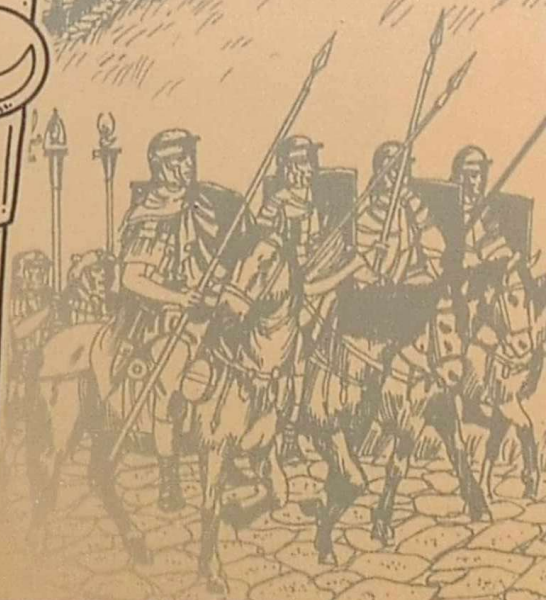
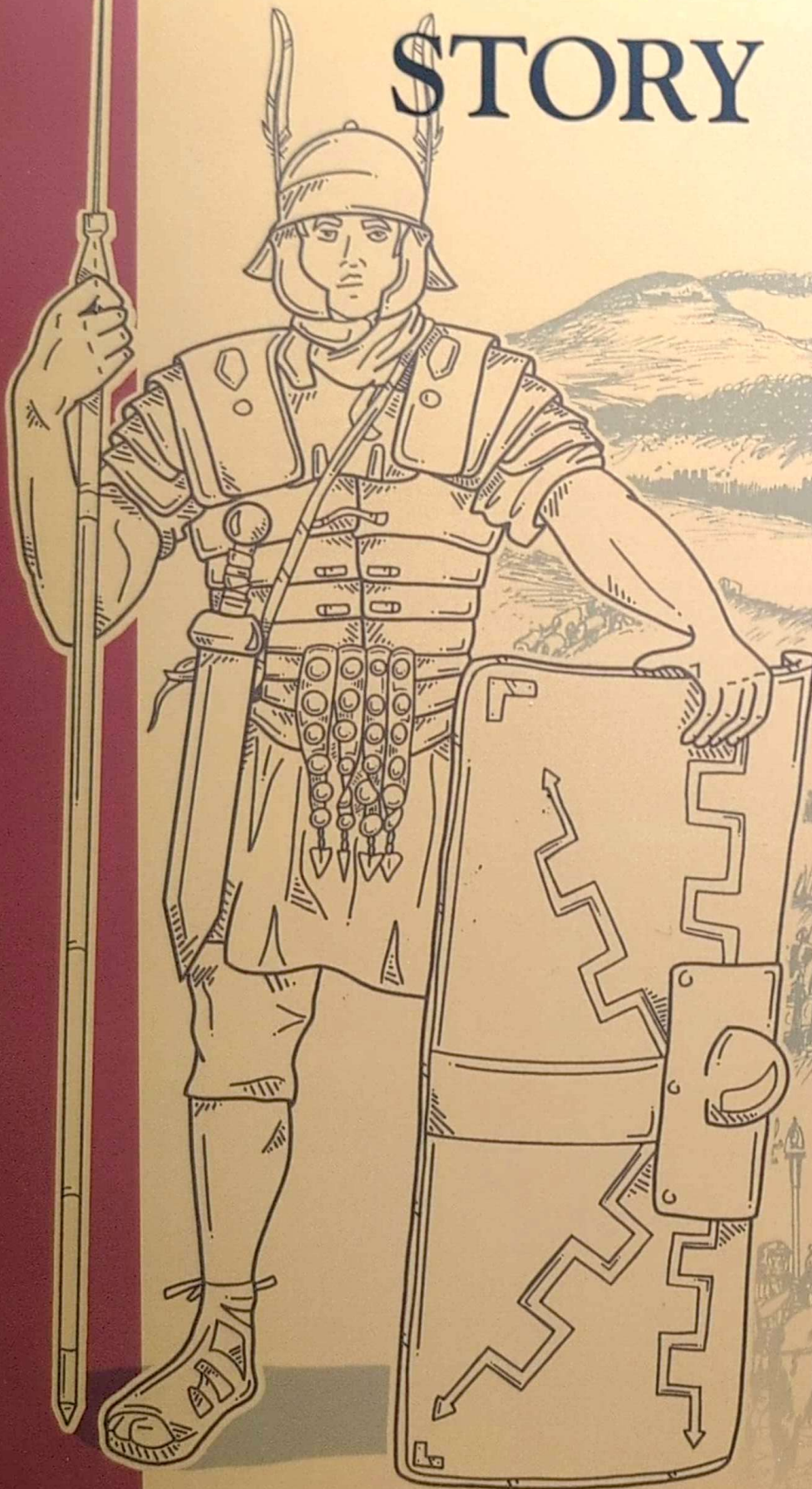


The TRIMONTIUM STORY





Dr John Reid, Trust Chairman with HRH Duke of Gloucester, Patron of the Trust at Trimontium Museum opening, April 2022.



HRH Duke of Gloucester at Trimontium Museum Opening April 2022.

The TRIMONTIUM STORY

*Published
by
The Trimontium Trust*

Robertson Award for Museum publication, 1994

*First edition 1992; second edition, revised and extended, 1997;
third edition, revised and reprinted, 1998; fourth edition, revised and reprinted, 2002;
fifth edition reprinted 2004; sixth edition, revised, 2010;
seventh edition, reprinted 2016; eighth edition, reprinted 2018;
ninth edition, revised and reprinted 2022*

Text by Walter Elliot, Past Chairman, The Trimontium Trust.
Illustrations by John Martin, St Boswells.
Photographs by Dr. Colin Martin, St Andrews University,
and the late Jack Cruickshank, Selkirk.
Designed and Printed by Bordersprint Ltd., Selkirk.



The TRIMONTIUM TRUST

Trimontium Trust was formed in November 1988 to promote the study of the Roman occupation of southern Scotland, with special emphasis on telling the story of the massive Roman military complex of Trimontium (the Roman name inspired by the three Eildon Hills) excavated by Dr James Curle of Melrose in 1905-10. His astonishingly detailed 450-page report, published in 1911, 'A Roman Frontier Post and its People', may be found online at www.curlesnewstead.org.uk.

