

RAVENGLASS ROMAN FORT BATH HOUSE, RAVENGLASS, CUMBRIA



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology North

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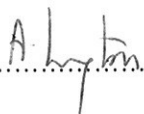
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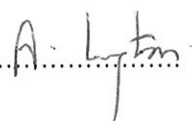
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SUMMARY

English Heritage have proposed improvements to visitor facilities at the site of the Roman fort bath house in Ravenglass, Cumbria (NGR SD 088958). These improvements consisted of: laying strengthening mesh to create a disabled access path and also on areas of high wear through the doorways of the ruins; removing an area of cobbles between the roadside and access path and installing a drainage pipe; replacing the current roadside fencing with bollards; installation of a drop-down bollard to allow access to maintenance vehicles only; and removal of the current signage.

The site of the well-preserved ruins of the bath house, known as Walls Castle, is a Scheduled Monument (no 13570). This is all that remains of the second century AD fort, *Glannaventa*. The fort was built as part of the system of fortlets and observation towers, similar to the milecastles and turrets, that served as an extension to Hadrian's Wall down the Cumbrian coast to Ravenglass and Eskmeals. *Glannaventa* lay adjacent to a natural harbour, which acted as an important naval base for supply communications both along the coast and also inland via Hardknott Pass. Excavations of the fort on the coastal side of the railway in 1978 helped to establish a possible stratigraphic sequence for the site, which suggested that a ditched, and possible palisaded, fort was constructed about AD 120, that was subsequently given a turf rampart in AD 130. The results also suggested that the fort was demolished and rebuilt between AD 190 and AD 210. Occupation of the site continued until at least AD 350-370 and possibly later. The bath house was later adapted to be used as a house from the medieval period and was home to the Penningtons, probably from c 1610. This ensured its survival as one of the most complete standing structures from Roman Britain.

Due to the potential for disturbance of archaeological remains during the groundworks Scheduled Monument Consent (SMCC00004796) was required to undertake the works. A condition of the SMC required an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks, which was undertaken by Ashlea Ltd of Carnforth on behalf of English Heritage.

The watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) over two days in November 2009. A path was excavated leading around the north side of the bath house, measuring approximately 30m x 2m. The depth of intrusion was approximately 250mm in order to level the area for the installation of the strengthening mesh or grass reinforcement system. The path was extended out to the roadside which necessitated the removal of cobbles to level the access, as well as excavating a pipe trench beneath this to install drainage. Bollards were also erected alongside the roadside to protect the Scheduled Monument from damage caused by vehicles parking on the site. The bollards were inserted within the pre-existing fence holes to a depth of 250mm. The hole for the drop-down bollard was also excavated to the same depth but within previously undisturbed deposits. Access through the doorways in the bath house ruins was improved by either excavating down and levelling out, or building up with spoil prior to the laying of the strengthening mesh.

The groundworks were of relatively minimal impact and, therefore, no features, structures or deposits of archaeological significance were observed during these works. No further archaeological work is recommended for this phase of groundworks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Iain Whittick of English Heritage for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to the staff of Ashlea Ltd of Carnforth, who undertook the site work on behalf of English Heritage.

The watching brief was undertaken by Nathaniel Jepson, who also compiled the report. The drawings were produced by Alix Sperr. The project was managed by Emily Mercer, who also edited the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROJECT

- 1.1.1 English Heritage proposed the updating of the visitor facilities at the Roman bath house at Ravenglass, Cumbria, which is a Scheduled Monument (SM no 13570), and part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. The proposals included laying strengthening mesh over the existing grassed area to create a disabled access path (measuring 30m x 2m), and also on areas of high wear through the doorways. This required either topsoil stripping and levelling of the current ground surface or making up the level using spoil (Fig 2). Where the access path joined the roadside it was necessary to level out the area by removing some of the pre-existing cobbled surface. This was bridged with mesh, beneath which a drainage pipe was installed to ease the accumulation of ground water (Fig 3). Also, the current roadside fencing was to be replaced with bollards, positioned in the pre-existing fence holes, to prevent parking on the monument site whilst enabling better access for the public (Fig 2), and a drop-down bollard was to be installed to allow access to maintenance vehicles (Fig 2). It also included the removal of the existing signage, which will be replaced at a later date.
- 1.1.2 The bath house is part of the second century Roman fort, *Glannaventa*, and the most complete standing structure in Britain (Bidwell 1997). Therefore, the proposed groundworks may have impacted upon any surviving below ground archaeological remains. Consequently, as a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent (SMCC00004796), essential for the work, a watching brief was required, and Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned by Iain Whittick of English Heritage to undertake the work, which was carried out on 4th and 5th November 2009.

1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 Ravenglass Roman fort bath house (NGR SD 0882 9592; Fig 1) is situated on the West coast of Cumbria, to the south of the hamlet of Ravenglass on the Esk Estuary, and north of the Roman fort. The area around the site of the bath house is mostly flat, and is on typical brown earths of the Wick 1 series (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983) and the underlying geology comprised of red and grey sandstone and mudstones (Ordnance Survey 1979).

1.3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 This section is intended only as a brief summary of the known historical and archaeological background to provide a context to the site and the results.
- 1.3.2 The first known reference to a Roman site in Ravenglass is from Camden (1600), where it is described as '*a station conveniently girt by two rivers where Roman inscriptions, as I have been informed exist*'. There is little remaining of the second century AD fort, *Glannaventa*, apart from the bath house, known as Walls Castle (Todd 1985, 142). The fort was built as part of

the system of fortlets and observation towers, similar to the milecastles and turrets, that served as an extension to Hadrian's Wall down the Cumbrian coast to Ravenglass and Eskmeals (*ibid*). *Glannaventa* lay adjacent to a natural harbour, which acted as an important naval base for supply both along the coast and also inland via Hardknott Pass (Birley 1958).

- 1.3.3 In 1978, excavations of the fort on the coastal side of the railway helped to establish a likely stratigraphic sequence for the site (Potter 1979), although, the interpretation was disputed by others (Bellhouse 1989; Brandon 1984). The results from the excavations suggested that a ditched, and possible palisaded, fort was constructed about AD 120, which was subsequently given a turf rampart in AD 130 (Potter 1979). The results also suggested that the fort was demolished and re-built between AD 190 and AD 210. Occupation of the site continued until at least AD 350-370 and possibly later (*ibid*).
- 1.3.4 Following the decline of the Roman Empire and abandonment of the forts in the fifth century AD, most forts were subjected to large-scale robbing of stone and brick for re-use. The exceptions were those structures in remote areas or those that could be adapted to serve new purposes, such as the bath house at Ravenglass (Bidwell 1997, 110), which was used as a house from the medieval period and was home to the Penningtons, probably from *c* 1610 (Birley 1958, 15).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 The groundworks on the site were conducted under constant archaeological supervision, in accordance with the Scheduled Monument Consent (*Appendix 1*) and current Institute for Archaeologists guidelines (2008a). They comprised mechanical and hand-excavation to a maximum depth of 250mm. All exposed soil horizons were examined and described, and the spoil heap was carefully checked for any unstratified finds.
- 2.1.2 A daily record of the nature, extent and depths of the groundwork was maintained throughout the duration of the fieldwork. All archaeological contexts were recorded on OA North's *pro-forma* sheets, using a system based on that of the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology. A monochrome and digital photographic record was maintained throughout.

2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with current IfA (2008b) and English Heritage guidelines (1991). The archive will be deposited with the County Record Office, Barrow, and a copy of the report will be forwarded to both the Inspector of Ancient Monuments for English Heritage and Cumbria County Council's Historic Environment Record Office.

