

In the footsteps of the Romans – Saturday, 20 May 2023

It was a perfect spring day for the IAG Roman road walk and 10 of us donned hats and applied sun screen for a stroll through 2,000 years of history in the Lune valley.

Starting at Nether Burrow, we rambled along quiet lanes and field tracks until we reached the Roman road which, walk leaders Phil and Clare explained, was constructed in the 1st century AD by the legions as they extended Rome's control over north-west Britannia. The road links the forts at Chester and Ribchester with the northern frontier of the empire at Carlisle. Though it was once the Roman equivalent of our M6, the route fell into disuse and passes through quiet fields grazed by sheep and lambs. But once you realise it is there, it can be seen quite clearly.

Our section ran in an arrow-straight line northwards and we walked along the "agger" which was a clearly higher than the surrounding pastures. We spotted the Roman ditches in the long grass and wondered if the large rocks we saw by the side of the track were part of the original construction.

At Overtown we looked at a Roman milestone which stands by the roadside, probably in its original position. Now, though, it is sadly damaged and only a fraction of its original height. We then broke for a picnic lunch in a beautiful sunny garden and sampled spicy biscuits baked to a Roman recipe. A big "thank you" must be extended to the owner of the house who very kindly let IAG use his outdoor dining area.

Our route then took us along quiet paths by Leck Beck to Cowan Bridge where we looked at the school house attended by the Bronte sisters in 1824-5. Charlotte Bronte's description of the harsh regime of Lowood School in Jane Eyre is based on her experiences there.

We then returned to the Roman theme and rambled though the fields towards the site of the fort at Burrow. Burrow Hall occupies the platform where the fort was constructed, probably in around 70-80 AD, and as the land is in private ownership we weren't able to get close to it, though we could identify some features of the landscape through the railings.

The imposing entrance gates to the hall stand on what was once originally one of the main roads into the fort, and we looked into the fields between the fort and the River Lune which recent Lidar surveys have revealed is the site of the civilian settlement - the vicus – which grew up near the fort.

The final section of our walk took us along the A683 which is in fact another Roman road, built to connect the Burrow fort with Lancaster. This became a turnpike road in the 18th century and is now a very busy trunk road through the valley, its long straight Roman stretches much appreciated by speedy drivers and bikers.

All in all it was a great day out, and we all enjoyed talking and walking in the sunshine, imagining how the landscape might have looked when the Romans first came to the Lune valley back in the 1st century AD.



At the gate of Burrow Hall – the main entrance to the Roman fort



Looking at the Bronte School House



Roman milestone