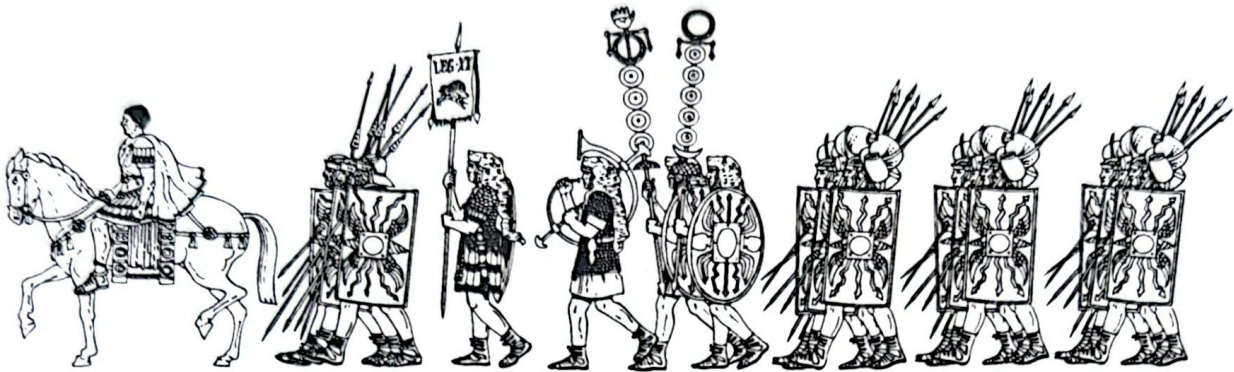
'Newstead 1911-2011', edited by Hunter and Keppie – with 17 contributors – has since been published in 2013 to celebrate the centenary, the work done since, especially through fieldwalking, excavation and aerial photography, with pointers to future study.

In 1989, the Trustees set up the first Trimontium Museum, staffed by dedicated volunteers in the restored Melrose Station and then, with the help of the local authority, in a former billiards room in The Ormiston, a community building in Melrose Market Square in 1991. As a mark of its museum accreditation status and in partnership with National Museums Scotland, and Live Borders it displays a range of impressive artefacts from the site, and an extraordinary display of Roman militaria from a private collection. Its outreach programme produces educational events for the general public, schools and two annual series of lectures, weekly guided walks to the site, and an annual group visit to an important Iron Age site elsewhere.

A National Lottery Heritage Fund Development Grant was awarded in June 2017, which together with generous funding from the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency and many individual donors has allowed the completion of the First Phase of the renovated and extended Museum. The Trust's Royal Patron, The Duke of Gloucester, officially opened the Museum in April 2022. Phase Two of the project, which will include a Community Archaeology Centre and Heritage and Landscape Observatory (HALO) will open on the same site in the spring of 2023.

Dr John H Reid, Chairman,
The Trimontium Trust
June 2022.

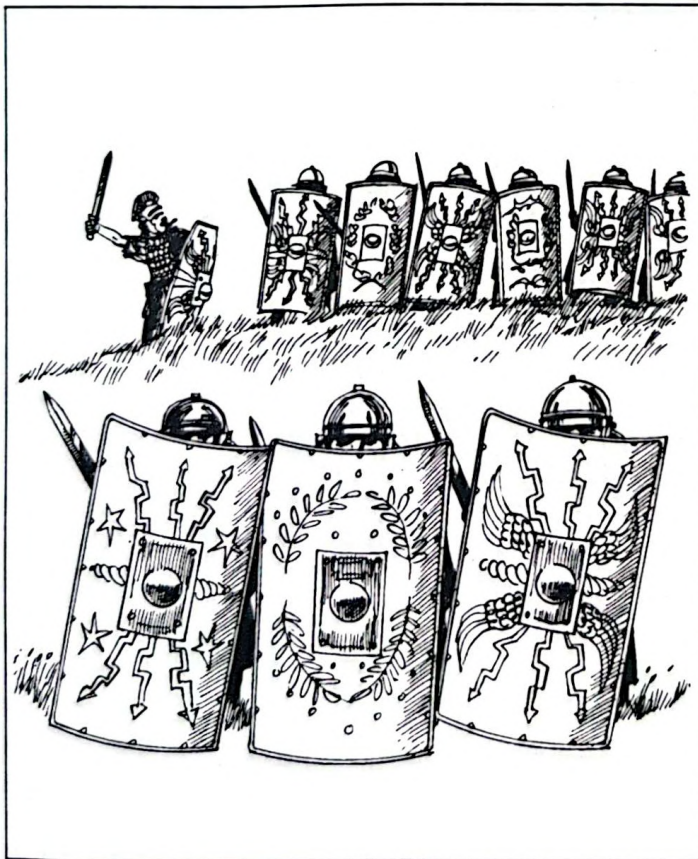
The TRIMONTIUM STORY



The Romans in Scotland

The Roman invasion of Britain began in 43 AD. For nearly forty years, the Romans pushed their forces through the southern part of the country, then moved westwards and north until by 78 AD, they had occupied all the lands we know as England and Wales.

It was Roman policy to keep advancing into new lands; in Britain, this meant until they had conquered the whole island. In 79 AD, the governor of the province of Britain invaded Caledonia with a force of some 20,000 men, supported by a supply fleet sailing along the coast. Five years of campaigning conquered much of Caledonia,



but the Romans never succeeded in occupying the whole area. A legion was withdrawn from the army of Britain about 87 AD and this was a set-back to Roman imperial designs on Caledonia.

In all, the Romans made another four attempts to bring Caledonia within the Roman Empire until finally giving up c211AD. The periods of Roman occupation were roughly 79 to 87 AD; 90 to 105 AD; 139 to 158AD; 160 to 184 AD and a last attempt by the Emperor Severus from 209 to 211 AD. However, these invasions must not be looked on as temporary incursions; each time the Romans came, they were intending to stay.

The Importance of Trimontium

When the Roman army crossed the Cheviots and looked into the Tweed valley, they could see an undulating landscape with the triple-peaked Eildon Hills as the most noticeable feature. They headed straight for it, planted their first fort at the foot of the northern hill and called the camp Trimontium, 'the place of the three hills'.

