



Looking for the Romans in Furness



(And why it matters to Millom)







*'The Romans had entered Furness at
Conishead Bank; in the
perambulation roll of the parish of
Ulverston... it is called the Spina
Alba, the White-thorn... where the
road they made use of quit the sands,
and is in the same roll called the
Street'*

From: *The Antiquities of Furness*, 1774

'it was improvement of a part of the Roman Castullum at Dalton into a garden that led to a full discovery of what was only before suggested, that the Romans had been there. This was evident by some fragments of Roman earthenware and Roman cement, but what made it above all doubt was the remains of a hypocaust, a Roman furnace for smelting copper with part of the copper slag, and a fragment of the worked metal, a small piece of the cornish [cornice?] of an altar of polished limestone, marked with part of two Roman letters elegantly cut - a further search may lead to valuable remains'

West's letter to John Whitaker
Preston Record Office RCHY 3/7/50, 1775

'on the spot where I marked Agricola's Castellum in Dalton church-yard has been dug up fragments of Roman earthenware, cemented walls &c, the foundation of a Hypocaust part of a building of pebble stones set in lime in shape of a hollow con [cone?] or modern limekiln, the apperture at the bottom being very narrow and rested on a free stone with a semi circular apperture of 7 inches by 13 in form which rested on 2 square stones or pedals. The funal [funnel?] shap'd building had a narrow slit from top to bottom. Some charcole and copper Scories [scoriae] were found near it with a fragment of an unpolished copper cornish from these accompaniments. I fancied it to be some part of a furnace for smelting copper... but by whom British or Roman though familiar to the work of the latter I shall be glad of your opinion'

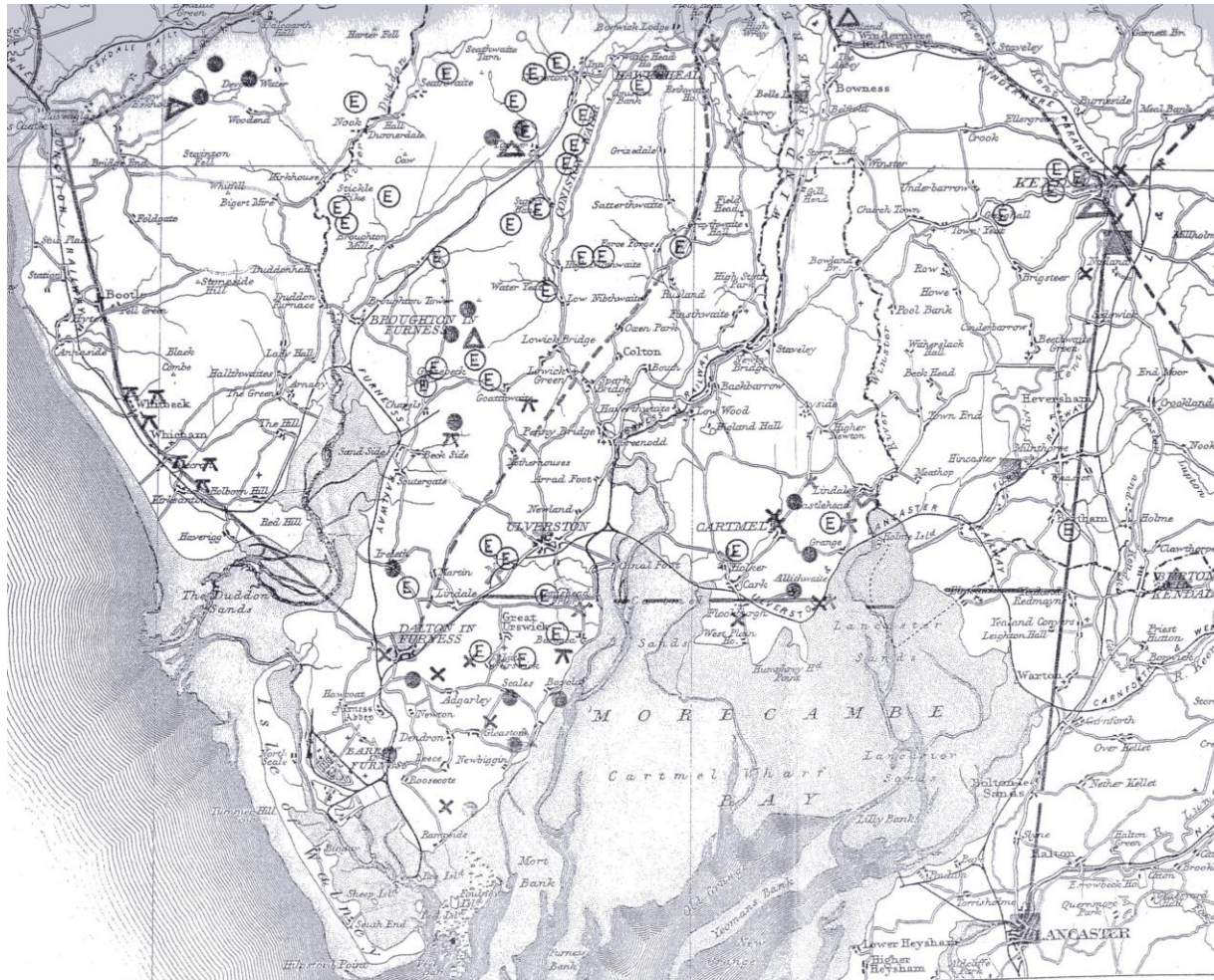
Second copy of West's letter to John Whitaker
Preston Record Office RCLJ 1/2/10, n.d.

