

## ANNUAL REPORT: Ribchester Revisited 2018 FIELD SCHOOL

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*Dr. Sayer removes soil from a 1<sup>st</sup> century wicker lined well.*

Ribchester revisited is a month long, residential, field work project that provides the opportunity for students to learn archaeological excavation and participate in a world class field school while working on and contributing to an internationally important site. Ribchester is located in the Ribble Valley in Lancashire, one of the UKs most picturesque landscapes. In the first three days of the project IFR students learned about Roman archaeology, archaeological recording techniques, and about Roman artefacts during the course of twelve hours of lectures and seminars focused on the end of the Roman period in Britain. The final seminar is structured as a parliamentary style inquiry, where Dr Morris, and Dr Sayer present different evidence of the decline and or continuity of Roman Britain. The Students are split into teams and are allowed to interrogate each presenter before coming to a conclusion. Did the Romans really leave Britain?

On the Saturday students undertook an expedition to archaeological monuments in Cumbria, to further their understanding of British Archaeology. This included Mayburgh Henge, a Neolithic monument, where students explored how the banks and ditches enclose the landscape. Castlerigg Stone circle, which is a standing monument set in the magnificent Lake District National Park. In the afternoon the trip visited Brougham Castle and Roman fort and were led by Dr Ash Lenton, who deconstructed historic building archaeology. Brougham Castle is special in having a Roman fort in the grounds, and at least one Roman grave stone is still visible in the castles construction. On the return trip we visited Old Heysham to see the Viking rock cut graves in and two 8th century chapels.

The excavation started on June 18th when the Taram protective cover was removed, revealing a well preserved trench. Work started at 9.00am every morning and ended at 6pm with stops for lunch and tea. Over the course of the project we entertained 17 school visits and over 1,782 visitors, to whom the student volunteers delivered site tours. Additional public engagement activities included the Roman festival with cavalry, medical tents, infantry, arms and armor and of course an archaeology tent.

Research resources included access to the Bath House, Granaries and Museum, with the site data available on an up-to-date rolling database, photo archive and a modest library of books accessible by each student to help with their own research projects. Fourteen additional classes were organized during the excavation which included the weekly highlight – Vicki Le-Quelenc's finds talk which was a much anticipated round up of the key artifacts from the excavation. Other activities included lectures from Dr Andrew Gardner (UCL) on frontiers and the Roman military, Leslie Allison-Jones on Roman women, Dr James Gerrard on Roman coins, and Dr Andrew Webster's introduction to Roman Pottery. A highlight was Dr Morris' tour of Hadrian's wall, starting at Sycamore Gap, with a particular focus on Housesteads Roman Fort, a site which has been excavated in a similar way to Ribchester site, but more completely allowing the students to explore larger areas of the fort. Seeing this laid out at as a visitor experience allowed students and staff to put our own 30x10m trench into context.

The excavation itself was very successful with 638 small finds taking our total to 1117, including over 80 coins, and this year a second century silver trumpet brooch from the earthen bank, the perfect object to help date the defensive structure. Other finds included hobnails found placed as whole shoes, and we were able to survey them all individually. Also a bone handled knife and stamped pottery were very exciting because the point of origin and the maker were identifiable. Over 229 context records were made, 256 plans drawn and sections drawn, 639 photos taken, 208 environment samples, and 1564 levels were recorded. Daily Vlogs were posted on our Facebook page, as well as tweets and posts. A particular highlight this year was getting onto BBC North West news as a key news item, including an excellent interview with Dr James Morris.

This year we identified a number of key features including six bread ovens, helping to explain the unusual mounding in the clays within the southern house complex. One of these had its internal structures intact, these are unusual in that they are not situated within the turf bank but in a building opposite the granaries. Logical location, and reusing an important building within the fort around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The quest to excavate a well in the south proved futile because increasing complex slumping floors and tiles made it impossible to get to the fill this year. However, unexpectedly a 2m deep wicker lined well was identified in the north of the trench, and cut by the later 2<sup>nd</sup> century ditch, this means the well must belong to the underlying first century fort. Our first insight into its location and how the two interrelated.

Over all the 2018 season has been important for project making real sense of the military structures and the uses and reuses of the building spaces. Not only that but we have started to understand the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century remains very well, so we may see more of the earlier fort next year. Most interestingly perhaps is the changing use of the building interiors with the large southern house having been a bakery, store room, and metal workshop. Our study of the military spaces identified not one but two guard houses with a second century wooden tower predating its replacement in stone. This was a surprise and suggests that the first phase of the second century fort was wooden and turf, quickly being refortified in stone and the whole defensive structure extending the fort by over five meters.