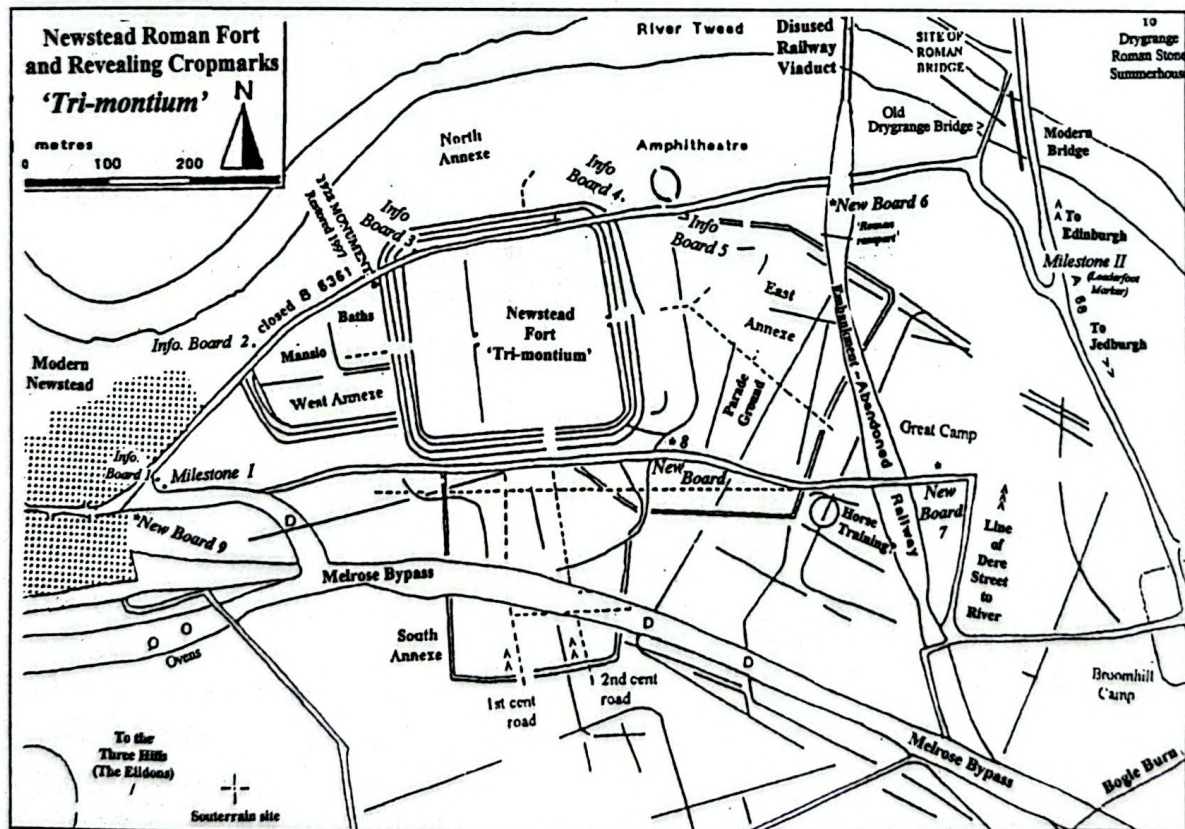
They chose the site well for the fort was on a key position. It was built on a natural mound overlooking the river and at a crossroads where the north/south traffic down the Leader intersected with east/west movement along the Tweed. Eventually, it was like the centre of a wheel with roads spreading like spokes in all directions.

Each successive occupation used Trimontium as the pivot of Roman defences in southern Caledonia. The main garrison comprised 500 or more mounted troops and this rapid reaction force could quickly respond to armed threat from any direction. Add the necessary supply and back up troops and there was a formidable force within the fort.

The Fort Complex

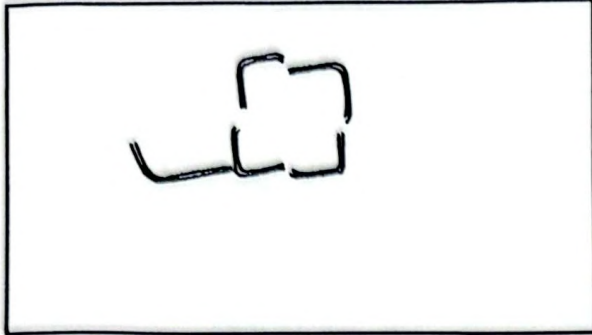
Although the illustration below shows what seems to be a spider's web of filled-ditches and former walls of the Roman site, Dr. Simon Clarke of Bradford University has produced a logical sequence of building and destruction for the fort and its annexes.

He did this by combining evidence from the first excavations, Curle (1905 - 10) and Richmond (1947) with air photographs and the modern search and rescue excavations of Bradford University (1987 - 97).



Phases of Building

Phase One, c. 79 - 87 AD. — The earliest occupation of the site was the irregular Agricolaan fort established c 80AD. It had a turf rampart on a cobble foundation with two ditches in front of it, overlapping each entrance.



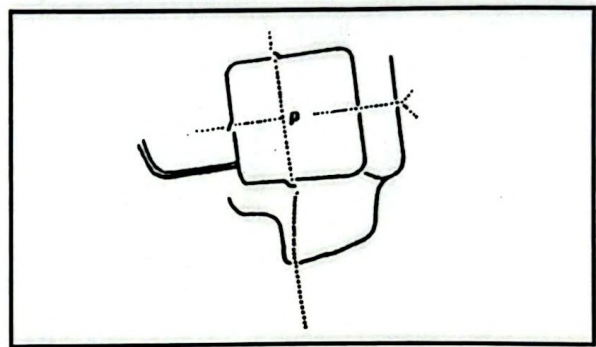
On the west side there was an annexe or development outside the fort which was also defended by a similar rampart and ditches.

Inside the fort timber buildings held troops and stores. The entrance to the fort at this period was through the annexe on the West.

Phase Two, c. 90 - 105 AD. — After a very short period when Trimontium may have been abandoned, the Romans were back again, building in strength.

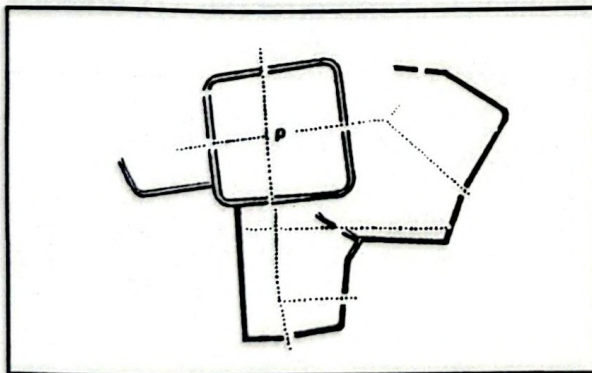
The old ditches were filled in and new defences constructed. This resulted in a colossal strengthening of the fort. The new turf rampart was built on a cobble base which measured 13.5 metres across and to a height of around 8.4 metres. In front of this was a single ditch 5 to 7 metres wide and 2 to 4 metres deep.

Civilians and camp followers gathered beside the fort and new annexes, equally well defended sprang up on the south, east and probably north sides of the fort.



Phase Three, c. 105 - 137 AD. — For this period, the army was withdrawn South and the site was deserted.