'The recent discoveries in Dalton Churchyard strikingly confirm your printed account. A Roman station was certainly there, the pointing of the road and the cement of the walls decisively shew it. But cannot you trace the walls or the ditch? And if you can, at what dimensions is the area? The foundations of the hypocaust I shall be glad to hear more of. This is too curious and too rare a part of Roman British antiquities to be past [sic] over slightly. As to the conical building, I have no doubt it was a furnace, as you suppose, though I have never met with anything of the kind before, and the position of it must give it to the Romans I think, unless it was within the area of the station, and in that case it must be later, I apprehend'

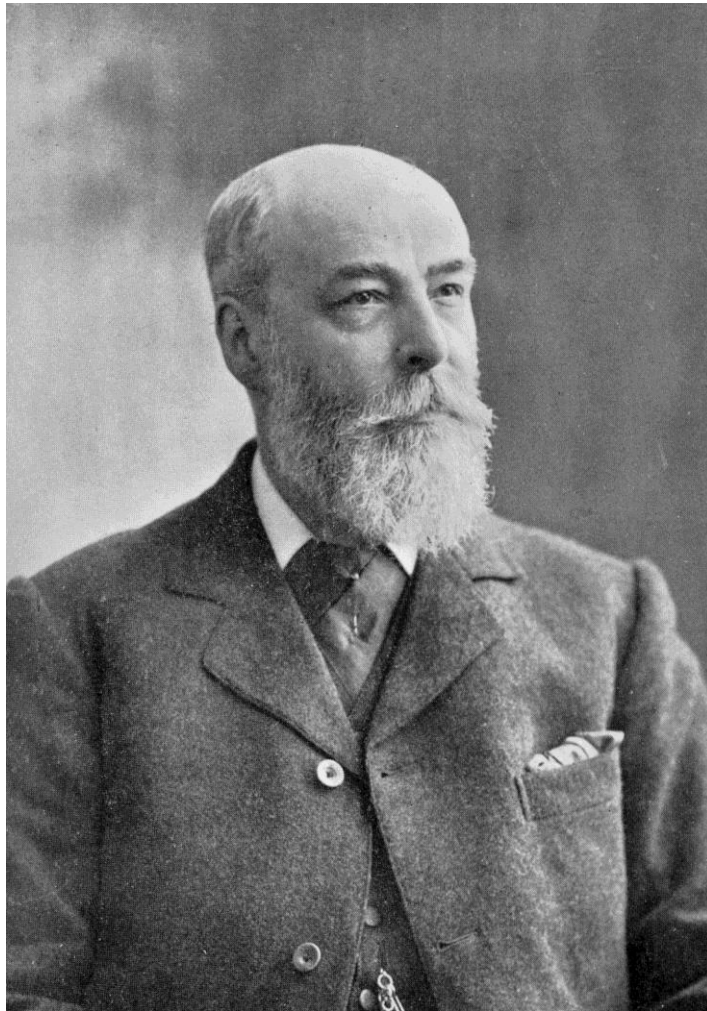
Whitaker's letter to West dated 16th October 1775
From: WT Watkin's *Roman Lancashire*, 1883, page 216

' 1. On the east side of the ditch in the church yard, an irregular foundation of a wall three feet in thickness, consisting of stones without mortar, was found under a quantity of superficial materials. 2. In the garden near the south-end of the rampart, at five or six feet below the surface, immediately under a bed of small loose pebbles, there was a stratum of dark earth mixed with marine shells. And 3. In part of the garden opposite the east end of the church, at the depth of six feet below the surface, the soil was mixed with the shells of periwinkles. From the different circumstances observed in making these perforations, it appeared evident that this mound of earth had been amassed in a great measure by human industry; but for what purpose it was not possible to discover'

From: William Close's additions to *The Antiquities of Furness*, 1805, page 344



Plan of archaeological remains in Furness from *Archaeologia*, Vol 53, 1893



Harper Gaythorpe, from the *Proceedings of the Barrow Naturalists' Field Club*, Vol 17, 1909

‘West... persuaded himself that he had discovered the vestiges of a Roman encampment at Dalton, supposed to be the ancient *castellum* erected by Agricola. There is not the slightest evidence to support this theory. No Roman altar has ever been found at Dalton, and the stones of which the Roman *castellum* was built, if such ever existed, must have been carried away. The few Roman coins which have been found in Furness have probably been lost in more modern times and re-found. The so-called Roman road which enters Furness at White Thorn, at Conishead, is most likely a road made by the monks’

