

TRIMONTIUM MUSEUM, MELROSE

14 June 2023

Following the successful morning visit to Carolside Gardens, near Earlston, 12 members convened at 2pm to visit the newly refurbished Trimontium Museum in Melrose.

The group, which was the first to visit the redeveloped building, was given an introductory talk about the museum and the Trimontium site itself following which those present looked at the exhibits on display.

Trimontium is the name given to it in Ptolemy of Alexandria's second century map and in the list of ancient place names, the seventh century Ravenna Cosmography. It is taken to refer to the three Eildon Hills – Eildon Hill North; the Mid Hill; and the Little or Bowden Eildon – all Bronze Age sites and landmarks visible from all directions. There is also the Little Hill beside them, the vent of the volcano of long ago. The Iron Age hillfort on Eildon North is a visible reminder of the fort's proximity to the local population. The Roman Road that became Dere Street passed nearby.

Trimontium was a Roman cavalry fort located at Newstead and, situated on a bluff on the South bank of the River Tweed, it commanded the valley. It was occupied from about 79 AD to 184 AD and was the largest of the "outpost" forts with associated *vicus* (settlement) still occupied after the construction of Hadrian's Wall in the 120s AD. It was located 60 miles north of the wall in seemingly "hostile" territory. Trimontium was about three times as big as any fort on Hadrian's Wall and, in the later period, became the most northerly settlement of the whole Roman Empire.

It is considered of international importance as the site of one of the largest caches of Roman military objects in Great Britain as well as the most northerly known amphitheatre in the Roman Empire.

The Trimontium Trust runs the museum which has undergone a £1.4 million redevelopment as part of a project supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to enhance and extend the galleries, displays and interpretation of Trimontium's history. The trust carries out guided walks to the Trimontium site, runs a lecture and talk series, undertakes activities linked to local community events, and presents school and family workshops.

Many of the original and later finds from Trimontium are of such quality and importance that they are displayed at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Items such as cavalry helmets and decorative face mask, horse chamfron and leather work can be seen, as well as other Roman finds.

The Trimontium Trust museum redevelopment project has seen key finds returned to be placed with other important items which are on loan. They are housed within this contemporary museum setting, which extends, redesigns, reinterprets and re-displays objects telling the story of Trimontium and its relationship with the local population. Making

use of state-of-the-art equipment loaned on a *pro bono* basis, the museum has carried out extensive Ground Penetrating Radar surveys of the Newstead site which, along with the permitted use of metal detectors, has provided more detailed information about the site than had previously been available.

The Trust is to be congratulated on its success both in creating a modern museum situated so close to the very important Roman fort at Newstead and also in seeking to explain the Roman occupation in the context of the local population and environment during the first and second centuries A.D.



Club members in the Audio-Visual area of the Trimontium Museum