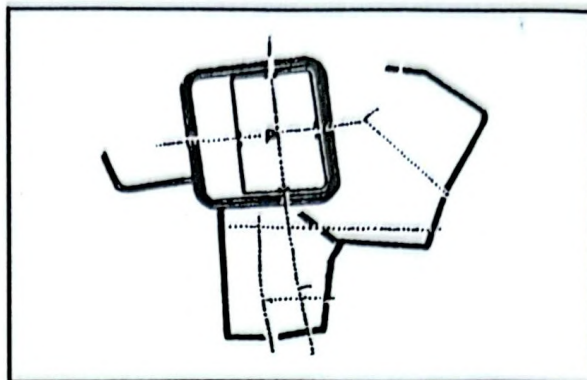
Phase Four, c. 137 - 139 AD. — The re-occupation of Trimontium is generally supposed to begin in 140 AD when the Emperor Antoninus Pius decided to complete the conquest of Caledonia.



However, there is evidence that the site may have been reoccupied a few years earlier and that for two or three years before 140, the fort of Trimontium was an outpost of Hadrian's Wall. If it was an outpost, it was a strong one with a sizeable civilian population in the annexes. The main entrance to the fort was now through the south annexe.

Although this theory perhaps requires more evidence, it fits in with the known facts.

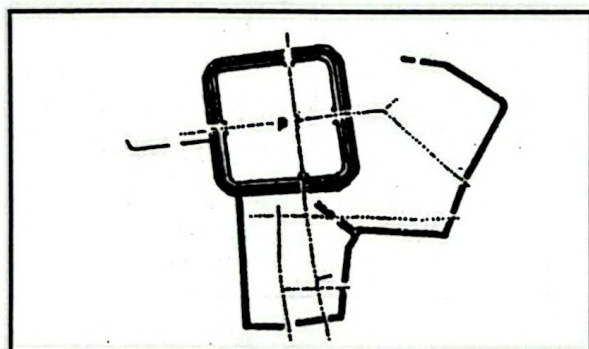
Phase Five, c. 140 - 158 AD. — When the Antonine Wall was started in 142 AD, Trimontium became a supply fort and distribution centre with its defences reduced accordingly. The fort was rebuilt in stone and reduced in size by sub-dividing the former area of the Phase Four fort with a two metre thick masonry wall. The larger section remained a military fort while the smaller became a manufacturing complex. The wall was extended round the remaining fort defences. In the reconstruction, the main entrance was still from the south but had been moved 70 metres to the east to fit in with the rebuilt fort.



During this period, the civilian population may have reached 2-3,000.

Phase Six, c. 160 AD. — There seems to have been some disruption in parts of Caledonia between 158 and 160 AD.

At Trimontium around 160 AD, massive changes took place. The Reducing Wall was taken down and long narrow barrack buildings were built on the former industrial area.

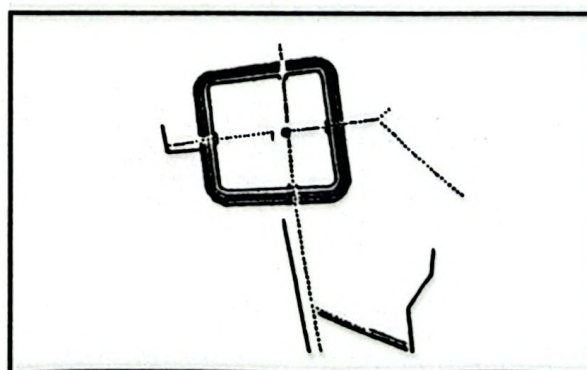


The civilian population in the annexes declined dramatically although there is enough evidence to suggest that their desertion was not total. The Antonine Wall had been abandoned and Trimontium had changed back from being an industrial / distribution centre in the Roman hinterland into a front-line fort again.

Phase Seven, c. 160 - 184 AD. — The last phase of occupation saw even more dramatic changes in every part of the fort. If a military presence remained, it was small. The large barrack blocks became 'chalets' for the remaining soldiers and their families. Many buildings were abandoned and the deserted annexes became fields again.

Coin evidence would suggest that the fort was abandoned shortly after 180 AD. Whether the remaining civilians deserted the area or moved into the fort is not known.

However, coins from the early 3rd to the late 4th centuries have recently been found in ground to the west and south of Newstead village. This suggests that there was a Romanised native population in the vicinity and that they were still using a currency economy for trading.



Building the Fort

The work of constructing or re-constructing the fort was done by the Roman troops. Like many armies, the Roman legions had specialist craftsmen within their ranks with smiths and wrights predominant. Manpower for the construction was abundant since commanding officers always like to see their troops kept busy.

However, building on such a scale required vast amounts of dressed stone, bricks and tiles, wood, nails and glass. Most of the raw materials could be found in the area but it was still a formidable task for the Roman quartermasters to deliver them on site in usable form.



Digging the ditch.

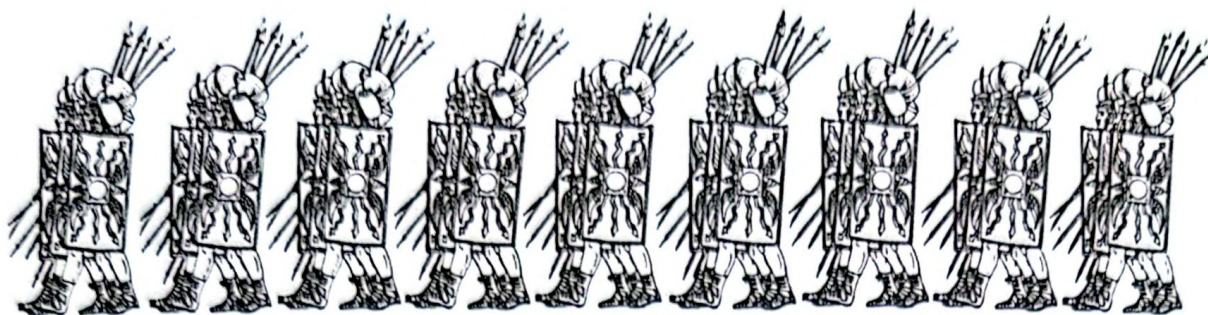


*Putting up
the palisade.*

Building the barracks.