From: *Proceedings of the Barrow Naturalists' Field Club*, 1909, Vol 17, page



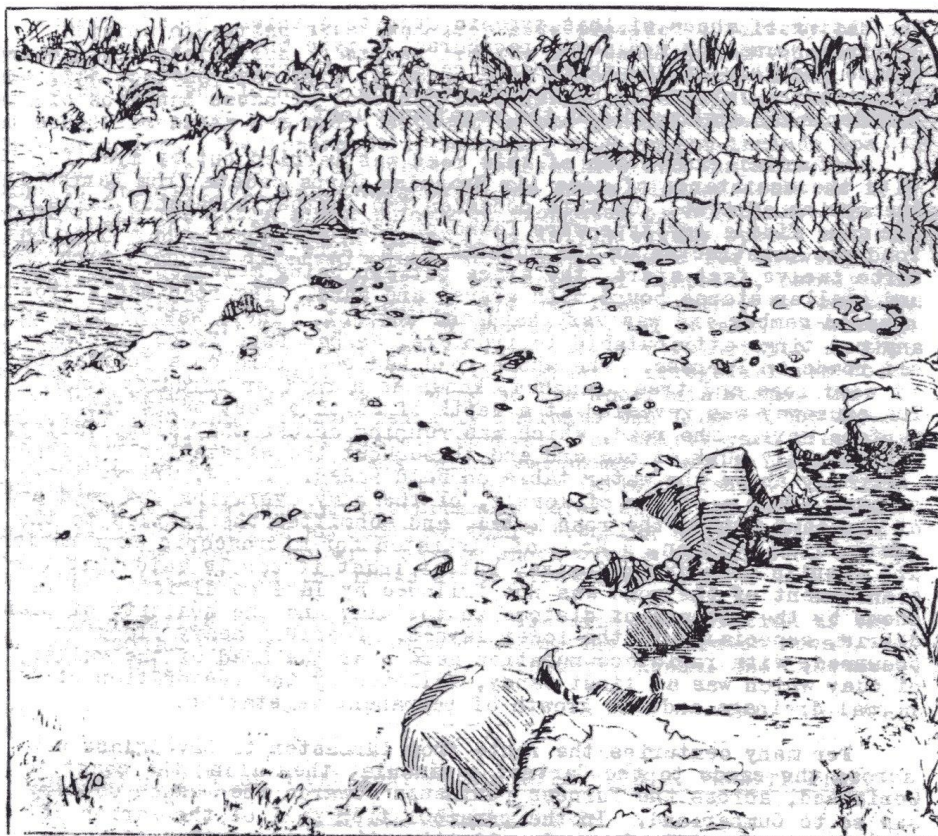
PLATE IV, A.—ANCIENT ROAD: UPPER AND LOWER SURFACES.



PLATE IV, B.—ANCIENT ROAD: UPPER SURFACE, SHOWING RUTS.

The road at Conishead as exposed in the 1920s

From: *Trans C&W Antiquarian & Archaeological Soc*, Vol **30**, 1930



A drawing of the road as exposed at Goldmire in 1966

From: *Proc Barrow Naturalists' Field Club*, Vol **10**, 1971



Aerial Photograph taken in 1966 by the Ordnance Survey



Figure 1: Transcription of features visible in the aerial photograph of 1966



Ordnance Survey 1850, 6": 1 Mile, Lancashire sheet 16

‘all the lands on both sides of the road which leads from Bardsea to Ulverston, and from the great road to Trinkeld, and from thence to the sea bank‘

