Obv. M COMMODVS [ANTON AVG PIVS]
Rev. [PM TRP VIII IMP VI COS IIII PP] S.C.
Worn (*R.I.C.* III (Commodus), 425)
16. AE *sestertius*, Julia Mamaea A.D. 222-235
Obv. [IULIA] MAMAEA [AVGVSTA]
Rev. [VE]NVS VICTRIX
Very worn (*R.I.C.* IV (Julia Mamaea), 705)
17. AE *sestertius*, Alexander Severus A.D. 235
Obv. IMP ALEXANDER PIVS AVG
Rev. [PM] TRP XIII COS III PP S.C. Sol
Very worn (*R.I.C.* IV (Alexander Severus), 541)
18. AE *sestertius*, Maximinus March A.D. 235- Jan A.D. 236
Obv. IMP MAXIMINVS [PIVS AVG]
Rev. [SALVS AVGVSTI] S.C. (In exergue)
Worn (*R.I.C.* IV (Maximinus), 64)

19. AE *sestertius*, Philip A.D. 244-249
 Obv. IMP [MIVL] PHILLIPVS AVG
 Rev. AEQVITAS AVGG S.C.
 Unworn (*R.I.C.* IV (Philip), 166)
20. AE *antoninianus*, Gallienus A.D. 260-268
 Obv. GALLIENVS AVG
 Rev. VIRTVS AVG
 Worn (*R.I.C.* V (Gallienus), 317)
21. AE *as*, Aurelian A.D. 270-275
 Obv. IMP AVRELIANVS AVG
 Rev. [CONCORDIA AVG]
 Very worn (*R.I.C.* V (Aurelian), 80)
22. AE *follis*, Diocletian A.D. 294-296
 Obv. IMP C DIOCLETIANVS [PF AVG]
 Rev. [GENIO POPVLI] ROMANI
 Moderate wear (as *R.I.C.* VI (Antioch), 44a)
23. AE *follis*, Maxentius July A.D. 306-March A.D. 307
 Obv. IMP MAXENTIVS PF AVG
 Rev. CONSERV-VRB SVAE
 Worn (*R.I.C.* VI (Aquileia), 116)
24. AE *follis*, Constantine I A.D. 307-319
 Obv. CONSTANTINVS PF AVG
 Rev. SOLI INV/I/CTO COM[ITI]
 Worn (as *R.I.C.* VI (London), 284)
25. AE Constantius A.D. 337-340
 Obv. CONSTANTIVS PF AVG
 Rev. GLORI-A EXER-CITVS 2 soldiers, 1 standard.
 Slight wear (*R.I.C.* VIII (Trier), 108)

The interpretation of a coin list comprised of stray finds is always difficult. Unfortunately the difficulty has been exacerbated in this case by the recognition that the coins derive from at least two sites, the fort at Ravenglass and an allotment at Muncaster (c. SD 31044966) approximately one mile east of the fort. However, we can be relatively secure in assigning the coins to these provenances as Mr H. Warburton did not drive or metal detect and was not in the habit of purchasing antiquities. Internally the collection supports the hypothesis that these coins were all local finds. Patination and corrosion on the coins is all very similar except in the cases of Numbers 8 and 10. Number 8 displays a bright green patination suggesting that it had been exposed to salt water, thus making a fort provenance likely. Number 10 has been the subject of some severe cleaning, probably with a household agent such as "Brasso". Thus there is nothing to suggest that these coins originate from

anywhere but the Ravenglass-Muncaster area. Indeed we might go further than that and suggest that the recovery of coins from a heavily wooded fort site, without the illegal use of a metal detector, is unlikely to yield the quantity of coins listed above. The digging of an allotment and the possible disturbance of archaeological stratigraphy might however. Thus it is possible to suggest that the bulk of the finds may have originated from Muncaster rather than Ravenglass.

If the argument outlined above is accepted then the first conclusion of this paper should be that there is a hitherto unknown site of the Roman period at Muncaster. This should occasion little surprise. The castle, church and associated buildings at Muncaster lie on the hypothesised route of the Ravenglass to Hardknott road (Fig. 1) (Richmond, 1949, 26-27) and a gold *solidus* of Theodosius I was recovered from the foundations of the castle's pele tower in the nineteenth century (Birley, 1958, 23). More speculatively we should perhaps note that the south wall of the chancel of Muncaster church contains a large number of red sandstone blocks of similar dimensions to those still to be seen in the walls of the fort's bathhouse. This might suggest the robbing of a Roman structure or structures in the vicinity in the mediaeval period. Finally, although the name Muncaster appears to have been attributed to the fort site by c.1610 (Birley, 1958, 15), an etymological study of how and when this name became applied to the Parish and castle site might also support the contention that there was Roman occupation at Muncaster.