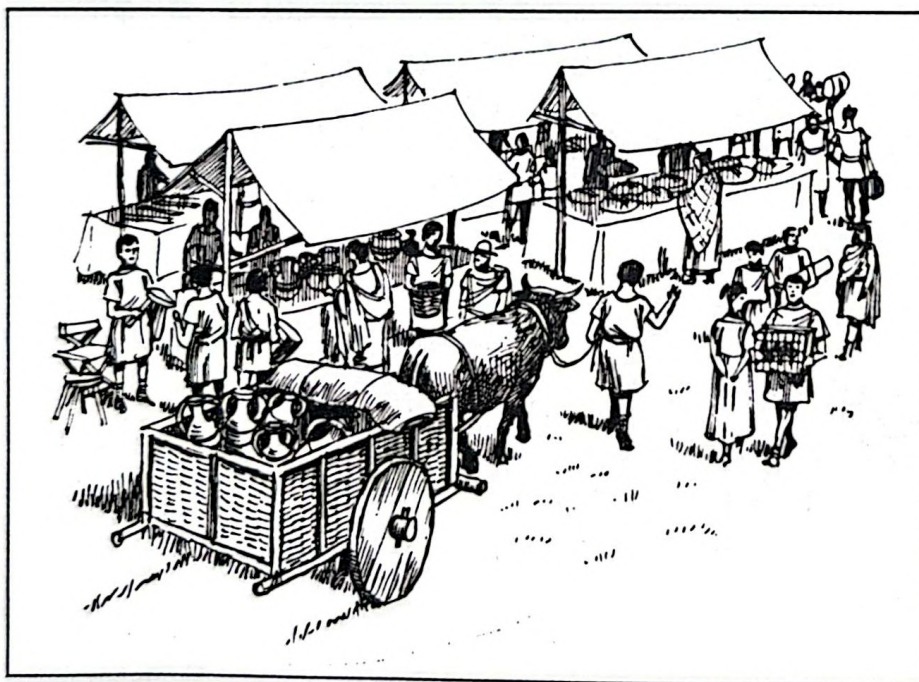
Trimontium as a Centre of Population



As well as the permanent garrison of around 1000 troops, there was always passing traffic along the Roman road which crossed the Tweed at a bridge near the fort. Troop movement and traders would make Trimontium a place of great activity.

Air photography and geophysical surveying on the ground has produced evidence for probably nine temporary camps in addition to the permanent fort. These represent large troop movements when an army was on campaign. Informed opinion would suggest that there must have been a population within the camp complex which varied from 2000 to 5000 at any one time of Roman occupation. Add to this the number of Roman troops stationed in the smaller forts in the surrounding area, and you have a considerable Roman presence in the Borders.

This number of people needed a lot of food and commodities to make life endurable on the northern frontier of Roman Britain. So manufacturers, suppliers and traders were soon found within the annexes of the fort. The area around the fort became virtually a town and, with the increasing demand, a market sprang up to supply it. It is through the activities of the manufacturers and traders that we can gauge the quality of life at Trimontium nearly two thousand years ago. It is also to them that we owe most of the artifacts shown in the Exhibition.



The Market

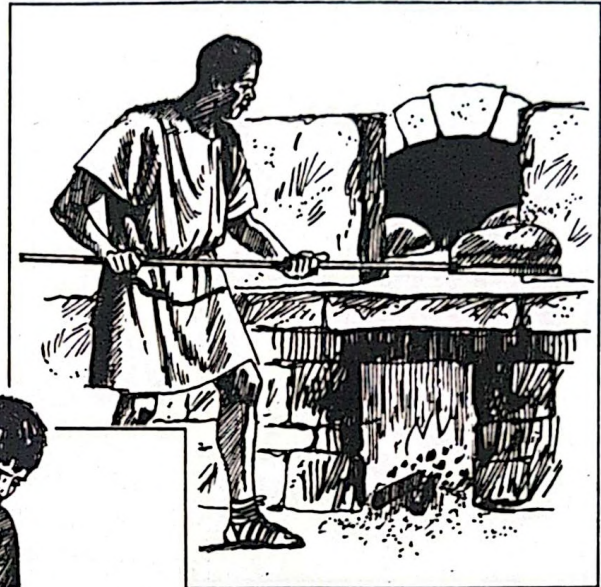
The Manufacturers

Wherever a profitable opportunity arises, there is usually someone to make or supply the means of filling it. Thus, at Trimontium...

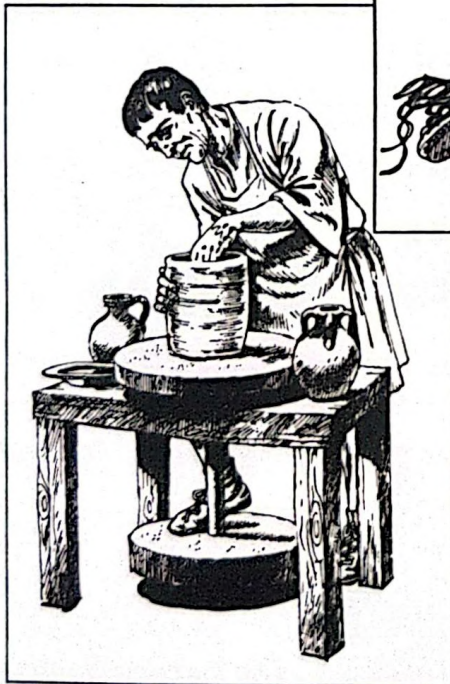


...there were blacksmiths to mend, supply and sharpen weapons and armour,

... bakers and cooks to supply food and drink to traveller and legionary alike.

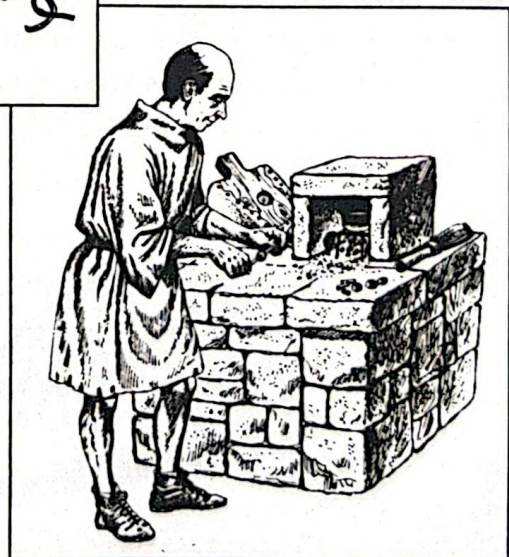


There were potters...



...and sandalmakers.

There was even a glassworker who made beads and fancy armlets to tempt the native buyer. These were made from re-cycled Roman bottles.

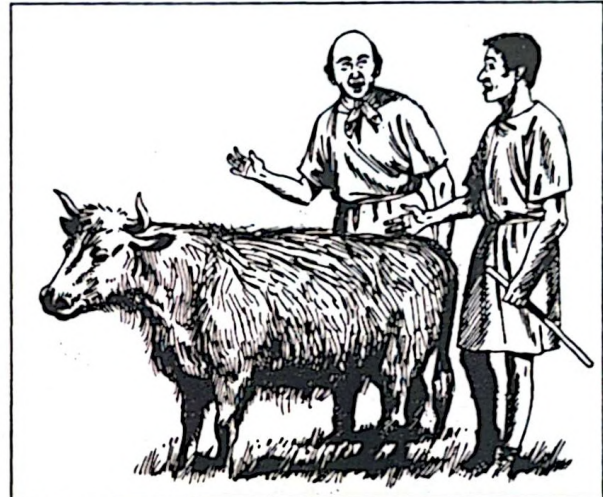


The Traders

In every market there are those who do not make but buy and sell the products of others. The difference between the prices provides their livelihood. Trimontium was no different from any other market — food supplies, animals and clothing would be traded. Trading was made much easier by the introduction of coinage by the Romans; previously all trading was done by barter.