3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The groundworks commenced with the mechanical excavation of the topsoil from the area of the proposed disabled access path, removing overlying deposits to a maximum depth of 250mm (Fig 2, Plate 1), in preparation for the laying of the strengthening mesh. Alongside the road, the existing fence line was removed and fence posts pulled up along with their concrete footings, in order that the holes could be re-used for the new bollards (Figs 2 and 4; Plate 2). An area of cobbles was removed under archaeological supervision to level the surface between the road and access path for disabled visitors and, within this, a drainage pipe was installed to ease the accumulation of ground water (Fig 3 and Plate 3). The occurrence of regular heavy ground water across the site has also led to erosion in areas of high footfall, particularly through the doorways, which necessitated the laying of strengthening mesh in these areas. Both the removal of deposits and levelling up, where necessary, was undertaken under archaeological supervision (Plate 5). A small post hole was excavated to a depth of 250mm for the drop-down bollard (Fig 2) under archaeological supervision, and the existing signage removed.

3.2 RESULTS

3.2.1 All of the groundworks were carried out in wet conditions, which slowed progress considerably. The excavated areas for the disabled access path, the doorways, and the removal of the cobbled surface, together with the removal of existing signage, were within topsoil and subsoil deposits and did not disturb the archaeological remains. The bollards were installed within previously disturbed deposits. With each event no archaeological remains were encountered, and no artefacts were observed during the course of the archaeological monitoring.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The groundworks, for the purpose of the visitor access improvements, were of relatively minimal impact as most were contained within disturbed deposits or overburden, and no features or remains of archaeological significance were observed during the watching brief. Consequently, no further work is required at this level.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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6. ILLUSTRATIONS

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Figure 1: Site location

Figure 2: Plan of the groundworks

Figure 3: Details of improvements to access from the road to the newly-laid path

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Plate 2: Bollards on the roadside

Plate 3: View of the access path following removal of the cobbles and installation of the pipe

Plate 4: View of the wet conditions along the excavated pathway

Plate 5: View of one of the doorways that has been excavated on one side and levelled up on the other side prior to the laying of the strengthening mesh



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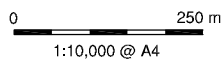
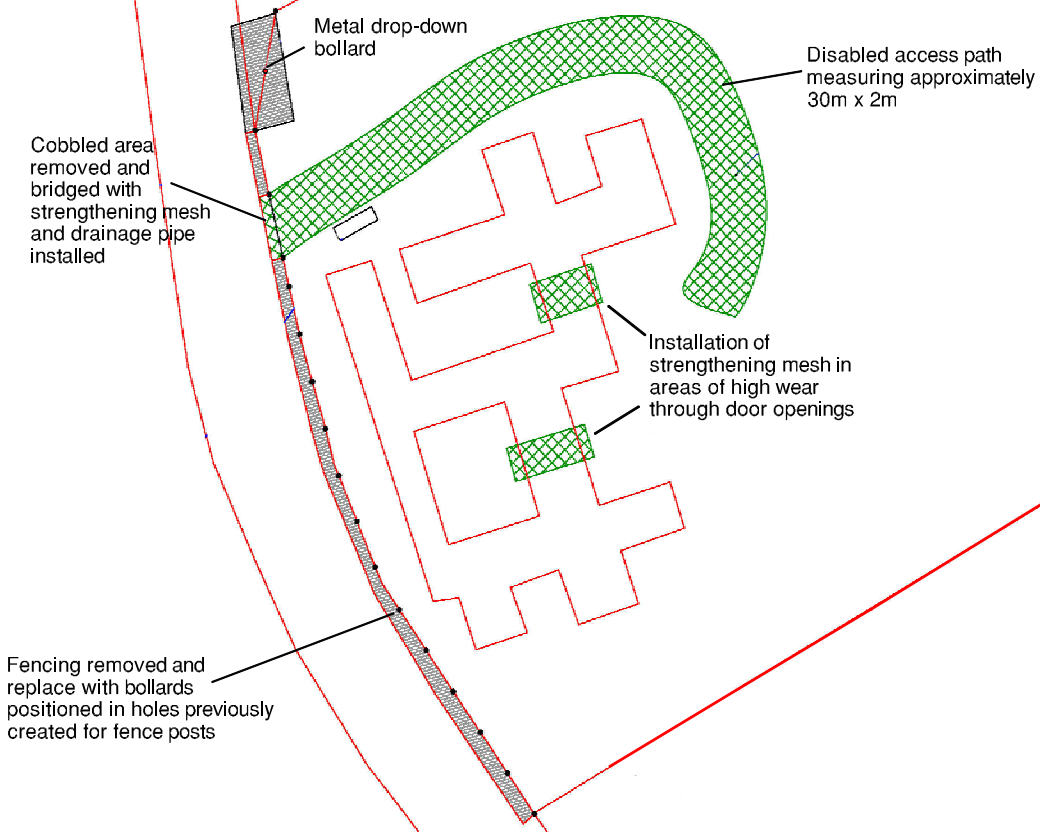