Because of the problems outlined above the specific interpretation of the coin list is problematic. However, if all of the recorded coin finds from Ravenglass and Muncaster are discussed together a number of interesting points emerge (Fig. 3). In general Mr Warburton's coins complement the coin series from the fort site. However, there is a peak in the pre-Flavian period. Although these coins could hypothetically have still been in circulation in the reign of Hadrian their condition and the virtual absence of Flavian *aes* makes this unlikely. Twenty years ago Shotter (1980) noted this phenomenon in the north-west and suggested that:

Sites of the early 70s (that is, the governorship of Petillius Cerialis) would yield noticeable quantities of pre-Flavian coinage especially *aes* denominations. An Agricolan site, by contrast, would be expected to reflect a decade of more organized minting – in other words, the swamping of pre-Flavian coinage by current or near current coin. (Shotter, 1980, 6).

More recently Shotter (1994, 25-26; 1995, 74; 2000, 40) has argued in a number of papers that pre-Flavian *aes* represents the historically recorded, although ambiguous, involvement of Roman troops in Brigantia prior to A.D. 70. He further suggested (Shotter, 1994, Fig. 1) that the predominantly estuarine and riverine distribution of such *aes* represented the movement of troops to trouble spots by the *classis Britannica* (Shotter, 1994, 26; 2000, 40). The governorship of Petillius Cerialis, when Agricola was the *legatus legionis* of *Legio XX* (Shotter, 1994, 28), has been put forward as the historical context for this activity (Shotter, 2000, 39-40). It is possible that the coins listed above support this notion. It is widely accepted that *aes* production under Claudius and Nero was fairly minimal. This gave pre-Flavian *aes* a very long use life which causes great interpretative problems. On their own pre-Flavian *aes* can tell us little about the historical situation in Brigantia. However, the Muncaster-Ravenglass collection contains an *as* of Galba minted late in A.D. 68, the year of the four Emperors. The Flavian period, which saw a vast increase in the