The Merchant.



The Cattle Dealer.



The Horse Dealer.

In the luxury goods trade, there was wine, raisins, cherries, olives and olive oil from Italy, France and Germany; wine and fish paste from Portugal; glass from many parts of the Empire, even as far away as Egypt; goddess figurines from Germany and vast amounts of pottery from France and southern Britain.



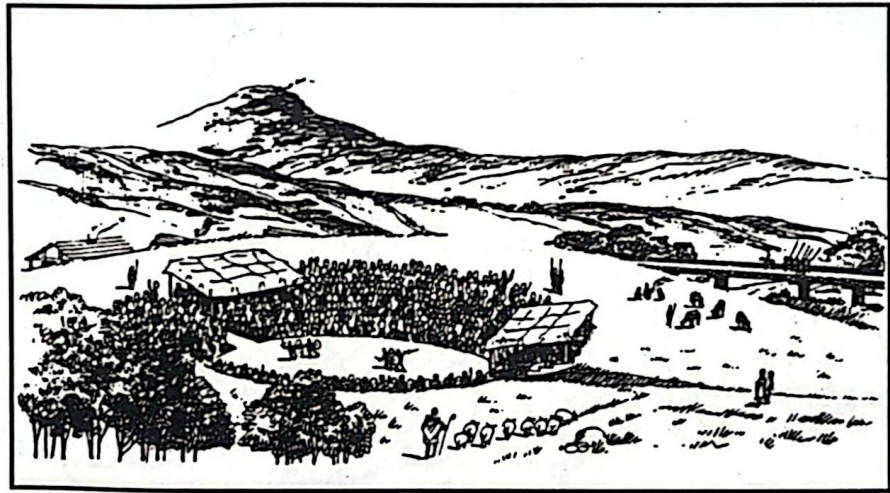
The Luxury Goods.

The Amphitheatre

Not all the soldiers' time at Trimontium was taken up with policing, digging, building and trading. Finds made on the site tell us that games were played, dogs were kept for hunting and pleasure and there would be places where the off-duty soldier could enjoy the pastimes of soldiers from time immemorial.

However, the keen eye of Dr. Bill Lonie, a Trimontium Trustee, noting the large hollow near the north-east corner of the fort, led to the suggestion that it could have been an amphitheatre. This hollow had been noted as being artificially made as early as the 1950s; the idea put forward then was that it was the clay source for the construction of the huge Phase Two rampart.

The possibility of an amphitheatre was taken up by Dr. Simon Clarke who was then directing the Bradford University excavations at Trimontium. In 1993, a contour survey and geophysical plotting of the hollow showed a bank of high resistivity and a hollow of low resistivity. This was not definite proof, but it did give sufficient encouragement to investigate the area further. The issue could only be proved or otherwise by excavation.

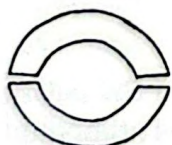


In 1996 the Bradford University team came back again. Four trenches were cut; two across the suspected line of the amphitheatre bank and two within the area of the arena. The results were quite conclusive.

The bank excavations showed that the gravel had been banked up in a terracing held in place by a timber revetment. On the surface, a number of Roman hobnails were found, presumably lost when the soldiers were cheering on their champions.

In the central arena, in excavations at one metre depth, fragments of pottery, nails, a belt fitting and a bronze coin all testified to Roman use.

The military amphitheatre was proved — the first to be recognised in Scotland, and the most Northerly in the Roman Empire. Not a big one certainly, but capable of holding about 1500 spectators.



Chester



Caerleon



Newstead



Tomen-Y-Mur

*Comparative
Amphitheatre
Plans.*

Roman Settlements in the Tweed Basin

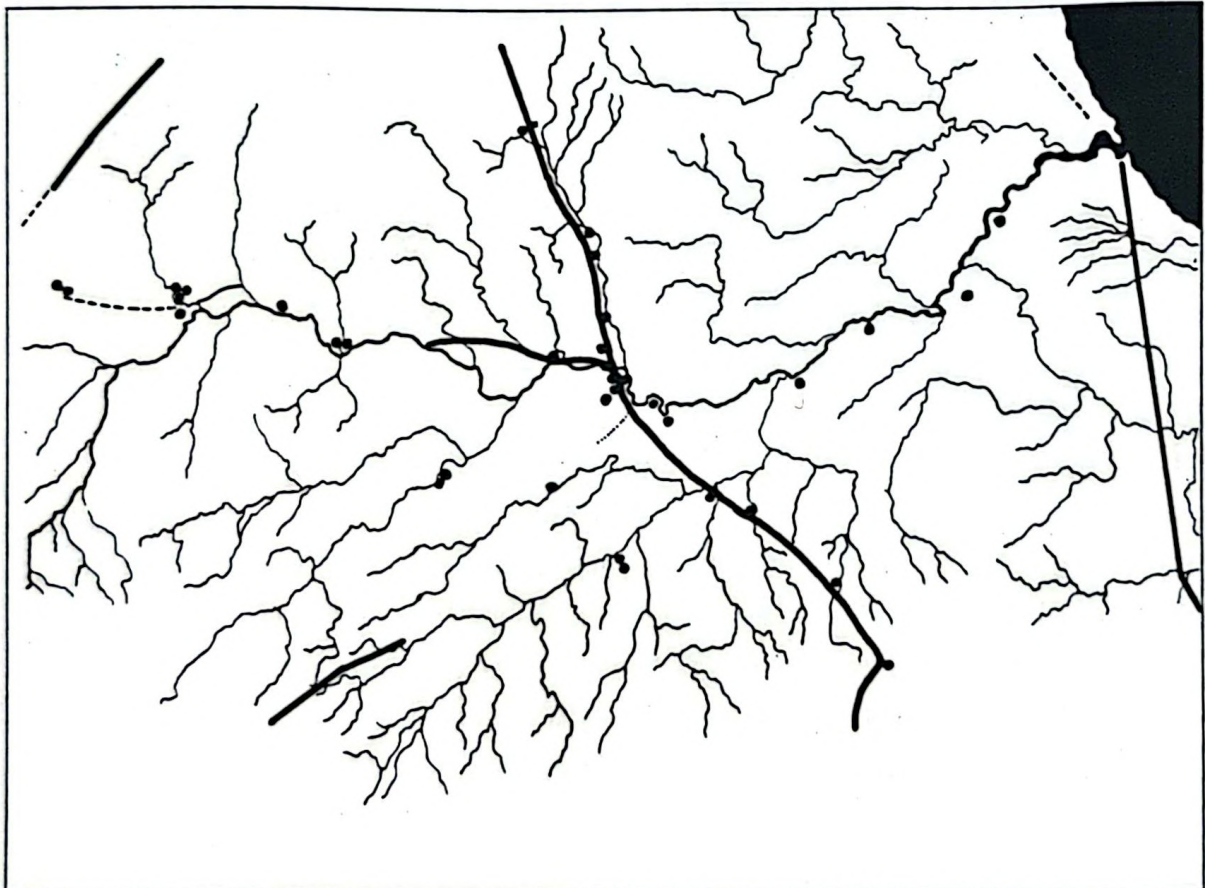
Trimontium was not the only Roman fort in the area although it is the principal one. Smaller, permanent forts were built at Oakwood (E. of Selkirk), Cappuck (S. of Jedburgh), Lyne (W. of Peebles) and Channelkirk (N. of Lauder). These were not used during every period of Roman occupation but are believed to have been sited to deal with particular periods of native unrest.