Figure 1: Site location

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-  Limit of study
-  Cobbled area
-  Area to be bridged using Golpa or similar product

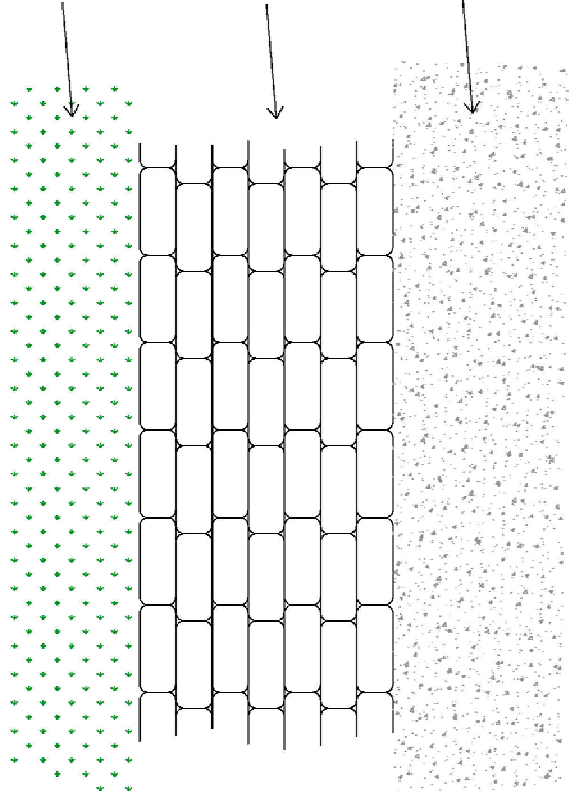
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Figure 2: Plan of the groundworks