From: *The Antiquities of Furness*, 1805, page 249

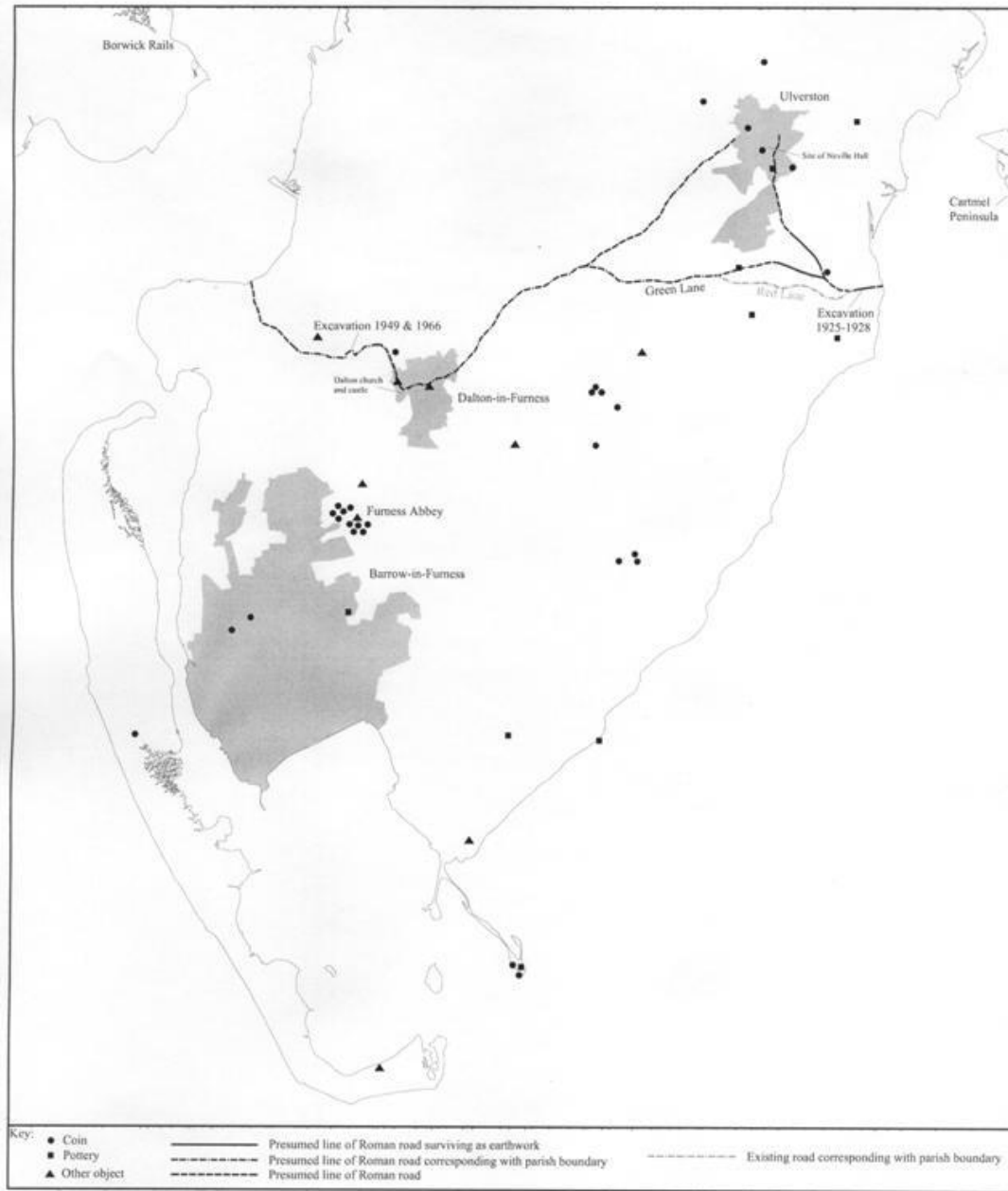