The most numerous traces of the Roman presence in the Borders are the temporary camps. These were the "short-stay" resting places of passing troops, working parties building roads, or simply troops on field exercises.

From the map it can be seen that temporary camps are strung along the Roman roads like beads. Which of these were the camps of road-builders and which of troop movement through the area, nobody can say with certainty.

The main road built by the Romans was called Dere Street at a later date and so well was it surveyed that parts of the present A68 road lie on top of the Roman construction.

Map of roads and temporary camps



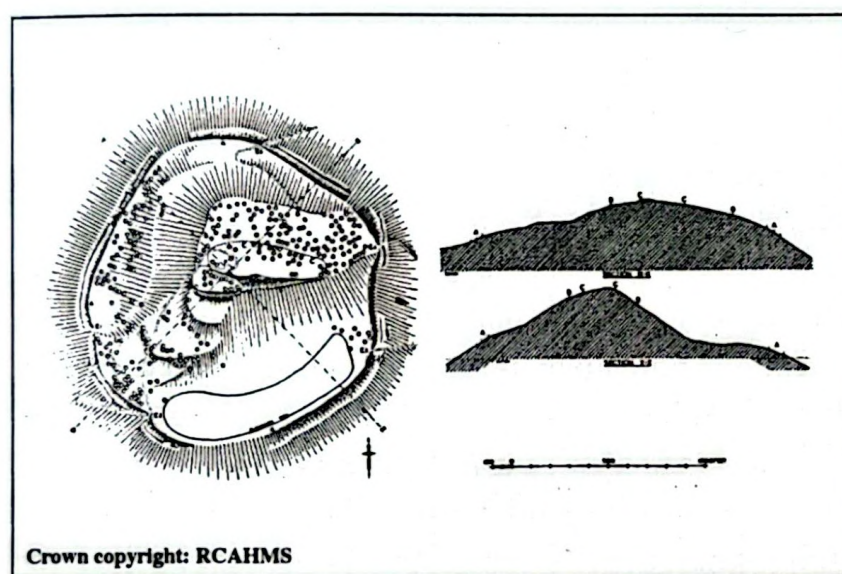
The Natives

We have been concentrating on the Roman invaders. Let us have a look at the native tribes who were in the area already. Little is known about the native peoples other than what Roman historians tell us and what can be deduced by archaeological excavation.

We do know that they were a Celtic people speaking a language of their own but with many different dialects.

The Celts were a tribal confederation which occupied most of northern Europe in pre-Roman times. They did not build impressive structures or towns like the Greeks or Romans. In Britain, there were probably as many as thirty different tribes speaking roughly the same language but often at war with each other. In the eastern Borders, the Votadini, with their capital at Traprain Law, occupied the flatter lands of the lower Tweed and the Lothians, while the Selgovae held the hill lands towards Annandale. Nobody is quite sure where the boundary line between the tribal lands lay.

It is thought that the Votadini were friendly towards the Roman invaders and the Selgovae opposed them. However, even this is not certainly true — we just don't know.



*Plan of the
Eildon Hill Fort*

It may be that the large hill fort, with its 300 house platforms, which can be seen on Eildon Hill North has some connection with one of the tribes as a gathering place either in time of war or as a place which had some religious significance.

Certainly, there was a large township on the top of this hill in the Bronze Age, one thousand years before the Romans came. During Roman times, the hill was occupied again and Roman finds have been made within the hut circles excavated.

The native Celts usually lived in small, family-sized settlements scattered through the area. Some of the larger settlements were lightly fortified. The Celts were herdsmen depending on their flocks but they also cultivated some land for grain production.

The results of recent excavations would suggest that the natives were able to co-exist with the Romans; it may have been an uneasy truce but Roman finds have been discovered on native sites and artifacts of native make have been found on the site of Trimontium.

The Celts Remain

When the Romans abandoned Trimontium as a permanent base around 185 AD, they left a native Celtic people who retained their culture and language for several hundred years. The evidence of placenames tells us that the traditions of the Celt outlasted that of Rome. The two examples nearest to Trimontium are Melrose (bare promontory) and Eildon (old stronghold).

The Excavations at Trimontium

People first became aware that a rich Roman site lay under the field surfaces to the East of Newstead when a railway cutting for the Waverley line was made there in 1846. Pits which contained Roman artifacts were found and dug through in the course of construction.

It was in the period 1905 to 1910 that Trimontium sprang to the forefront of archaeological attention. James Curle, a Melrose solicitor and amateur archaeologist, excavated the site on behalf of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. His finds were staggering, both for the artifacts found and for the amount of information he was able to extract from the excavations.

In 1911 his prompt publication of the results in 'A Roman Frontier Post and its People' provided a standard reference work some fifty years ahead of its time. This is still the most decisive work published in Scotland for that period and has now achieved the additional cachet of being a collector's piece.

In 1947 Sir Ian Richmond carried out a minor excavation on the site and re-interpreted Curle's findings. Parts of his interpretation were highly speculative and are subject to modern revision.

Around the same period Dr J.K. St Joseph began developing air photography as a tool in archaeological research. At Trimontium, this has revealed a new complex of camps through cropmarkings. At least nine temporary camps have been recognised.

Twenty years ago the Trimontium complex was investigated by the Department of Archaeological Sciences of Bradford University. They used the tools of the twentieth and twenty-first century — computers plot the readings of electrical resistance and magnetism in the ground. This gives a picture of the archaeological features under the soil and pinpoints where best to use the trowel.

The Newstead Project began in 1989 and was planned to last five years. It was initially directed by Dr. Rick Jones, and thereafter Dr. Simon Clarke, from the Bradford Department of Archaeological Sciences. However, when the Borders Regional Council decided to put Phase Three of the Melrose By-pass into operation, the new road was planned to cut through the South Annexe of the fort, partly along the disused railway line.

The Trimontium Trust gave evidence to the two Public Inquiries that there was bound to be considerable archaeological knowledge held within the area to be disturbed.

