



HOLME CULTRAM ABBEY

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

St Mary's Abbey at Holme Cultram was founded by the Cistercian order of monks. This was a breakaway group from the Benedictines and had its headquarters at Citeaux in France. Cistercians are sometimes known as the White Monks because of the colour of the robes they wore.

Holme Cultram is situated on naturally raised land surrounded by low-lying wetlands and marsh. The land on which the abbey was built remained dry, though surrounded by water during recent flooding in Cumbria as you can see in this photograph from 2018. In the abbey's charters it is referred to as an island.



The name Holme Cultram comes from the Old Norse '*holmr*' which means land surrounded by water and '*cultram*' or '*culteram*', '*culter*' meaning cultivated land and '*ham*' the Old English for settlement. The earliest reference to the site is one in the ninth century which refers to a '*Mansio*' (mansion or guest house) belonging to the See of Lindisfarne and named Culterham.

There is little to see of the main monastic buildings which were situated in the field to the south of the present church, as over the years, any valuable building stone has been removed and reused. Stones from the abbey can be seen in many of the houses in the local villages.



West Cumbria Archaeological Society, which has produced this guide funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has been researching, surveying and excavating at Holme Cultram since 2006, in association with Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd. The excavations were preceded by archival research and

geophysical survey, using both magnetometry and resistivity. The excavations were undertaken with Scheduled Monument Consent and supervised by professional archaeologists. Detailed reports are available (see Further Reading p25), but this guide is intended to give an overview of our work for local people and the interested visitor.

HISTORY

THE FOUNDATION OF THE ABBEY

The land around Holme Cultram is border country, and in the 12th century it was the personal holding of King David of Scotland. It was a desolate place of marsh and forest which may have appealed to the frugal Cistercians – or perhaps they just took what land they were given. The abbey was founded in 1150 according to the Melrose Chronicles as its daughter house, and a granddaughter house of Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire. David's son, Prince Henry, was the founder. He was probably influenced by his tutor St Aelred of Rievaulx, a Cistercian monk from Hexham.

THE EARLY YEARS

In 1157 Henry II succeeded to the English throne and reclaimed the northern counties, which included the area round Holme Cultram, for England. He granted surrounding land and rights to timber to the abbey and this grant was confirmed by later English kings Richard I, John, Henry III and Edward I. Despite its location in the far north of England, the first abbot, Everard, was a renowned scholar and attended the coronation of Richard I. The father of Robert the Bruce, (The Earl of Carrick) was possibly buried at the abbey in 1294. A gravestone believed to be his can be seen in the ambulatory.

Holme Cultram quickly established itself and soon had five granges (farms) including a cow byre at Abbey Cowper, the monastic orchards at Applegarth, pig pens at Swinsty and kennels at Raby Cote. Stank End was the abbot's fish pond; *stank* is the medieval word for water supply.

CONTACTS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

There is strong historical evidence to suggest that from the early days the abbey had contacts across the Irish Sea. Holme Cultram's only daughter abbey, Grey Abbey was established on Strangford Lough, in Northern Ireland in 1193.

It was founded by Affreca, daughter of the King of Man (Isle of Man) and wife of John de Courcy who ruled over land in north east Ulster. Holme Cultram was exempted from tolls by her father. The third abbot at Holme Cultram was William de Courcy who may have been the son of Affreca and John.



The abbots regularly travelled to the Cistercian headquarters in Cîteaux, for the Chapter General meetings. Indeed Abbot Gilbert (1233-37) died on his way back from Cîteaux. A pilgrim badge found during excavations is possibly from Boxley Abbey, Kent, a popular stopping place on the way to Canterbury, and may have been brought back by a travelling monk.

