



Bremenium

07 July - 01 Aug 2025

Dig Diary



Redesdale
Archaeology
Group

The Archaeological
Practice Ltd.





Bremenium, meaning *By The Roaring Stream*, is the Roman name for this site which was, at the time, the northernmost occupied fort of the Roman empire and the most important outpost beyond Hadrian's Wall. Today it is quiet, peaceful and one of the most remote locations in England, in the heart of the Northumberland National Park.

Bremenium is also the first fort in the Roman Empire ever to be excavated by archaeologists (1852) and the first to have a plan produced for it. More recently, the site was excavated by Professor Jim Crow and Newcastle University in the 1990s, revealing some of the building structure and layout. In 2021-2 the lottery-funded *Revitalising Redesdale* project provided funding for further investigations which were led by The Archaeological Practice and established the Redesdale Archaeology Group (RAG). RAG have since revisited the site in 2023 and 2024, working with The Archaeological Practice and with support from Northumberland National Park.

This 2025 project was supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and, for the first time, enabled a continuous four week excavation period of the annexe to the west of the main fort. This builds on previous work and aims to enable further learning and understanding about the occupation of this site on the edge of the Roman Empire (although, as readers will find out, archaeology often raises more questions than it answers!).

This diary has been collated by Katherine Williams, Evaluation Consultant, bringing together words from the site diary and other logbooks kept by RAG Chair, Bob Jackson, vlogs produced by The Archaeological Practice, a photo diary from RAG member Elaine Vallack and other feedback from volunteers and visitors. It is intended to show the day to day progress of a community archaeology dig and the remarkable achievements of RAG's most recent project at Bremenium Roman Fort at High Rochester.

The Archaeological Practice's daily vlogs bring the dig to life with tours of the trenches and interviews with volunteers and professionals - these can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/@archprac> or scan the code



SCAN ME



Left: RAG volunteers and students working together in Trench 2
Below: RAG volunteers in Trench 3
(Photos provided by Elaine Vallack)



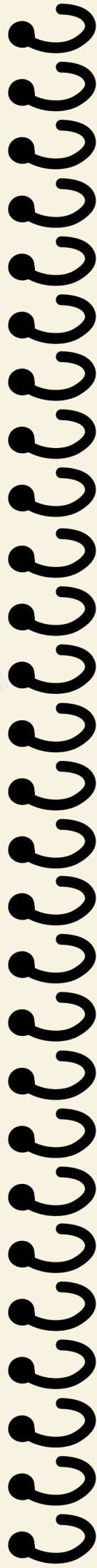
Left: Bread oven found in Trench 2
(Photo by Elaine Vallack)



Above: Backfilling trench 4 (photo by Elaine Vallack)




Left: Aerial view of the site mid excavation (photo by The Archaeological Practice)



DAY 1: MONDAY The digger arrived on site early to lift turf on three trenches and RAG volunteers immediately got stuck in, working alongside professionals from The Archaeological Practice. Even on day 1 some interesting finds were discovered: lots of pottery (grey ware, Samian ware and burnished black ware) along with pieces of glass, tile and slag all dating from Roman times. Lots of excitement about the Roman Intaglio found in Trench 1 by volunteer Barry - this is an intricately carved gemstone, only about 1cm in diameter, which would have originally been set into a ring and used as a seal.

DAY 2: TUESDAY All kinds of Roman finds being revealed today. Lots of pottery including Nene Valley ware, Samian ware and black burnished ware. Multiple fragments from amphora. Artefacts of particular interest are a small metal oil lamp (approx 6.5x3.5cm) from trench 3, a copper medallion, a melon bead and a fragment of pot stamped with a makers mark.