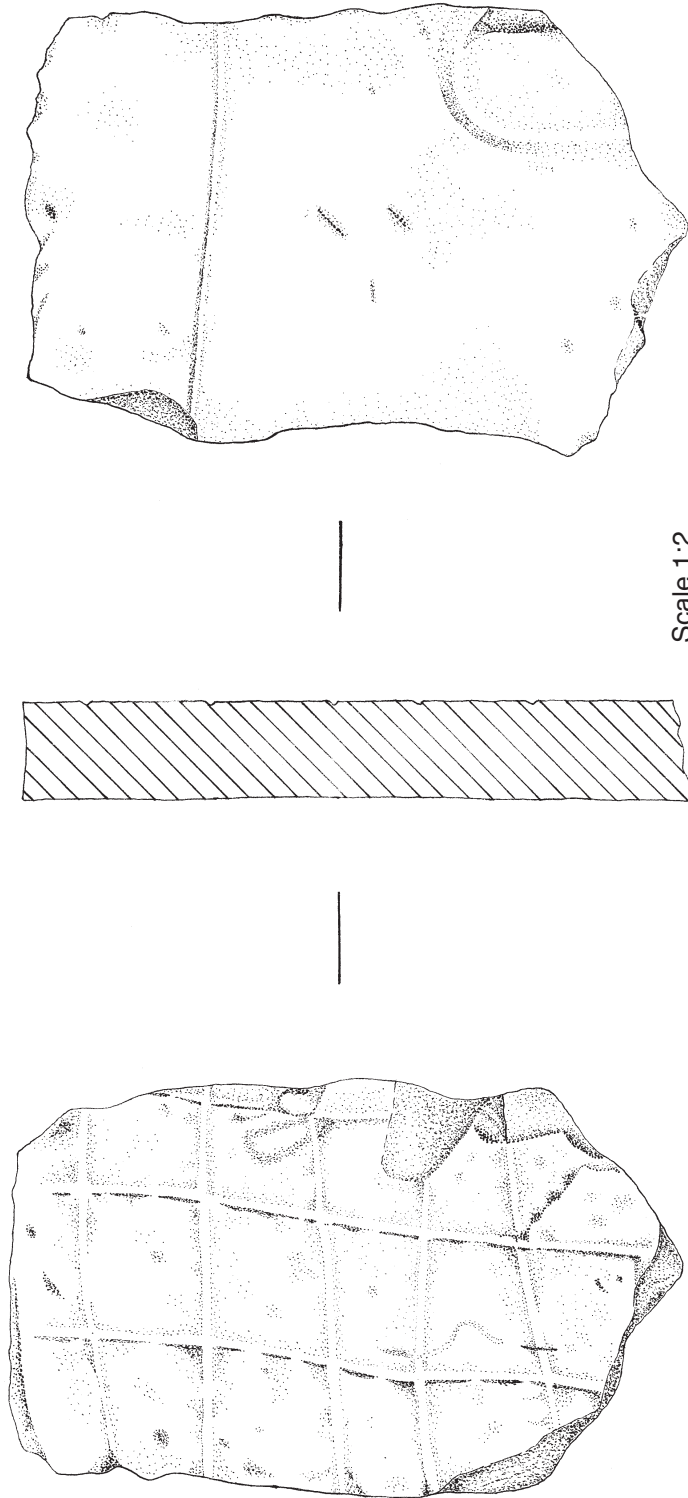


FIG. 2.

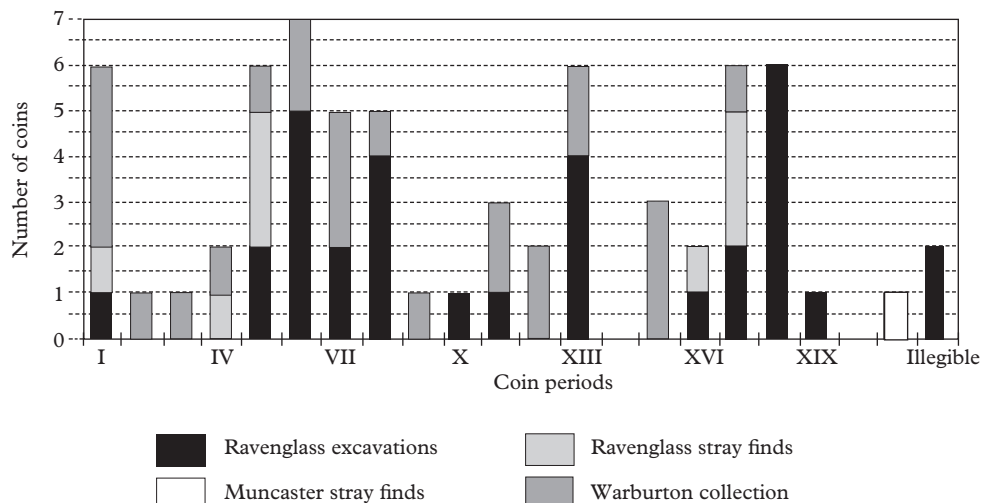


FIG. 3 – Bar chart illustrating the relationship of all known coins found at Ravenglass and Muncaster (Coin periods after Shotter, 1980, 4).
Data from Shotter (1979, 105; 1991, 274; 1998, 304) and above.

production of *aes* (Shotter, 1980, 6), is only represented by two coins, a worn Domitianic *as* and an *aureus* of Vespasian. The precious metal content of the latter and its recovery from the Hadrianic fort (Potter, 1979, 3) negates its historical importance while Domitianic *aes* is relatively common in Trajanic and Hadrianic contexts (Shotter, 1980). Therefore we might tentatively suggest that the slightly worn *as* of Galba gives a *terminus post quem* of late A.D. 68 for the Roman intervention in Cumbria. The virtual absence of Flavian issues could give a *terminus ante quem*. Thus Rome's campaigns in this area possibly took place between Late A.D. 68 and the arrival of Flavian *aes* in quantity, in other words the early years of Petillius Cerialis' governorship.

The presence of coins from Domitian to Constantius would suggest that occupation at Muncaster probably echoed that of the fort down on the coastal plain. The nature of such a long lived occupation, apparently on the site of some kind of pre-Agricolan activity, remains to be defined. Muncaster's topographical situation might offer some clues however (Fig. 1). The hills offer extensive views to the south and up the valley of the Esk. These presumably attracted the Penningtons when they constructed Muncaster Castle, and may have attracted the Romans before them. Indeed a military installation on the fell would offset many of the coastal fort's tactical disadvantages. Alternatively the road could certainly have attracted civilian settlement. Only fieldwork can resolve the nature of the Roman occupation in the environs of Ravenglass and Muncaster.

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