By the Dissolution in 1538 the abbey was the second wealthiest in Cumbria and of immense importance with widespread trading contacts. The wharf discovered

in excavations in 2017-19 demonstrates that from its establishment there were contacts and trade via the Solway Firth. Holme Cultram had holdings at Boston (Lincolnshire), Carlisle, Hartlepool, Newcastle, and across the Solway in Dumfries and Galloway. Its size and grandeur has been compared to Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire and at its peak in the 13th and early 14th centuries it provided hospitality to the King and his retinue during the wars with Scotland. The abbots travelled widely, and their names frequently appear on the Pipe Rolls (Royal charters concerned with the governance of the country).

A FRONTIER ABBEY

The 13th century was a period of prosperity for Holme Cultram; however, it was very much at the frontier. In 1216 Alexander II of Scotland raided the abbey, his soldiers even stooping so low as to steal the bed covers from a sick monk in the infirmary. In 1235 the lay brothers were granted a license to bear arms to protect the abbey and associated granges. Anyone who menaced the monks was threatened with excommunication by the Pope.



Under the jurisdiction of the monks Newton Arlosh Church (pictured here) was built with a fortified tower, resembling a pele tower, for defence. Wolsty Castle, near the coast, was built with massive moat, rampart and defensive walls as revealed in an excavation in 2013. The castle provided a refuge for the abbot and abbey valuables in the event of Scottish raids.



The excavation at Wolsty



Edward I (1272-1307) used Holme Cultram as the base for his campaigns against the Scots in 1299 and for the siege of Caerlaverock across the Solway in 1300. The abbey's port at Skinburness was home to the English fleet and was used to supply the army. There are many records of goods arriving at Skinburness and being shipped to the abbey and Carlisle. The amount of food consumed by the King and his retinue led to complaints and claims for restitution to both Edward I and Edward II by the abbey. In July 1307 Edward I spent his last day and night at Holme Cultram, signing charters and he was crossing Burgh Marsh, possibly on his way back to Lanercost, when he died.

As a result of the Scottish attacks a grant was given to use a quarry at Aspatia, possibly Westnewton Quarry, to provide stone for repair. Evidence of the attacks by the Scots may have been found in the

excavations, where areas of burning were uncovered, along with burnt and shattered glass. It must have been a turbulent time as in 1319 the raids by the Scots were so bad that a number of monks left the abbey.

Despite the fighting and raids Holme Cultram continued to maintain a close relationship with Melrose Abbey for spiritual support.

Throughout the rest of the 14th century the abbey was subjected to more raids, as well as famine, plague and numerous livestock diseases.

LATER YEARS

Although life in the Cistercian order was rooted in prayer, piety and hard work, the reality in later years was often very different. By the 15th century monks at the abbey were enjoying a much more relaxed regime. So much so that in 1472, when Abbot Richard of Melrose arrived at Holme Cultram, on the occasion of the appointment of a new abbot, he announced a series of injunctions to be read to the monks. These regulated the times of worship and how often priests should receive the sacrament; restricted the monks to the monastery, forbade women on the premises unless they were accompanied and provided a schoolmaster for the younger brethren. He also arranged for the rebuilding of the infirmary, for the inner doors of the monastery to be locked and forbade any monk, but particularly John Ribtoun, to act as a bailiff or forester or otherwise engage in worldly business. Unfortunately we do not know what transgression Ribtoun had committed. Though no doubt a shock to monks at the time, the message to behave was soon forgotten.

EVENTS LEADING TO THE DISSOLUTION

The final abbot to undertake extensive rebuilding at Holme Cultram was Robert Chambers who was abbot from around 1489 to 1519. He added the west porch to the front of the church. Other alterations and extensions can probably also be attributed to him.

More controversy arose during the appointment of a later abbot, Matthew Devys (1531-32). A second monk, who was also a candidate for the abbacy, Gawain Borrodaile, was accused of poisoning him and was imprisoned at Furness Abbey. Devys was already suffering ill-health but two other men who had eaten with him also became ill. *Digitalis* (foxglove) berries were found in the archaeological excavations and were probably used medicinally in the infirmary, but they could also act as a simple poison. Borrodaile spent twenty weeks imprisoned at Furness Abbey but was released after Dr. Thomas Leigh, the Chancellor to Henry VIII, wrote to Thomas Cromwell saying he was wrongly accused.