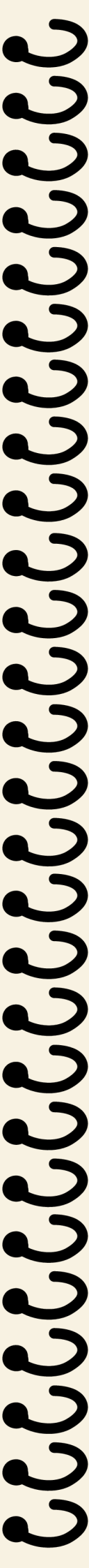




DAY 3: WEDNESDAY Another intaglio! Found by Lara and Jonathan showing a portrait of an elderly bearded man - could this be Socrates? Many other finds including large quantities of Roman pottery.

DAY 4: THURSDAY The finds keep coming but we are also starting to see several phases of building now as we reveal the ancient Roman walls. Some of the walls are overlapping, indicating different periods of build - the earlier walls appear to be better quality. Some volunteers are now starting to work through the spoil heaps, with the help of a metal detectorist. We also welcomed Professor Jim Crow onto site today - not only did he help to excavate the fort annex but he also identified the portrait on yesterday's intaglio as Silenus, a companion of Bacchus/Dionysus, who was related to musical creativity, prophetic ecstasy and drunken joy.

DAY 5: FRIDAY A very hot day and many volunteers needed to retreat to the shade of the gazebo which enabled much progress on the washing of finds. In the trenches we are starting to see Roman buildings emerging. Two Roman coins found today.



DAY 6: MONDAY Archaeology students from Newcastle University arrived today, staying in the village hall for 2 weeks. Extensive areas of burning evident in Trench 3 - could suggest small industry which would be expected in a military annexe. Prof Jim Crow returned to site today. Heavy rain in the afternoon sent us all home early. Digger returned later to extend trenches supervised by Richard Carlton (The Archaeological Practice).

DAY 7: TUESDAY Heavy rain continues and we set students up in the village hall cleaning, identifying and cataloguing finds. A few hardy (or foolhardy) volunteers continued digging in Trench 3 but by lunchtime we closed the site.

DAY 8: WEDNESDAY The rain has now passed and digging is a little easier compared to the sun-baked conditions of week 1. We are starting to define the extent of buildings now, along with a probable road surface and potential annexe rampart. Today's finds need identifying but include possible spear head and a knife.

DAY 9: THURSDAY The layout of walls is becoming more complex and an intriguing building is emerging at the western edge of site. We welcomed Roman finds specialist Alex Croom (Tyne & Wear Museums) onto site to help us identify artefacts and talk to students.

DAY 10: FRIDAY Several test pits opened up today on the main site and into adjacent farm fields - numerous finds but mostly small and poor quality. Trench 3 is now about 1m deep. The outer rampart is proving to be enormous - up to 8m wide - and it seems to abut the south wall of our main Roman building.

DAY 11: SATURDAY Another wet day with an Amber weather warning (a shame for a weekend!). Despite this we were joined by a new volunteer who commented how much they had learned and how welcome they felt. Still finding significant amounts of burnt material in Trench 3. Metal detecting continues on the spoil heaps (nothing remarkable today).



DAY 12: MONDAY Today we were visited by a drystone waller working on the adjacent farm. He brought down an interesting stone which he found in the wall - this turned out to be a small Roman altar. Very worn (to be expected) but we shall send off for analysis and hope we can find out more about the inscriptions. We are also continuing in our test pits and trenches with finds, buildings, roads and ramparts being further uncovered.

DAY 13: TUESDAY An impressive amount of finds so far, both in quantity and quality. Trench 4 has been extended to reveal more of the square building including a possible doorway. Elsewhere we have a second bread oven (the first being found on the Revitalising Redesdale dig in 2022). A beautiful blue glass bead was found late in the day.