In 1994 this prediction was to be proved true in the 'rescue excavation' when Dr. Simon Clarke and his team excavated the sides of the old railway cutting. Forty major archaeological features were uncovered; these included six deep pits containing a wealth of organic material.

In 1996 Dr. Clarke returned to investigate the suspected amphitheatre and previously un-recognised North Annexe (as page eleven reveals, the investigation was fruitful).

1997 saw the Bradford team complete the geophysics of the fort site. Over twenty years later we look forward to the final report of the excavation, within our lifetime.

The Roman Army Finally Leaves Trimontium

When the Roman army finally abandoned Trimontium as a base and retreated to the line of Hadrian's Wall, they left a population which had become partly Romanised.

In the area between the Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall, client kingdoms based on the native Votadini tribe, were established, and as clients of Rome, though not Roman citizens, the men were allowed to bear arms for their own defence.

That Traprain Law was the capital of the northern Votadini is reasonably certain by the finds made from the excavations there. Recent finds of over three hundred coins of the third and fourth centuries in the vicinity of Roxburgh Castle, suggest that this strongly defensible site, then called Merchidun, may have been the capital of the Southern Votadini.



The Third Century

For a period around 209 AD Trimontium was re-occupied. Roman coins of this period were found near Newstead village and the intaglio of the Emperor's son Caracalla was picked up inside the fort in 1998. See opposite page.

For the whole of the third century the land of Southern Scotland was patrolled by the exploratores (frontier scouts) who kept a reassuring presence for the Romanised native population and reported back to the Roman Army in Northumberland.

Fourth Century

The next hundred years were not peaceful. Although Rome maintained a protective eye on the area north of Hadrian's Wall, punitive expeditions had to be sent on frequent occasions.

The legions had to return in strength in 305-6, 342-3, 360 and again in 367-9 when Count Theodosius put down a serious invasion from the north, recovering a 'province which owed allegiance to Rome', and called it 'Valentia' in honour of his Emperor. This is claimed to be the province of client kingdoms between the walls of Hadrian and Antonine.

Around 410 AD Rome finally conceded that Britannia was not worth the effort. The Roman soldiers remaining became absorbed into the population, eventually establishing the Dark Age kingdoms of Southern Scotland.

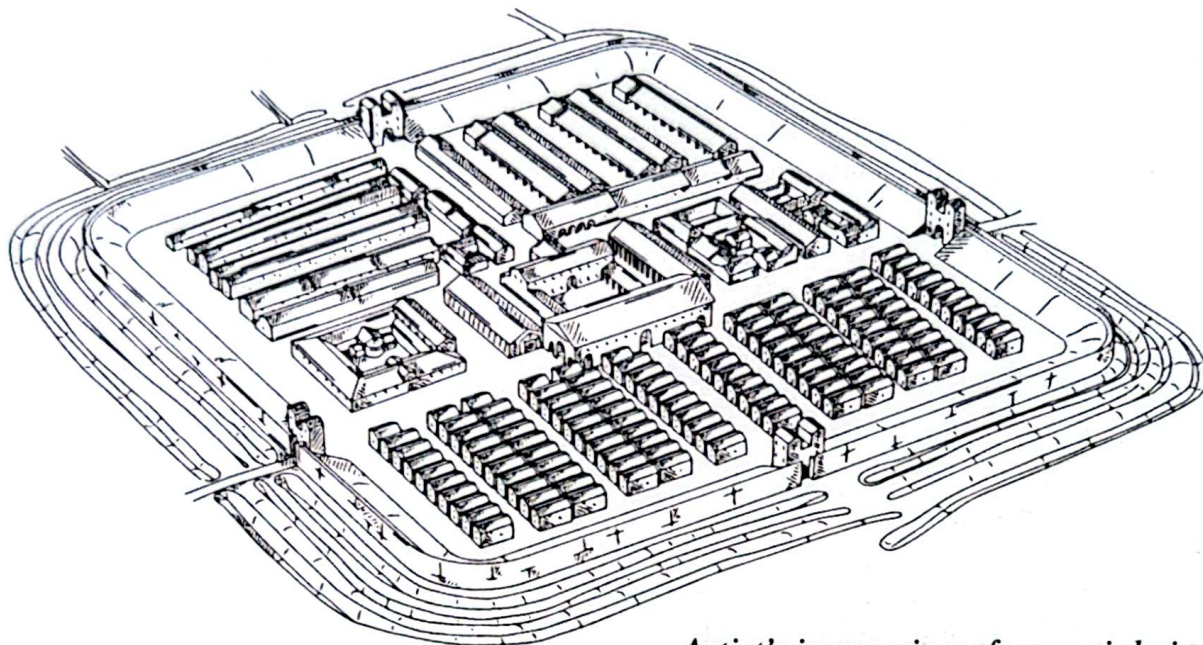


The Exhibition

When the Trimontium museum in Melrose was planned, it was decided to make it not simply a dedication to the might of the Roman army and the Roman soldier even though this must, of necessity, be a large part of any Roman exhibition.

The intention was to look at the people who lived outside the fort in the annexes, for there lived the people who serviced the needs of the troops within the fort. Even further afield, what was the impact of a body of foreign troops on the people already living in the area. How did it change their lives?

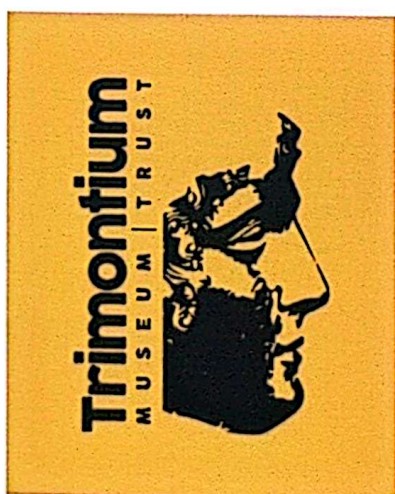
In the new Trimontium museum a range of stunning objects from the fort itself and the wider historic Borders landscape are displayed alongside key pieces from private collectors, replica objects that support greater understanding and the latest audio visual presentations, reconstructed graphical interpretation and awe-inspiring drone footage.



*Artist's impression of an aerial view
of the Roman fort at Newstead*

We are open year-round but please check website as times and days vary, especially in the winter. We run walks, talks, events and activities. All are advertised on the events page of our website. Follow us on social media to get the latest news and updates as they happen, and much more.

If you would like to support and/or join the Trimontium Garrison, please visit the donate/membership page on our website.



The Trimontium Museum
Market Square, Melrose TD6 9PN

Website : www.trimontium.co.uk

Email : info@trimontium.co.uk

 Twitter: @TrimontiumTrust

 Instagram: @trimontiumtrust

 Facebook: @TheTrimontiumTrust

 Pinterest : @trimontiumtrust



£3.00
The Trimontium Story
Regular