Holme Cultram again came under the scrutiny of Cromwell when he was assessing monastic wealth and fortune prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Thomas Graym, the Abbey Cellarer, possibly acted as a spy. He reported back to Cromwell that the then abbot, Thomas Carter, dined and supped with women at the abbey and sold off the church plate and jewels. He also accused him of leasing *demesne* lands (land controlled by the abbey) against the instructions of the King.

Abbot Carter was almost certainly involved in the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536-37) a popular uprising in the north of England against the closure of the monasteries. He was initially pardoned for his part in the revolt, although he was subsequently involved when the Pilgrimage of Grace besieged the city of Carlisle. Most leaders of the siege were hung, drawn and quartered but there is no further record of Carter, hopefully he escaped.

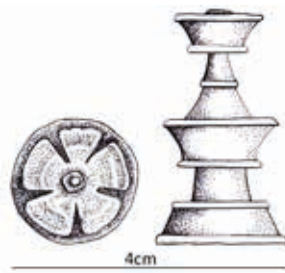
DISSOLUTION

The last abbot was Gawain Borrodaile (of poisoning fame) who surrendered Holme Cultram on 6th March 1538. He continued to live at the abbey taking over the Cellarer's building - now the tea room and offices. At the time of the Dissolution, the abbey held 1600 acres of land and there were twenty four monks still living there.

Unusually for a monastic house, the abbey had served as the parish church before the Dissolution. A successful petition was submitted to Cromwell for this to continue and for the church to act as a refuge from Scottish attacks.

When Abbot Gawain died in 1557 Queen Mary passed the *Right of Presentation to the Living of Holme Cultram* to the University of Oxford.

Excavation has shown that the abbey buildings were systematically demolished at around this time. The stained glass was taken to an area to the south of the monastery and stripped of the lead that held the panes together. Because of the removal and selling off of good building stone, little remains archaeologically except the foundation trenches. The removed stone was sorted and ornamental pieces dumped in the area of the warming room and refectory where it was discovered in the 2008 excavations. By 1561 only the nave of the church, the Abbot's lodgings and those of the Steward and Queen's officers remained in use. The men involved in this demolition may be responsible for losing the chess piece found in the area of the refectory.



AFTER THE DISSOLUTION

Sometime after the Dissolution other old walls that were still standing were pulled down and the stone sold off. The church began to fall further into disrepair. Records exist of Francis Threlkeld who 'led (stone) out of old walls' and also Robert Farish who when challenged with removing stone said he 'would take no stop at anie man'. Many houses incorporating stone from the abbey can be seen in a walk around the area.

On 1st January 1600 the tower fell along with part of chancel and the east end of the nave roof. This had barely been repaired, when, in 1604, the roof of the nave was again destroyed, this time by fire. It was caused when the priest's servant, Chris Harding, took a burning coal into the roof to light a candle and search for a lost chisel. The new chancel was also burnt down. The decline continued, with a report in 1640 from the steward Peter Senhouse of 'swine wourting in the graveyard'. The last usable stone was sold off in 1688.



View from S.E. (Date about 1739)