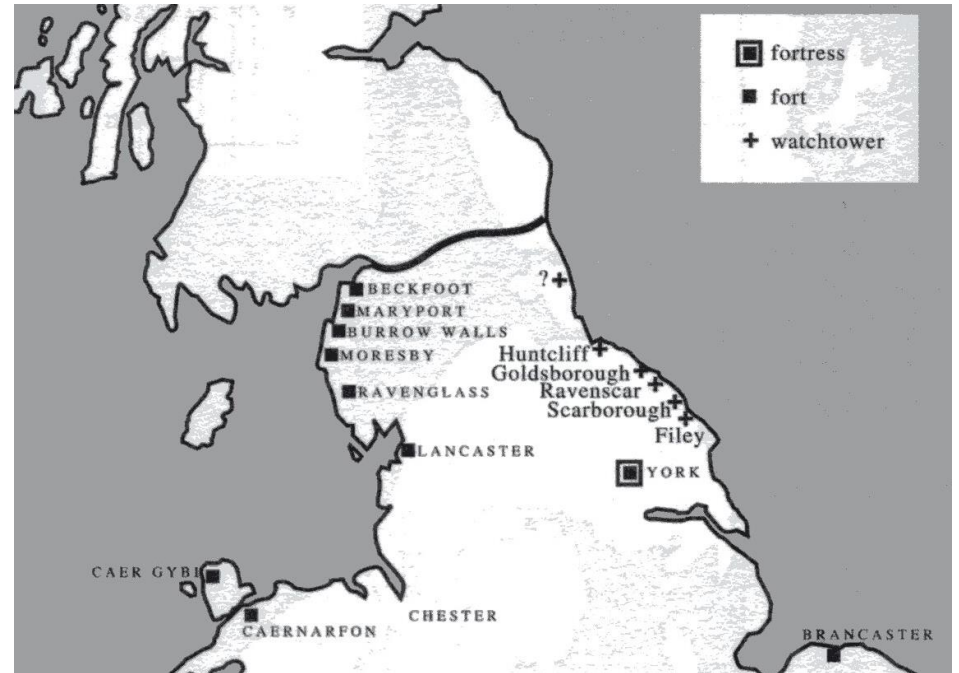
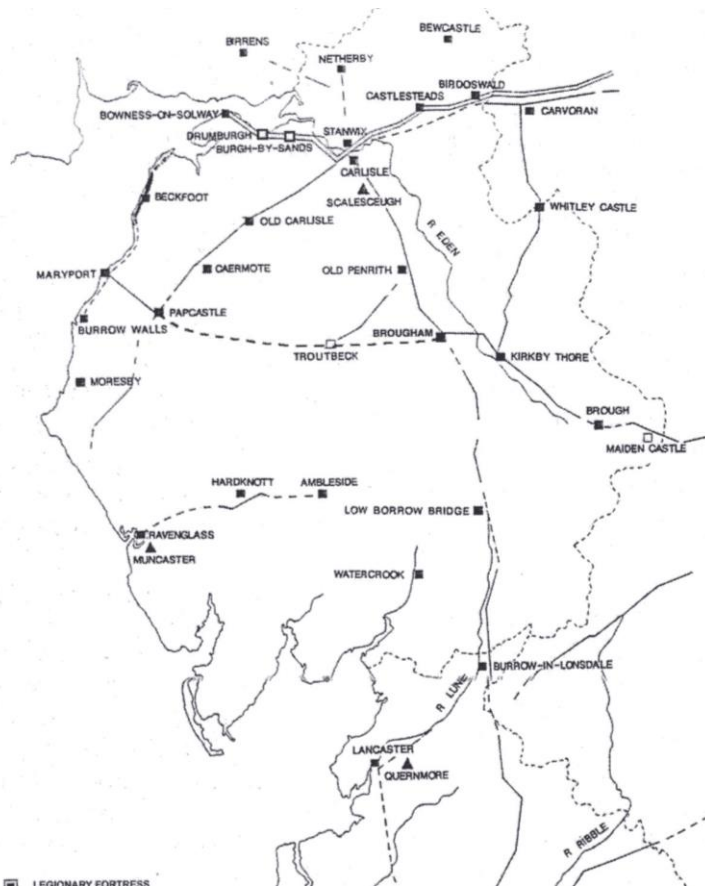
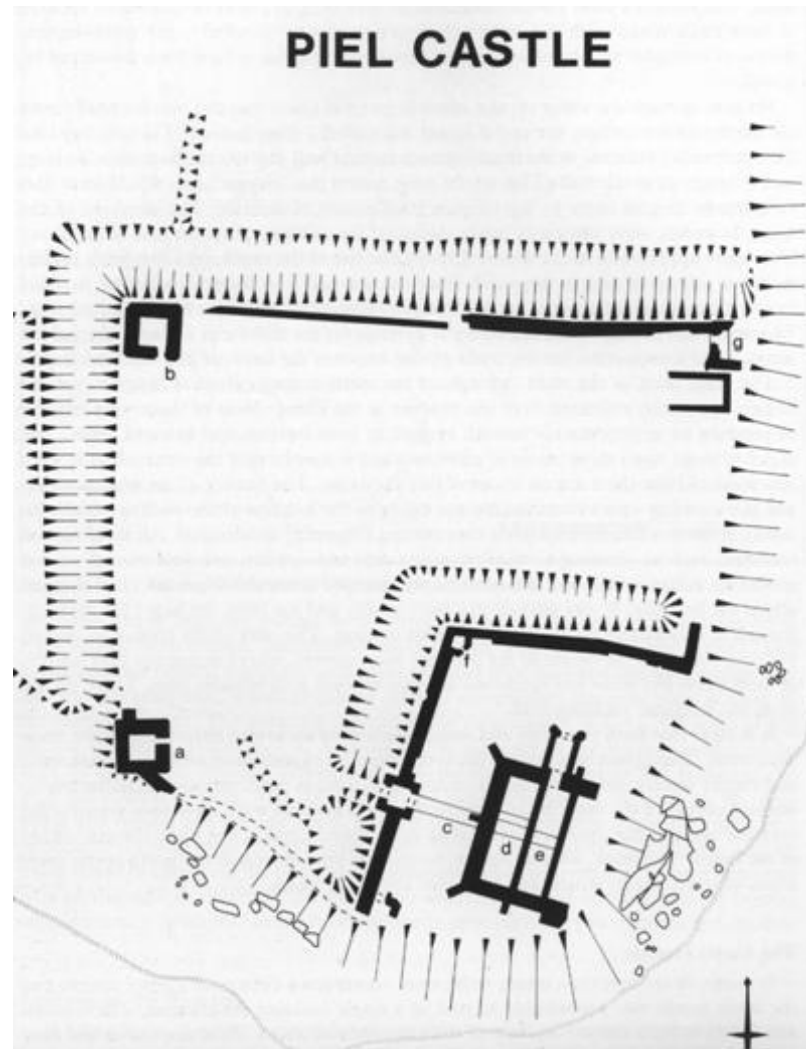


