

= Whitley Castle =

Whitley Castle is a large and uniquely shaped Roman fort ( Latin : castra ) north @-@ west of Alston , Cumbria , England that was known to the Romans as Epiacum . The fort was built early in the 2nd century and at least partly demolished and rebuilt around AD 200 .

Whereas Roman forts are normally " playing @-@ card shaped " ( rectangular with rounded corners ) , Whitley Castle is lozenge @-@ shaped to fit the available site . In addition , it has the most complex defensive earthworks of any known fort in the Roman Empire , with multiple banks and ditches outside the usual stone ramparts . The fort appears to have been sited to control and protect lead mining in the area as well as to support the border defences of Hadrian 's Wall .

The fort was surveyed by the geologist Thomas Sopwith in the 19th century and the historian R.G. Collingwood in the 20th , with a geophysics survey in the 21st , but it has not been fully excavated . Among finds at the fort are altars with inscriptions to Hercules by the 6th Legion of the Roman army ( normally stationed at York ) and to Apollo by the fort 's garrison of auxiliaries , the 2nd Cohort of Nervians . Other finds include a midden containing shoes ; coins , fragments of Samian pottery , beads , nails , and a bronze handle shaped like a dolphin .

= = Situation = =

Whitley Castle is about 1 @, @ 000 ft ( 300 m ) above sea level in the Pennine hills on the border of Cumbria and Northumberland . It lies to the west of the modern A689 road beside the Pennine Way long @-@ distance footpath . During the Roman era , Epiacum was situated about 15 mi ( 24 km ) south of Hadrian 's Wall and 20 mi ( 32 km ) north of the main road which ran between Luguvalium ( Carlisle ) in the northwest and Eboracum ( York ) in the southeast . The Maiden Way road connected it to Magnae ( Carvoran ) on the Wall and Bravoniacum ( Kirkby Thore ) on the Carlisle ? York road .

Whitley Castle is one of the most isolated Roman sites in Britain , which may help to explain both why it remains largely unexcavated as of 2012 and why so much of it has survived . The site is a lozenge @-@ shaped spur of high ground on Castle Nook hill farm under permanent pasture . The remains lie under the grass , and are most clearly seen in aerial photographs . The Roman fort itself covers about 4 acres ( 1 @. @ 6 ha ) ; outside it is a system of concentric defensive ditches .

The fort may have been sited to exert control over the area near Alston and its lead mines , as well as to provide support for Hadrian 's Wall .

= = Roman fort = =

Epiacum was built early in the 2nd century . It was at least partly demolished and rebuilt around AD200 ; the destruction coincides with an uprising of the northern tribes in 196 . The fort was modified or wholly rebuilt about the year 300 . It appears to have been preceded by an Iron Age fort , followed by a Roman camp before the permanent fort was constructed .

Epiacum is in some ways a typical Roman fort : inside the wall are straight roads which cross , a headquarters building ( the Praetorium ) , the commandant 's house , a set of barrack blocks for the cohort of auxiliary soldiers , and granaries to store food . Also as usual , there is a bath house and a temple ( dedicated by the auxiliaries to the Emperor Caracalla ) outside the wall . There is an altar to Mithras and another , as already mentioned , to Hercules .

Epiacum , however , has two unique features . Firstly , the fort 's military engineers modified the usual rectangular plan to suit the available site : it is distorted into a lozenge or parallelogram ; the internal features of the fort are similarly distorted . Six barracks were however fitted in behind the headquarters building ( Principia ) , and four in front of it , in a limited area of 1 @. @ 25 hectares ( 3 @. @ 1 acres ) . Secondly , the wall is surrounded by four steep defensive ditches and banks around the hill spur , and seven such ramparts across the uphill side of the spur . These constitute the most complex defensive earthworks of any known Roman fort , with multiple banks and ditches outside the usual stone ramparts .

Inscriptions on some of the altars found at Epiacum provide evidence of the Roman army units garrisoning the fort . One of these is inscribed " DEO HERCVLI C VITELLIVS ATTICIANVS > LEG VI V P F " ( " To the god Hercules , Gaius Vitellius Atticianus , Centurion of the Legio VI Victrix , Loyal and Faithful , [ erected this ] . " ) This was a regular army legion based at York .

Another altar is inscribed " DEO APOLLINI G ... IVS ... COH II NER ... " ( " To the god Apollo , Gaius Julius Marcius , [ commander ] of the 2nd Cohort of Nervians , [ fulfilled his vow ] . " ) . This and two other inscriptions also naming the 2nd Nervians , auxiliaries from the lower Rhine , date to 213 @-@ 221 AD . The altar was in a socket of a big stone slab supported by four columns , each topped by a coin ; one of these was dated to 141 @-@ 161 AD .

= = Archaeology = =

Little archaeological research has taken place at Whitley Castle . In 1810 , the Revd . John Hodgson excavated the bath house , in the north @-@ east corner of Epiacum . In 1825 several leather shoes were recovered from a Roman rubbish tip when a Mr Henderson was cutting a drainage ditch . The geologist Thomas Sopwith surveyed the fort , describing it , its baths and the midden ( waste heap ) in 1833 as follows :

Still further north [ of the multiple ditches ] are the remains of the Hypocausta or baths ? the supposed cemetery of the station ? and , what is rather a variety in antiquarian researches , the perfect remains of a Roman middenstead , which , strange as it may appear , has furnished many loads of excellent manure to the neighbouring fields , and been hitherto the productive mine of several interesting curiosities .

The fort was surveyed and described by R.G. Collingwood in his Archaeology of Roman Britain , 1930 , where he noted the fort 's uniquely skewed shape and extraordinary set of defensive ramparts on the northern , uphill side . Pottery excavated in the 1950s suggested that the fort was constructed in 122 AD , at the same time as Hadrian 's Wall . A survey in 2007 ? 8 by English Heritage showed a large Roman civilian settlement or vicus to the north and west of the fort . Artefacts found include coins , pottery , glass , objects made of jet , and inscribed stones . In 2012 , the University of Durham carried out a geophysics survey as part of an English Heritage project . In the absence of a full excavation , archaeologists have exploited the diggings of moles to uncover Roman artefacts by sifting earth thrown up by the animals in their molehills . Finds include fragments of terra sigillata ( Samian ware , Roman table pottery ) ; rim fragments of serving bowls and earthenware pots ; a bead made of jet ; some iron nails ; and a bronze dolphin from the bath house , most likely the handle of an instrument like a strigil or razor .

= = Name = =

The Roman name for the fort , Epiacum , is given in Ptolemy 's Geography as the first town in the area of the Brigantes tribe of northeastern England . The name probably means " the property , or estate of Eppius . ' Eppius ' is a Romanised Celtic or British name , and he may have been a local leader of the tribe of Brigantes . "

= = Protection = =

The site is on the privately owned Castle Nook Farm , and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument . In 2012 the not @-@ for @-@ profit company Epiacum Heritage Ltd. secured a £ 49 @,@ 200 Heritage Lottery Fund grant to develop a programme of events for the fort to include a website , guided tours for the public , archaeology survey days for volunteers and educational events for schools .