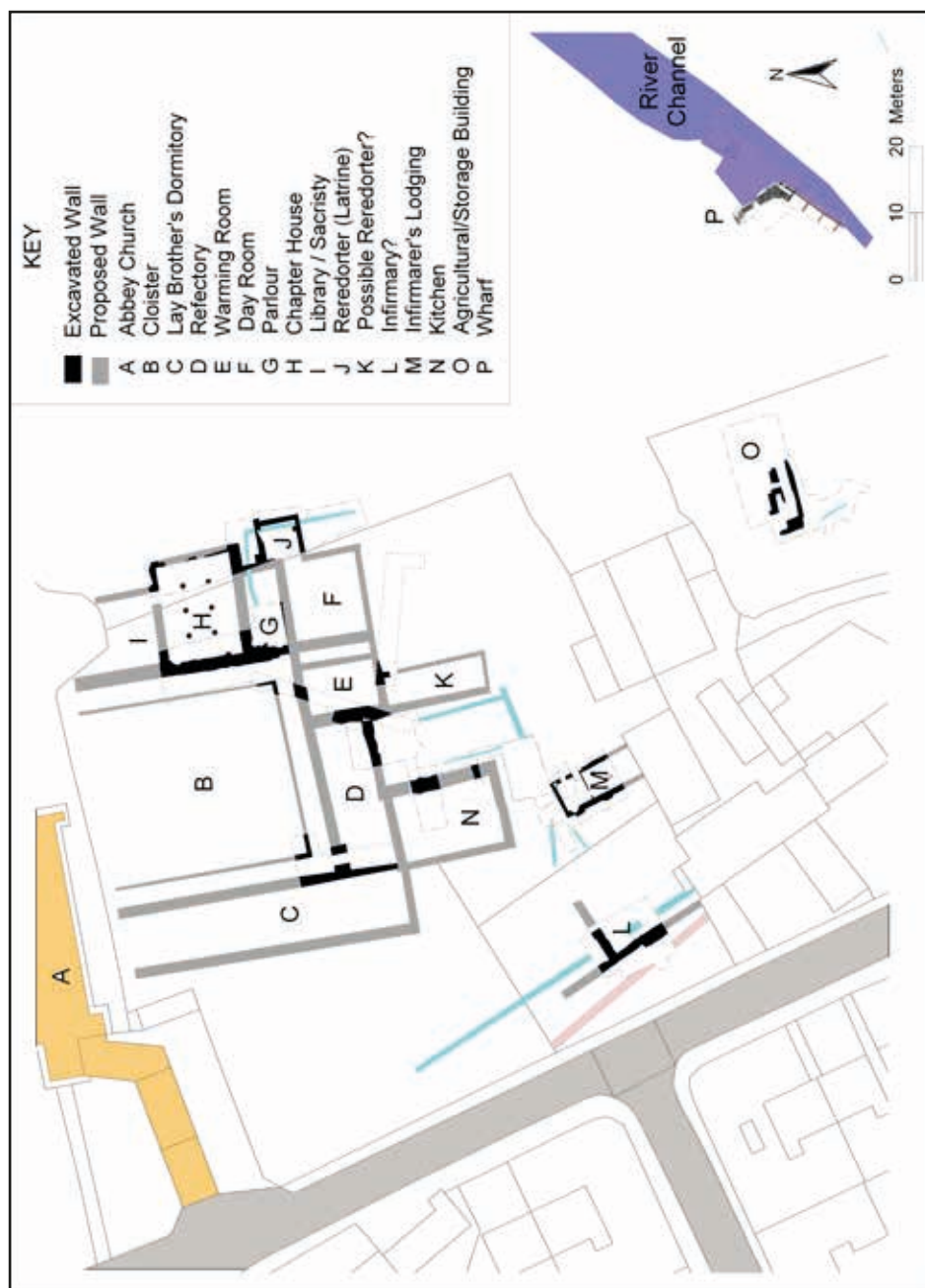
In 1703 a visit by Bishop Nicholson reported a state of decay, with lead removed from the south aisle roof. Trustees were appointed. The nave was reduced to six bays and the side aisles removed. The roof was lowered and a moulded plaster ceiling was inserted. Originally there was a clerestory (a series of high windows) above the side aisles. Galleries were added along with seating for 846 people. This work was completed in 1730. In 1833 the floor was lowered and flagged, the galleries removed, and pews installed.

In 1913 the plaster ceiling was removed and stone corbels added. Between 1959 and 1973 the two old cottages on the south side of the churchyard, formerly the Cellarer's house, were converted into offices, a kitchen, reading room and library. The ambulatory (passageway) was added to connect with the porch, gift shop, and toilets. These renovations were opened by Princess Margaret in 1973.