Figure 2: Distribution of Roman-period finds from the Furness Peninsula in relation to the assumed line of the road(s).

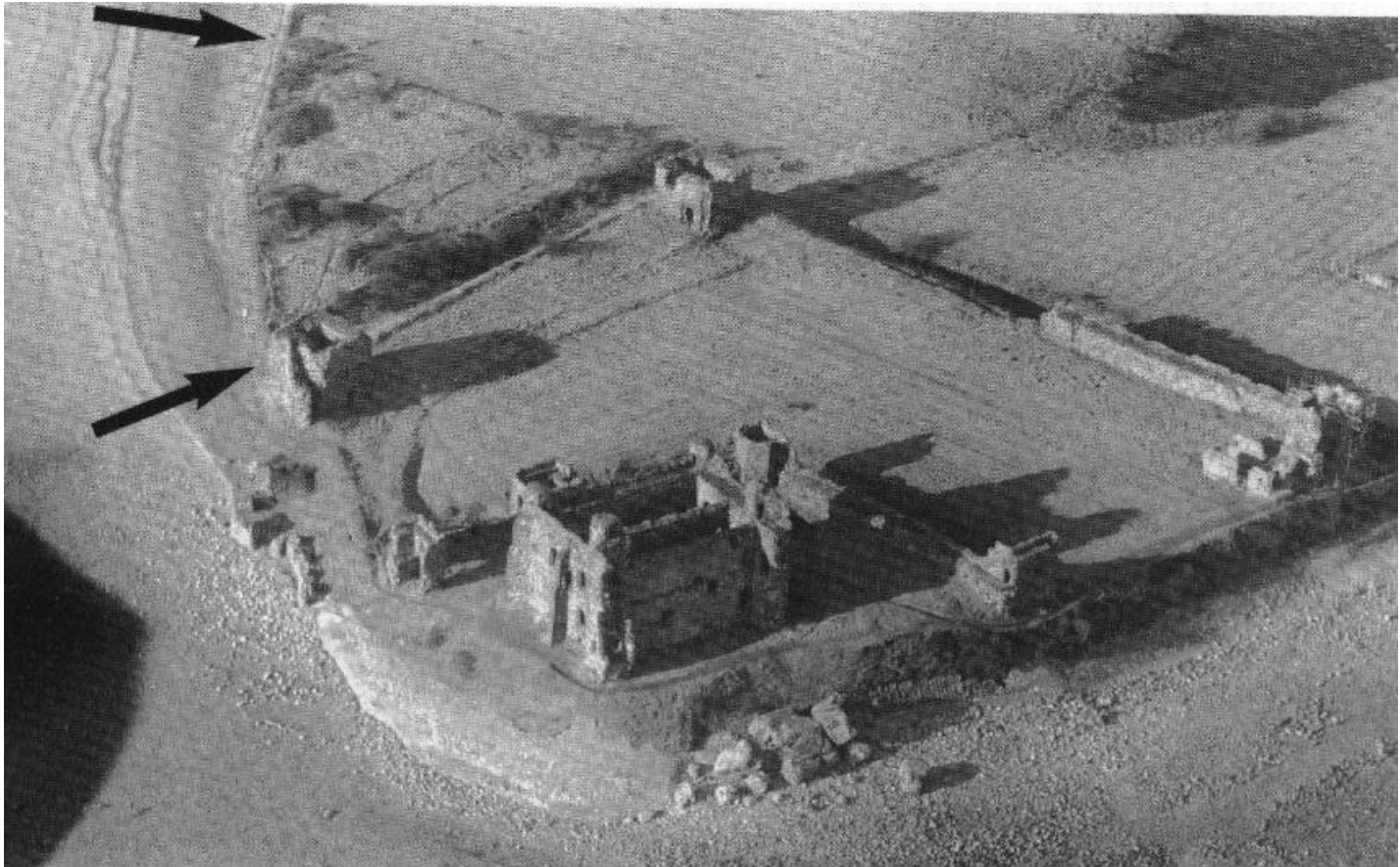


Forts along the West coast of Cumbria showing the gap between Ravenglass and Lancaster

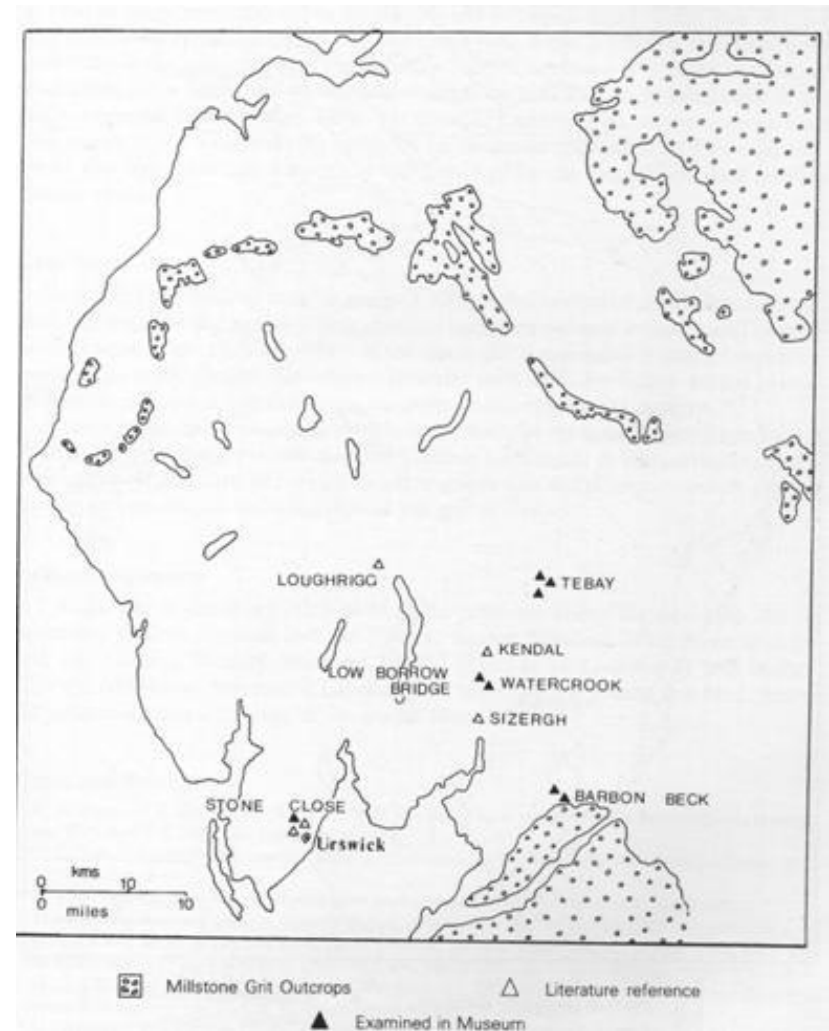
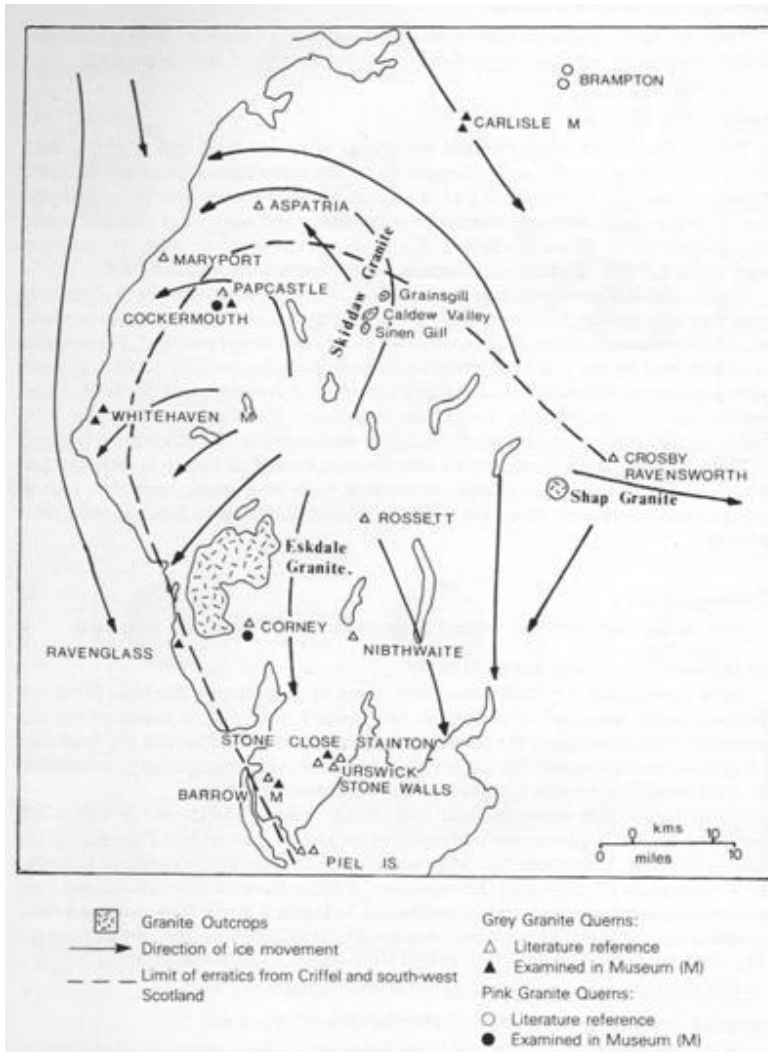
From: D Shotter, *Romans and Britons in North-West England*, 2004 and D Shotter, *Roman Britain*, 1998