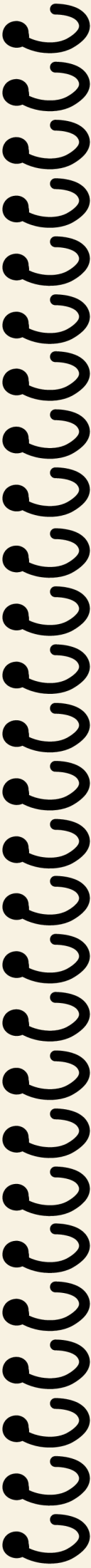
We were joined today by Roman finds specialist Lindsay Allason-Jones and Professors Rob Collins and Mark Jackson from Newcastle University. Lindsay will carry out the post-excavation appraisal of small finds for us.

DAY 14: WEDNESDAY Starting to close down some test pits now. Continuing to expose walls in Trench 2 (extending further east than first expected). Cobbles now also being revealed.

- DAY 15: THURSDAY** We shifted a lot of soil today! We finally discovered the rampart wall and it looks fantastic with substantial ashlar blocks and offset foundation. Buildings in all trenches are becoming much better defined and we now have:
- > A square building in trench 4, near to the fort gateway, with very broad walls
 - > Layers of walls from different periods in trench 2 - removing the later ephemeral walls has revealed footings of an early building
 - > South wall (beyond the bread oven) extending yet further to the east - a very large building indeed!
 - > Newly discovered flagged floor revealed below two stone floor surfaces at the west end of building 2

Finds are still being retrieved from the initial spoil heap and it seems likely that this could contain high status midden material from inside the fort, possibly from the Pretorium (commanding officers house).

We also welcomed a group from North East Sight Matters on site today - a new experience for these young people who have sight impairments. They were able to handle finds, feel the Roman walls and have a go at metal detecting, all guided by our volunteers.



DAY 16: FRIDAY The sheer size of the buildings, walls and ramparts at Brementium is continuing to surprise us. Again, a good range of pottery was recovered, including a large amphora handle and base. Students enjoyed learning how to take levels and draw trench sections.

DAY 17: SATURDAY Last day on site for our students. Amongst other finds, a Roman coin was discovered in Trench 1.

DAY 18: MONDAY Into the final week... The square building in trench 4 appears to have very substantial walls for its size and various theories are emerging about its function. More of the enormous rampart wall in trench 3 has been revealed together with an adjacent outer ditch (which could potentially give rise to well-preserved artefacts due to good anaerobic conditions). In trench 2 the north wall of our first building continues eastward - a very sizeable building indeed! The Making History project brought children from Kids Kabin and North Tyne Youth onto site - they had lots of fun exploring our finds, metal detecting and mounting a surprise attack on our volunteers (with faces painted blue as a native tribe of 'Wood Warriors').

DAY 19: TUESDAY Trench 1 filled in today. Trench 4 was extended in another attempt to find the wall return. Further progress made in trench 3 to reveal the annexe wall. A great deal of organic material is now being encountered across the site and we have reached probably water table in some trenches. A red deer antler was found on the north side of building 1, along with a probable gaming counter made from black polished stone. Trenches were extended again by digger after volunteers had left the site. We were visited by Tony Wilmots, Hadrian's Wall scholar today.

DAY 20: WEDNESDAY Trench 4 is still extending north - the wall now appears to incorporate a second build at its north end (perhaps a platform for a timber building?). In trench 3, the rampart wall was cleaned up and an organic-rich layer investigated for potential dating evidence - trying to understand the sequence of events. Continued investigations in trench 2 (main trench), revealed a Roman drain through the north wall at its east end. We were joined today by an old friend of the site, archaeologist Clive Waddington who was part of the excavation team here in the early-mid 1990s, as well as Durham County Council archaeologist David Mason, an expert in all things Roman.