In 2006 the abbey was subjected to an arson attack. Fire gutted the church destroying original records, damaging the stained glass and destroying the roof. In the same year West Cumbria Archaeological Society undertook a geophysical survey of the field to the south of the church, leading to their later excavations.

Services continued to be held in the church from the first week after the fire and by 2009 a substantial renovation programme was under way with a new roof, underfloor heating and a new flagged floor. During the removal of the old floor and building of the steps to the altar in the nave of the church, at least three, probably shrouded, medieval burials were found by the builders. Other human bones were also retrieved by them. The stained glass was repaired by Pilkington Glass.

In 2015 the abbey cottages were restored to provide a new tearoom, and in 2017 the porch and balcony were also restored.



Plan of excavations 2008 to 2019

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

The diagram below shows the cloisters as not being a regular square. However surveying and excavation carried out by West Cumbria Archaeological Society discovered that the layout of the abbey was more conventional and systematic than previously thought. This can be seen in the modern excavation plan on p10. The recent investigations established the south, east and west sides of the cloisters and found the cloister walk and inner wall.



J H Martindale's 1925 plan of earlier excavations

The monks used the standard Cistercian plan to lay out the cloisters. It is likely that they were later remodelled with solid walls and windows as the original open cloisters would have been draughty and unsuitable in the Cumbrian climate. Pillar capitals, probably from the original cloister were found reused as drain covers.

The south wall of the refectory ran east to west. A drain ran from the refectory from north to south and was probably associated with a basin found in the refectory. Again, there seems to have been rebuilding of the southern refectory wall. The rebuilding of this and the cloisters may reflect Scottish raids.

The location of the western and eastern ranges were established by excavation. Both the day and night stairs to the church from the *dorter* (dormitory) in the eastern range were located. The south end of the eastern range was arched and there was evidence of complex water management. A substantial drain was found to the south of the kitchen which was further traced to the south western corner of the field, linking with a large vaulted cistern used to collect and release water to flush the drainage system. This served the latrine in the building which is thought to be the Infirmary's lodgings.



Plan and photograph of cistern which averages 1.5m (4' 11") interior height

The north, south, east and west walls of the chapter house were identified and located. A raised bench of stone flags set on clay ran around the sides and it had a ribbed vault ceiling. Various graves were found in the chapter house, their covering slabs removed presumably at the time of the Dissolution. To the south of the chapter house was a *reredorter* (communal latrine) with flushing toilet block and a drain leading to the outside.

Other graves with an east to west alignment were found along the eastern cloister walk to the west of the chapter house, but most had been disturbed and the bones removed, possibly when the ground was deconsecrated at the time of the Dissolution.

Post pads were found beneath the cobbled surface in the centre of the cloisters, hinting at earlier timber buildings before or while the monastery was being built. Other sparse evidence of possible timber buildings predating the stone abbey was found to the south and east of the lay brother's building. However, it seems likely that the abbey was built of stone from the beginning, with massive granite boulders forming the earliest foundations.



Grave slab believed to belong to a member of the de Neuton (Newton) family

A re-examination of the 1906 excavations at the eastern end of the church exposed floor tiles and the collapsed tower and doorway. The eastern wall of the southern transept was located with a possible staircase leading from the upper dorter level.

THE INFIRMARY

The infirmarium was rebuilt on the instructions of Abbot Richard of Melrose in 1472 and is traditionally identified as the farmhouse known as Millgrove which lies to the south of the monastic complex. This building has many medieval features. The area to the south west of the church was excavated in 2014. The lodgings were comfortable with the latrine and a fireplace in the northern room and an open hall with central hearth beyond a wooden partition to the south. The visible wall line protruding from the north gable of Millgrove aligns with a wall discovered running north to south and which may be the east wall of the infirmarium.