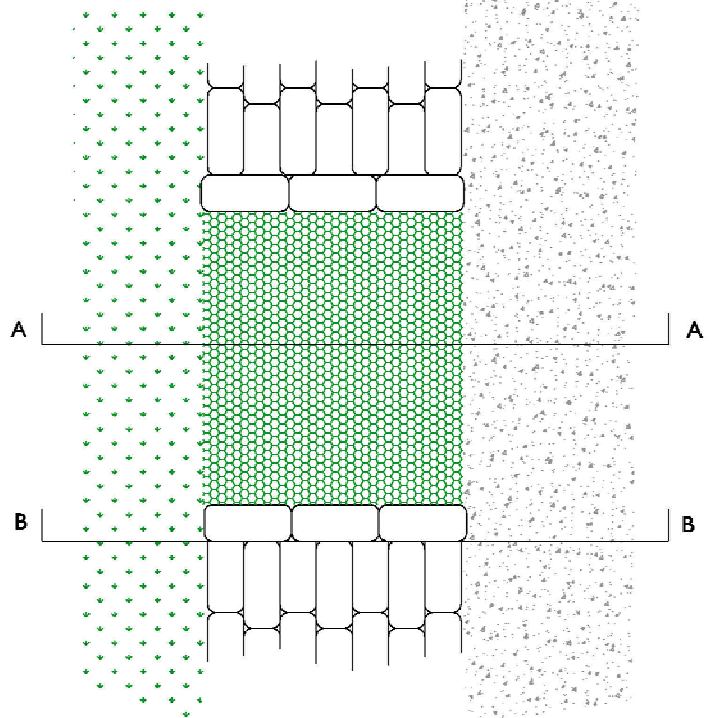
Grass Cobbles Tarmac



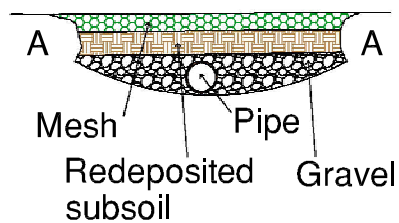
Cobbled section prior to improvements



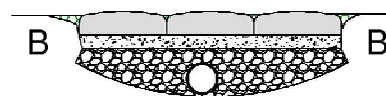
New access route over previously cobbled section, showing mesh and drainage pipe



Pipe in bottom of trench to allow rainwater to pass through into gully beyond



Cobbles alongside mesh to create edge to new access path



Southward view of area of cobbles removed for access improvements

Figure 3: Details of improvements to access from the road to the newly-laid path



Plate 1: View of the excavated pathway around the north side of the bathhouse



Plate 2: Bollards on roadside



Plate 3: View of the access path following removal of the cobbles and installation of the pipe



Plate 4: View of the wet conditions along the excavated pathway



Plate 5: View of one of the doorways that has been excavated on one side and levelled up on the other side prior to the laying of the strengthening mesh

APPENDIX 1: SCHEDULED MONUMENT CONSENT

SMCC00004796

Cert no.1

CERTIFICATION OF SMCC 6

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS 1994 NO 1381, ANCIENT MONUMENTS CLASS CONSENT ORDER

1. Monument to which this certificate relates:Name of Monument: **Ravenglass Roman fort bath-house, also known as Walls Castle**Region: **North West**National Monument Number: **13570** National Grid Ref: **SD 088 959****2. Proposals to which this certificate relates:**

Provision of disabled access, removal of fence to be replaced by bollards, installation of improved signage.

3. Conditions applied to this certificate:

The documentation of this proposal has been examined and is appropriate to permit certification.

The following conditions are required in order that the proposed works can be commissioned in accordance with English Heritage conservation policy:

(i) Not less than 2 weeks' notice (or such lesser period as may be agreed) in writing shall be given to Mr A P Davison, Suites 3.3 and 3.4, Canada House, 3 Chepstow Street, Manchester, M1 5FW (telephone 0161-242-1412) in order that the P&D Grants and Advice Team North West may have the opportunity to inspect the works and their effect in compliance with this consent.

(ii) All those involved in the works must be informed of the scheduled status of the monument and the legal obligations which apply.

(iii) Equipment and machinery shall not be used or operated in the scheduled area in conditions or in a manner likely to result in damage to the monument other than that which is expressly authorised in this consent.

(iv) Photographs shall be prepared of the monument before the start and after completion of the works and a set of the prints (together with copies on disc if in digital format) shall be sent to Mr A P Davison at the North West Regional Office (address as at condition i above) within 3 months of the completion of the works (or such other period as may be mutually agreed).

4. Further documentation required:

Not applicable.

5. Certification by Regional Team:

I have examined the proposals and I am content that they document fully works that would otherwise be subject to Scheduled Monument Consent.

I have listed conditions that apply to this certificate.

The proposed works may now be commissioned. Please ensure that all contractors working under this consent are issued with a copy of this certification.

Signed:

Date: 11 August, 2009

Name: Andrew Davison
Inspector of Ancient Monuments