Survey of Piel Castle from *Trans C&W Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, 1987, Vol **87**



Aerial photograph of Piel Island from *Trans C&W Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, Vol **100**, 2000



Distribution of beehive querns in Cumbria

From: *Trans C&W Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, 1987, Vol **87**



12 Lower quern stone found in situ during excavation of building A, at the Romano-British settlement at Frocester, Gloucestershire. Photograph courtesy of Mr E. Price



13 The lower stone of a beehive quern next to its emplacement in the floor of structure X at Dalton Parlours Roman villa, West Yorkshire. Photograph courtesy of West Yorkshire Archaeological Service

Beehive querns *in situ* on Romano-British and Roman sites

From: M Watts, *The Archaeology of Mills and Milling*, 2002

THE
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OF
NORTH WEST
ENGLAND



An Archaeological
Research Framework for
North West England:
Volume 1
Resource Assessment



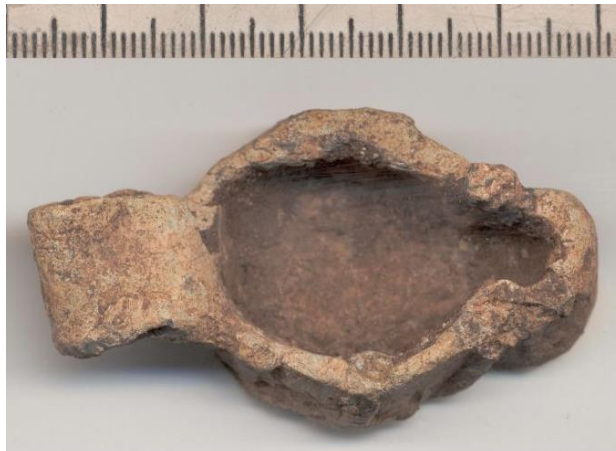
Edited by
Mark Brennand

Hypocausts at
Millgate, Wigan (left
side), excavated in
2005



(above) copper alloy pot
found near Furness Abbey –
date unknown but very
similar to the other example
(right) thought to be 1st-2nd
century AD

