

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF THE AREA AROUND IRTHINGTON AND THE AIRPORT

INTRODUCTION

The following is an extract of other works prepared recently detailing the local area geology and history and uses reliable sources including consultation of the Cumbria Historic Environment Record (HER), a database of known and potential archaeological sites within the county (excluding the Lake District National Park). Historic maps and published and unpublished material relating to area around Carlisle Airport.

LOCATION AND GEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The area around the airport is entirely rural and is surrounded by agricultural land to the west of the village of Irthington. It lies close to Hadrian's Wall and associated Vallum, between that to the north, and the course of the Stanegate Roman Road to the south

The wider area around the airport is comprised of a solid geology consisting of sandstones of the Permo-Triassic New Red Sandstone (British Geological Survey 1979) overlain by drift deposits of glacial till, primarily in the form of Boulder Clay (Countryside Commission 1998, 21).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Place Name Evidence: the name Irthington is derived from Old English, meaning farmstead, or village (*tun*) on the river Irthing. The first documented reference to Irthington, is in 1169 (Armstrong *et al* 1950, 92).

Prehistoric: not much is known about the area during the prehistoric era, although stray finds and evidence from previous archaeological investigations do indicate activity in the area from as early as the Neolithic. Refuse pits of probable later Neolithic origin have been found to the immediate west of the western boundary of the airport between 1995-6 (Reeves and Wigfield 2000), as well as postholes suggesting a 'D' shaped enclosure, three cooking pits and a possible trackway (Flynn 1998; HER 18978; see 3.4.3).

Various other features were encountered in an archaeological evaluation trench within the airport in 2007, producing charred grain of a Bronze Age date, and a worked flint flake of Later Neolithic or Bronze Age origin (Gaskell 2007). Stray finds, including a perforated stone axe-hammer (HER 228), late prehistoric flint dagger and arrowhead (NMR NY46SE27). A small bronze Bronze Age palstave (HER 234) has been found in the vicinity of Irthington as well as an oblique barbed arrowhead found near the Stanegate to the west of the airport (HER 42556), further attest to utilisation of this area during the prehistoric period.

Romano-British: of most importance is the close proximity of known archaeological features of the Roman era. The Stanegate, an earlier Roman Road, runs on an east-northeast to west-south-west alignment to the south of the airport (HER 5781). Roman occupation within the study area was well established by AD 72-3 under the governor Cerialis (Jackson 2010,

13). It is probable that the Stanegate system was constructed at this time. The Stanegate was comprised of a military road serving as a communications route between the Roman forts at Carlisle and Corbridge, and appears to have been the northern limit of Roman military occupation in Britain by c.AD 105 (Bidwell *et al* 1999). The definitive course of the Stanegate is not confirmed west of Nether Denton, and in other areas, it has been postulated, based on known points (Newman 2006, 12). The line at Carlisle Airport runs from Buckjumping to the east, where there are also earthworks which may date to the Roman period (HER 10223), through the Watchclose Plantation to Crosby Lodge.

Agricultural improvements during the 18th century onwards, and subsequent regular ploughing in the airport environs, suggest the road survived well until then, when people “often plowed up paved stones here” (Hutchinson 1794, 122). It still survived as earthworks by the early 20th century in the Watchclose Plantation where ploughing had not occurred (Richmond and Hodgson 1936).

To the south-west of the airport, and to the south of the Stanegate lies the site of Watchclose Roman temporary camp (HER 216; Scheduled Monument 26028). Although the camp is no longer visible at the surface, it is visible as a cropmark on aerial photographs of the airport. The Roman camp was partly excavated in 1935 by The Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society (CWAAS) Excavation Committee (Richmond and Hodgson 1936, 170-2). No internal features were revealed, however only a small sample of the interior was investigated. The rampart had been removed by ploughing by this time, but the line of the ditch, entrances and traverses were investigated. The single ditch was recorded to be eight feet (2.4m) wide and three feet (0.9m) deep, enclosing an area of approximately 240 square feet (22.3m²). Three entrances covered by external traverses (*tituli*) were identified on the north, east and west sides of the camp, approximately 5m in front of the ditch terminals. However, dating evidence was scarce, and the 1935 excavations failed to resolve whether the camp was associated with the Stanegate system or with Hadrian’s Wall further north. An evaluation in 2010 succeeded in locating the northwest corner of the perimeter ditch of the Roman camp and has relocated the Scheduled Monument approximately 7m further north than previously thought, although the lack of datable finds rendered the issue of the Roman camp’s association with either the Stanegate system or Hadrian’s Wall inconclusive (Jackson 2010, 31). A section of L-shaped ditch of uncertain date visible as a cropmark on aerial photographs may be related to Watchclose Roman camp (HER 43560).

From AD122 the northern frontier was made more prominent by the construction of the Wall under Emperor Hadrian (HER 5782, Scheduled Monuments 26084, 26085 and 26086). This is a World Heritage Site, and the development site itself lies within the Hadrian’s Wall Buffer Zone (Austen and Young 2002). The eastern part of the Wall was of stone construct, but between the River Irthing and the Solway, it was turf- built, 20 Roman feet wide with a steep barrier on the north side; it was later rebuilt in stone (Austen and Young 2002, 5), though not always on the exact same line (Scheduled Monument 26084). Within the study area, the line of the wall is not visible above ground. The Wall was protected to the north by a V-shaped ditch, only seen as a slight earthwork in parts of the airport, and at intervals of 1 Roman mile, milecastles, several of which lie around the environs of the airport and

Irthington but none of which survive above ground (HER 220,221 and 230). Between each milecastle, two turrets were positioned, although none are visible above surface (HER 225).

