

Digging deep to uncover altars' secrets

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Archaeologists from Newcastle University (UK) are hoping to excavate an internationally important Roman site in Cumbria.

Led by Professor Ian Haynes, the team is focusing its attention on the site of a major discovery of Roman altars 140 years ago.

The site where the altars were found now forms part of the Roman Maryport site at Camp Farm, which is owned by Hadrian's Wall Heritage.

“The Maryport altars have been at the centre of international debate about the nature of religion in the Roman army for decades,” said Professor Haynes, who is currently waiting for Scheduled Monument Consent from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to carry out the work.

“However, we still know very little about the context in which they were originally deposited and this project represents a marvellous opportunity to further our understanding.”

Last year, the University worked with Southampton University on an extensive geophysical survey led by Alan Biggins, a Newcastle PhD student from TimeScape Surveys. This gave [archaeologists](#) a better overview of the site, but further excavation is required to help answer many more questions about the altars' origins. It is hoped work will begin at the end of May 2011.

Peter Greggains is chairman of the Senhouse Museum Trust, which is commissioning and funding the excavation. “The altars found by Humphrey Senhouse in 1870 are part of the internationally important collection of Roman sculpture and inscriptions from the Maryport site which is now displayed in our museum,” he said.

“It is very exciting that we can now revisit the site where the altars were found and, with modern methods, learn more about their burial and other activity in this area more than 1,800 years ago.”

Linda Tuttiett, chief executive of Hadrian’s Wall Heritage, which is responsible for the development of Hadrian’s Wall Country, added that the work was “an important step towards the establishment of a long-term programme of archaeological research and a key element in the development of Roman Maryport”.

The £10 million heritage Roman Maryport development is expected to attract 50,000 visitors a year and create 76 jobs. It is part of the development of the whole of Hadrian’s Wall Country over the coming years, designed to draw many more visitors to the north of England.

Provided by Newcastle University

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