

Archaeological experts uncover Roman temple

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An archaeological excavation team, led by Newcastle University's Professor Ian Haynes (pictured), has identified the most north western classical temple in the Roman world.

This is the third year of a five year programme of excavation commissioned by the Senhouse Museum Trust with in-kind support from Newcastle University and the permission of the landowners the Hadrian's Wall Trust.

Remains of a building adjacent to the Roman fort and civilian settlement at the site were discovered in the 1880s by local amateur archaeologist Joseph Robinson. The excavation this year has confirmed the building was a Roman temple from the second century AD, and information from the position of fallen roof stones is allowing a reconstruction image to be drawn. The building is calculated to have been 8.4 metres high to the tip of the roof.

Professor Haynes said: "We can confirm the stone building first uncovered in the 1880s was a temple from its shape, characteristically rectangular with an apse at the southern end. Foundations for columns at the entrance at the northern end of the building have also been identified.

"It is the north-western most classical temple in the Roman world.

"There is also what looks like a Roman military ditch beneath the temple

which indicates an earlier phase of Roman presence at the site.

"In the area just outside the temple Joseph Robinson found material directly comparable to the cache of altars found by Humphrey Senhouse in the 1870s 100 metres further north. From our previous excavations here we know these altars were re-used in the foundations of a large timber building, having been moved from their original position. Part of the Temples project is establishing where they were placed originally and it's something we'll be looking at again when we come back next year."

The site team includes fellow dig leader Tony Wilmott, supervisors Dan Garner and David Maron, community archaeologist Hannah Flint and environmental archaeologist Don O'Meara with a group of other experienced excavators, working alongside archaeology students and volunteers.

Rachel Newman of the Senhouse Museum Trust said: "We'd like to thank everyone for their commitment and hard work again this year, particularly our volunteers who have given so much of their time to the excavation and as guides to the site. We'd also like to thank the Hadrian's Wall Trust for permission to dig here.

"Work certainly doesn't stop when the [excavation team](#) leaves Maryport. Indeed, in many ways, the hard work begins then, as all the records made on site during the excavation need to be studied to understand in detail the way the site developed and individual structures were built. Finds also have to be cleaned and conserved, and then studied, and a report written.

"Lectures here at the Senhouse Roman Museum will be given throughout the year to allow both the public and other archaeologists to hear about the exciting findings."

Nigel Mills, director of world heritage and access for the Hadrian's Wall Trust said: "The fort and civilian settlement at Maryport were a significant element of the coastal defences lining the north western boundary of the Roman Empire for more than 300 years. They are also part of the world heritage site.

"As this year's excavation season for the Roman Temples project closes, we're preparing for a separate and complementary excavation exploring the civilian settlement adjacent to the fort and the temple area. The Roman Settlement project is due to start on site in August, subject to scheduled monument consent."

The excavations are an important step towards the establishment of a long-term programme of archaeological research at Maryport, which is a key element in the development of the proposed Roman Maryport heritage and visitor attraction being taken forward in partnership by the Hadrian's Wall Trust and the Senhouse Museum Trust.

The 23 Roman altars dedicated to Jupiter and other Roman gods by the commanders of the Maryport fort provide information of international importance for the study of the Roman army and its religious practices. In some cases the career histories of the commanders can be established from the inscriptions on the altars, tracing their movements across the Roman Empire as they moved from posting to posting. The altars are now part of the display in the Senhouse Roman Museum.

Provided by Newcastle University

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