Initially the Wall was garrisoned from existing forts along the Stanegate (HER 5781), but new forts were built along the wall, sometimes replacing pre-existing milecastles and turrets, and the vallum also dates to this period (Newman 2006, 14). This was a steep-sided flat-based ditch 6m wide and 3m deep flanked by two 6m wide banks. The distance between the Wall and Vallum varies widely, but in the vicinity of the development site, the two are quite close (Scheduled Monument 26084). The frontier was briefly favoured by a more northerly frontier, along the Clyde-Firth, the Antonine Wall, but by AD 160 this had been abandoned and the frontier of Hadrian's Wall was renewed with a new Military Way, road running between the Wall and Vallum, linking all forts and milecastles (Austen and Young 2002, 10). The findspots of an altar (HER 236) and two centurial stones (HER 231 and 229) further attest to Roman-related activity in the area. Additionally, an Irthington Metal Detecting Rally in 2005 produced a number of Roman finds, including: a silver denarius of Tiberius (AD 14-37; HER 42536), a Roman copper-alloy brooch (c AD 43-70; HER 42542), a sestertius of Trajan (AD 98-117; HER 42535), a fragment of a dragonesque brooch (c. AD 75- 175; HER 42548), a sestertius of Faustina Junior (c. AD 138- 161; HER 42534) and an as or dupondius of Faustina II (HER 42541).

Medieval: during the medieval period, the area was part of Gilsland, a relatively independent and powerful lordship which may have been established at the beginning of the 12th century (Newman 2006, 14). In 1158 it was granted to Hubert de Vallibus as the Barony of Gilsland (Ferguson 1890, 160). The western boundary of the barony still survives in modern field boundaries to the west of the development site (Baron's Dyke HER 210, 482); it became the later parish boundary. Other medieval features in the area include the 12th century St Kintigern's Church (HER 20384) and St Cuthbert's Well in the churchyard (HER 4573) as well as a motte known as Castle Mound (HER 217), all attesting to medieval settlement at Irthington. It seems that the area of the airport itself was common grazing during this period, in the township of Newby (Whellan 1860, 680-1). A copper alloy mount in the shape of an arm clad in armour was recorded from the Irthington Metal Detecting Rally in 2005 to the west of Carlisle Airport which dates to sometime between 1400 and 1800 (HER 42545).

Post-Medieval (1485-c.1900): the airport area remained in use as agricultural land during the post-medieval period. The main area of settlement continued to be at Irthington to the east, although farmsteads and some hamlets were developing around the common land, including at Hartleton, Netherfield and Beanlands (HER 40010), shown on Hodgkinson and Donald's County Map of 1774 (Figure 3). Oldwall, just to the northeast of the development area, is first referenced in a survey of 1603 (Armstrong *et al* 1950, 93), with Old Wall Farm (HER 20392) and The Cottage (HER 20397), both Grade II Listed Buildings dating to the postmedieval era. Several other houses and farmsteads attest to this increasing population of the wider study area (HER 19937, 20411, 20395, 20396, 20400, 20382, 20383, 20385, 20386, 20387 and 20388; as well as Gill House, Watch Cross Farm, Watch Close Farm, Hartleton Farm and Netherfield Farm (Newman 2006,15-16)). Two finds were recovered from near the Stanegate to the west of Carlisle Airport from an Irthington Metal Detecting

Rally in 2005: a copper-alloy looped buckle dated to between c. 1500- 1600 (HER 42550) and two silver shillings of Charles II (1642; HER 42557).

The agricultural developments in the area were triggered by '*An Act for dividing, allotting and enclosing the several Open and Common Fields, Moors, Commons and Waste Grounds, in the Parish of Irthington, in the County of Cumberland*', brought before the House of Lords on 21st April 1779 (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=116639>). The common land lay between Oldwall to the north and Newby to the south. The new field system formed rectilinear fields with straight boundaries, clearly distinguishable from the pre-existing landscape. A woodland plantation was created at Watchclose, still in existence today (Newman 2006, 18), with the rest of the area improved for arable cultivation. Many upstanding archaeological features disappeared over the successive years. A clay pit and quarry also date to this period.

The Military Road was constructed between 1751 and 1758 to facilitate military communications and the movement of troops, part of a wider programme of road improvements which mainly affected Scotland (Hindle 2001, 90). The modern A689 road predominantly follows its route, and runs to the south of Carlisle Airport.

Modern (c.1900-present): the land around the airport remained in use as agricultural land up until the mid-20th century, as evidenced by Ordnance Survey Mapping dating from 1863 to the outbreak of the Second World War, which show no change over this period.

The mid-20th century brought fundamental changes in the form of developments relating to the outbreak of the Second World War. 512 acres was commandeered by the Royal Air Force for use as Crosby-on-Eden Airfield, which opened in 1941 (NMR NY46SE162). Various Operational Training Units utilised the site for flights and training (Chorlton 2006), until 1947 when it was returned to agricultural use.

In 1960 it was purchased by Carlisle Corporation and reopened as an airport. Some of the buildings are still in use. As well as the airfield related structures, an air raid shelter and nearby pillbox (NMR NY46E) also attest to mid-20th century activity in the vicinity.