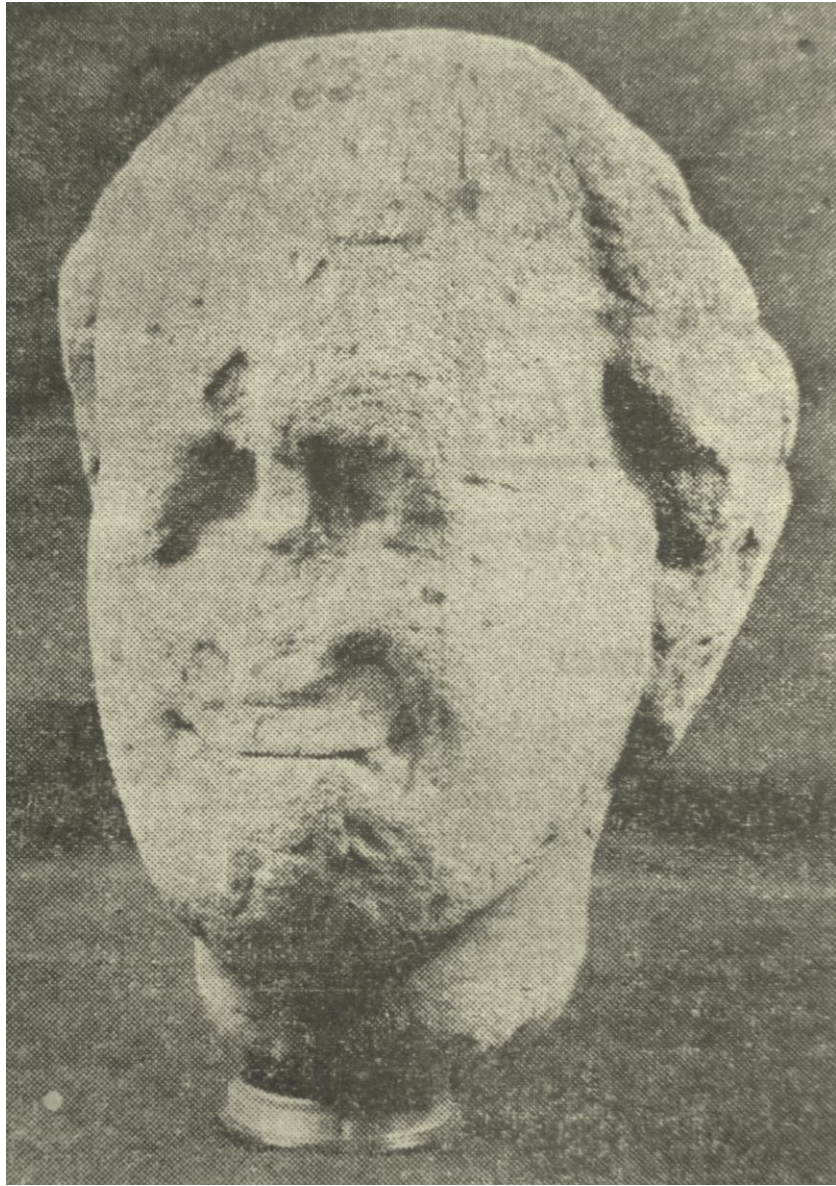


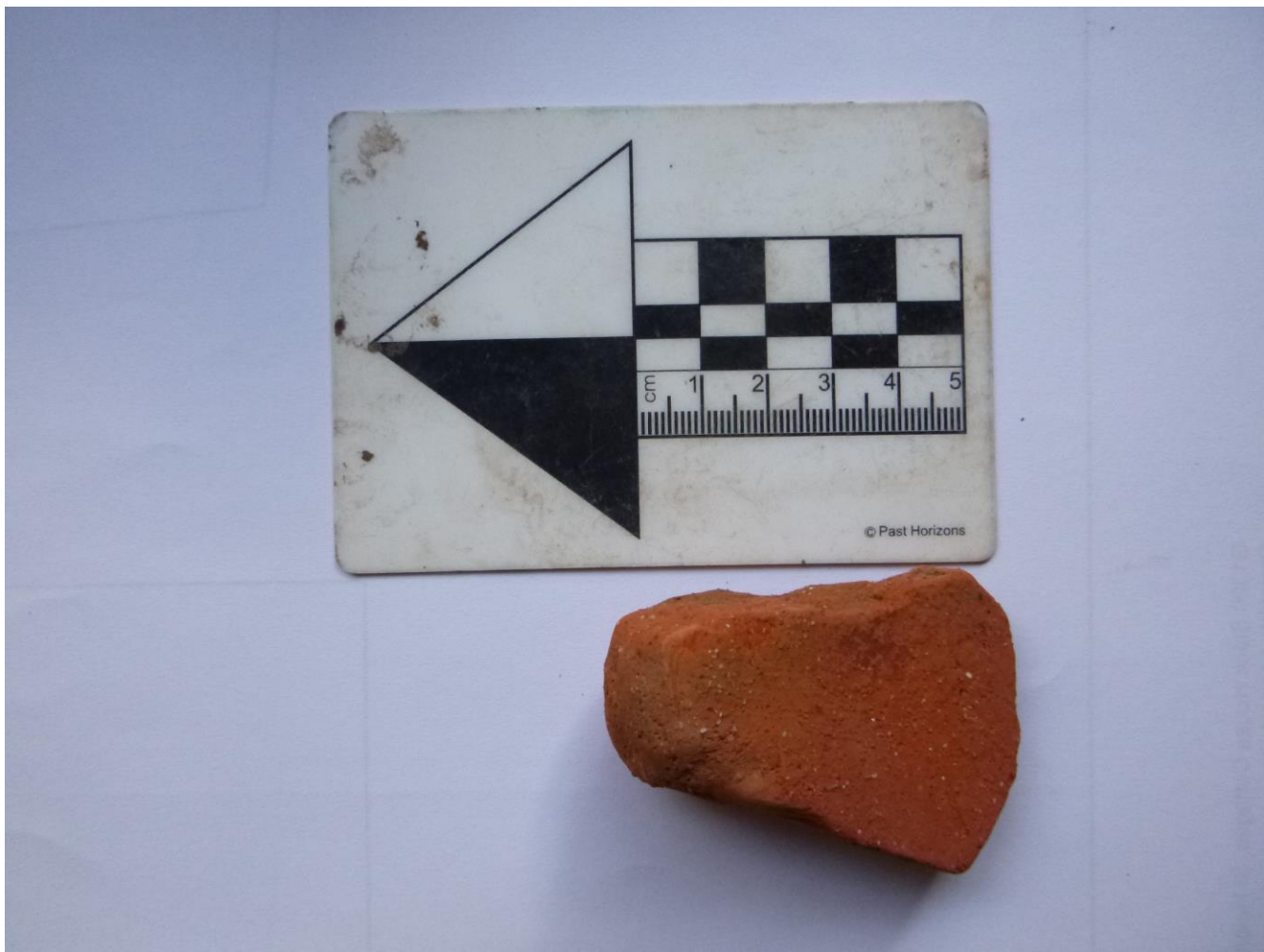


(above) 'Oil lamp' found during the clearance of the dungeon in Dalton Castle

(left) Lead lamp holder of 1st – 2nd century date from the PAS website









Arthur: I am Arthur, king of the Britons...

Woman: King of the who?

Arthur: King of the Britons.

Woman: Who are the Britons?

Arthur: Well we all are! We are all Britons! And I am your king.

Woman: Well I didn't vote for you!

Arthur: You don't vote for kings!

Woman: Well 'ow'd you become king then?