

The Romans Were Here - and so were we!

This autumn we have been busy with a new project called “The Romans Were Here”. The west end of Newcastle is fortunate in having several important Roman remains – three sections of Hadrian’s Wall, a Turret, a Temple, and a Vallum Crossing forming the south entrance to the fort of Condercum. These sites are not as well known as they should be in comparison to the tourist destinations such as The Sill and Vindolanda. Our aim was to celebrate our Roman remains and raise awareness of them. Here are some of the activities that have happened so far.

Digging for History

Twenty volunteers took part in a day of digging for Roman and other historical remains, under the supervision of a team of archaeologists. There were three test pit sites – the grassed area adjacent to Denton Burn Library which is on the line of the Wall, and the back gardens of houses in Thorntree Drive and Countess Drive near the site of the Vallum.



The Romans are coming to tea

Following an illustrated talk in the West End Library about our local Roman sites, the audience was invited by historian Rosie Serdiville to try a variety of different foods prepared to Roman recipes.



The Life of a Roman Soldier

Here is John Sadler, kitted out in the outfit of a Roman soldier, giving a talk at the Vallum Crossing site in Denhill Park, Benwell, about the Roman Army and the Condercum Fort while the audience enjoyed a picnic lunch.



There was a surprise appearance by the Emperor Hadrian, the man who commanded the Wall to be built across Northern Britain almost 2000 years ago.



Heddon on the Wall

Although it is outside Newcastle, we wanted to include a visit to Heddon to see the impressive section of Hadrian's Wall. We felt this was especially important since the route of the official Hadrian's Wall Path misses this out. A guided tour of the Wall by local historian Andrew Curtis included many other aspects of the history of this area.



Benwell Roman Temple

It is surprising how many residents of the west end, including people who live in the surrounding streets, do not know that there are the remains of a Roman Temple in Benwell or that it was the place where the local Benwell God Antenociticus was worshipped. A drop-in event in October attracted more than fifty people to visit the site, explore the temple, meet some of the local gods, and enjoy cake and hot drinks.



Here are two local residents getting to know Antenociticus who is not known anywhere else in the Roman Empire, and Mithras whose secret cult was popular with soldiers along Hadrian's Wall.



Mithras is often depicted in carvings sacrificing a bull.



Neptune, the god of the sea, also visited the drop-in at the temple with his trademark dolphin and trident. Neptune has a special connection to Newcastle as an altar to him was found in the River Tyne near the Swing Bridge.

The Romans Were Here – were you?

If you attended any of the activities we ran as part of *The Romans Were Here*, we would love to know what you thought of the project.

This is not one of those tick box surveys. We would prefer you to tell us in your own words.

We are especially interested in whether you learned anything you didn't know before about the Romans, the local Roman remains in the west end, or anything else about our local history. All comments are welcome.

It would be helpful if you could tell us if you live locally in the west end, elsewhere in Newcastle, or outside the city.

Please email your responses to stjamesbenwell@gmail.com or write to us at the address below.

English Heritage

The Romans Were Here project is funded by English Heritage as part of their Connected Communities programme. English Heritage have commissioned an independent company to evaluate this programme. They have asked if people attending our activities would be willing to complete their events survey to give insight into the ranges of people attending events and how their attendance has benefitted them. If you are willing to help with this, the survey link is <https://eu-ln.sprw.ai/stt-ljRxN>.



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Visit St James' Graveyard: Wednesdays from 10am-1pm, or by arrangement.