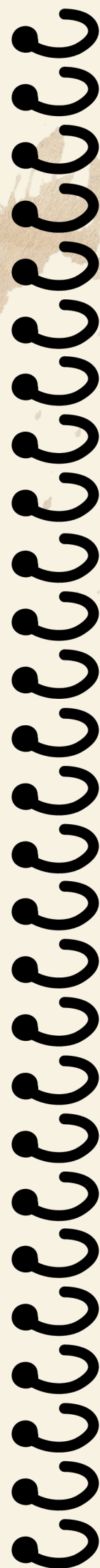
DAY 21: THURSDAY Lots of backfilling and drawing/recording features. Black membranes used to preserve features underground and enable continued excavations in future. Metal detectorists busy in the spoil before it is returned to trenches and digging continues in trenches 2 and 4. Slots found in the clay adjacent to the bread oven are likely to have held timbers with a well preserved plank found nearby in the waterlogged conditions along with what appears to be a complete plum. Still failed to find a return in the exceedingly long wall in Trench 4 - this is perhaps a focus for a future season? Groups from Tynedale USA and the National Park Farming in Protected Landscapes team visited (both very interested to speak to volunteers and learn about the fort) as well as Northumberland's Assistant County Archaeologist Karen Derham and Dr Jame Harrison. .

DAY 22: FRIDAY All trenches backfilled and the farmer's field put back to 'normal'. Waterlogged conditions encountered throughout much of the excavation now, indicating potential for significant preservation of organic material which could give rise to yet more interesting finds across the site - next time! Finds from this dig will now be evaluated by researchers (funding permitting because quality and quantity is much higher than anticipated).



Visitor log

<u>Day</u>	<u>Weather</u>	<u>No. of volunteers</u>	<u>Newcastle Uni students</u>	<u>Visitors (individuals, groups and invited guests and specialists)</u>
1	Bright & sunny	25		1
2	Dry & breezy	23		3
3	Sunny, breezy	20		4
4	Hot & dry	12		8
5	Very hot	13		1
6	Warm, heavy rain pm	13	24	5
7	Constant rain	7	24	2
8	Overcast but dry	12	24	5
9	Sunny	12	24	8 inc Alex Croom, Tyne & Wear Museums
10	Dry	13	24	4
11	Stormy	6	24	4
12	Overcast but dry/warm	8	22	6 inc dry stone waller from next farm
13	Showery	11	22	8 inc 2 professional archaeologists
14		13	22	11
15	Overcast	19	22	31 inc NE Sight Matters (8 adults, 5 children)
16	Overcast, cooler	12	22	10
17	Cloudy	16	22	13
18	Overcast, cooler	16		27 inc Kids Kabin & North Tyne Youth (6 adults, 13 children)
19	Sunny intervals	19		10
20	Dull but warm	11		16
21	Overcast	13		31 inc Tynedale U3A (17 adults) + Farming in Protected Landscapes team
22	Overcast	18		2

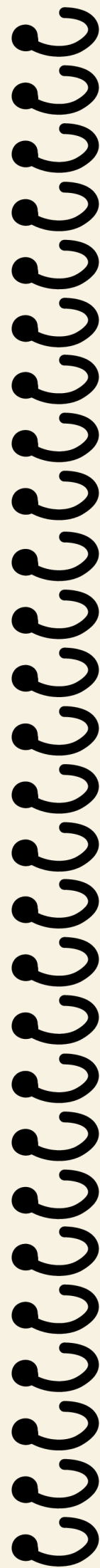




COMMENTS FROM OUR SOME OF OUR VISITORS

<u>Day</u>	<u>Visitors from</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Day 2 & Day 4	Yorkshire	Here on holiday and have had a guided tour of the dig site. Very interesting, have been able to hold some finds. Very friendly bunch of people. Will be visiting everyday for a week to see what turns up. Last visit this morning interesting to see cleaned up finds. I am now following the dig on Facebook. Have thoroughly enjoyed visiting this dig. Thank you to all.
Day 3	Netherlands	Beautiful interesting site. Thank you for the tour and information.
Day 4	Aberdeen	Many thanks to Bob and the team for a fascinating tour of the dig and some of the finds. WOW! Great to see first hand and to add to our understanding of the Roman history of the area.
Day 6	Local resident, High Rochester	Good to have you back in Brementium. Look forward to following progress over the next three weeks!
Day 8	Australia	Very informative. So great to see a dig! Bob was fantastic.
Day 8	Prudhoe, Northumberland	Feel so lucky that we timed our visit to Dykehead to be able to visit the dig! Thanks loads to Bob for all the information!
Day 9	Cramlington, Northumberland	Very interesting to see and hear about the dig in progress. Much more than we expected to see. Excellent visit.
Day 13	Belgium	We came across the site on our roadtrip to Scotland from Belgium. Thank you for the interesting tour! We've loved it very much and wish you all good luck.

<u>Day</u>	<u>Visitors from</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Day 16	East Yorkshire	We've really enjoyed visiting the fort and seeing a dig in progress! They're clearly all very dedicated and our guide was very knowledgeable. Lovely to find out more and wishing the team luck in future work. Thank you!
Day 16	Local resident, Rochester	Amazing! Incredible what is below the fields. Thank you for the fab tour!
Day 17	Not stated	Lovely to see progress. Third year I visited (alongside dog trialling). Lots of pottery! Thanks for showing me around!
Day 18	Widdrington, Northumberland	A fantastic tour given by Bob explaining the history and the workings of the current dig. We were so enthused that we will be joining RAG in time for next season. Thank you to one and all!
Day 19	Netherlands	Smashing site. We were excited to find it so close to our cottage. Thrilling part of history. many thanks to the young guide that took the time to explain what was found.
Day 20	Dr Clive Waddington	Stunning results from a limited investigation raising important questions about the nature, phasing, history of the edge of the Roman Empire. This site has considerable potential to answer key questions ... about the wider Roman occupation and repeated invasions of northern Britain.
Day 21	Tour guide, NE England	Followed the dig online and have a real passion for late Roman Britain, wanted to see the development of the dig and to understand more of what was happening here. Thank you for being welcome.
Day 21	Tynedale U3A	Well! What an amazing visit to a VERY SPECIAL site with such significance in the Northern Roman Frontier. Everyone involved was so helpful, enthusiastic and passionate about this site. Thank You!!!



Bremenium 2025

in numbers

45 Volunteers | **8** Professional archaeologists working on site |

11 Visiting archaeologists and academics | **24** Archaeology students |

20+ Children (volunteers and visitors) | **22** Days on site |

>4000 Volunteer hours | **350 sq metres** excavated |

2 farms | **500 tonnes** of soil moved | At least **1000** finds

including **91** small finds of interest | **200** visitors | **5** visiting groups

And, in the weeks after the dig... **6 or more** outreach activities including talks and hands on displays at local shows.



Photos of visitors from Kids Kabin: Elaine Vallack

Bremenium 2025 small finds list*

<u>Find Type</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Intaglio	x3 (1 fragment)	All of red carnelian stone, carvings depicting mythological scene and Silenus, companion of Bacchus
Silver (Ag) Coin	x10	Denarii (1st-3rd century AD), inclusive of hoard x7 coins found together
Noteworthy sherds of Samian Pottery	x4 stamped x7 decorated x1 spindlewhorl	These, among large quantity of plain sherds belonging to all manner of crockery types
Mortaria Stamp	x1	Large rim sherd with decorative stamp
Copper (Cu) alloy	x1 lamp x7 brooch x3 coin x19 'item'	A rare bronze oil lamp, small and possibly votive. All to be appraised
Iron (Fe)	x2 hook x2 blade x1 spearhead x2 buckle x6 'item'	All to be appraised
Glass	x4 vessel sherds x4 beads	Decorated and from squared vessels. Many other plain sherds. All to be appraised
Lead (Pb)	x1 unit seal x3 pot repair x9 'item' x1 lead sling shot	All to be appraised
Stone gaming counter	x1	To be appraised

* Initial finds list provided by The Archaeological Practice, September 2025
(all items still to be fully appraised/analysed)