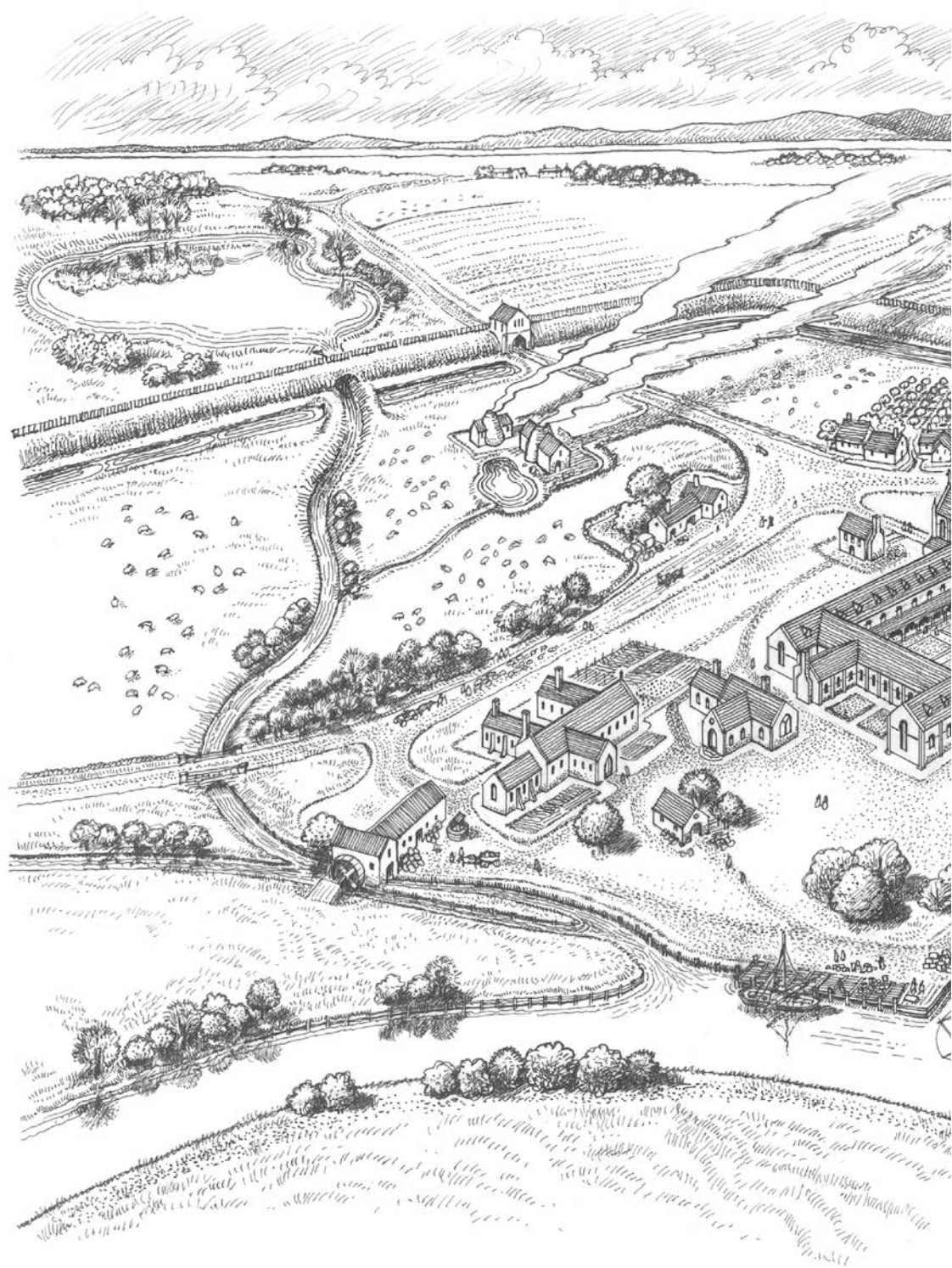
The excavation in 2016 also uncovered a substantial drain running north to south serving the infirmarium. This probably explains a local legend that there was a tunnel from Millgrove to the church. At full height the drain was 1.8m (6^{ft}) deep and provided a vital supply of water to the monastery, possibly from a spring line running east to west, north of the church. A clay surface with a possible lean-to roof against the wall hints at a second cloister to the west.

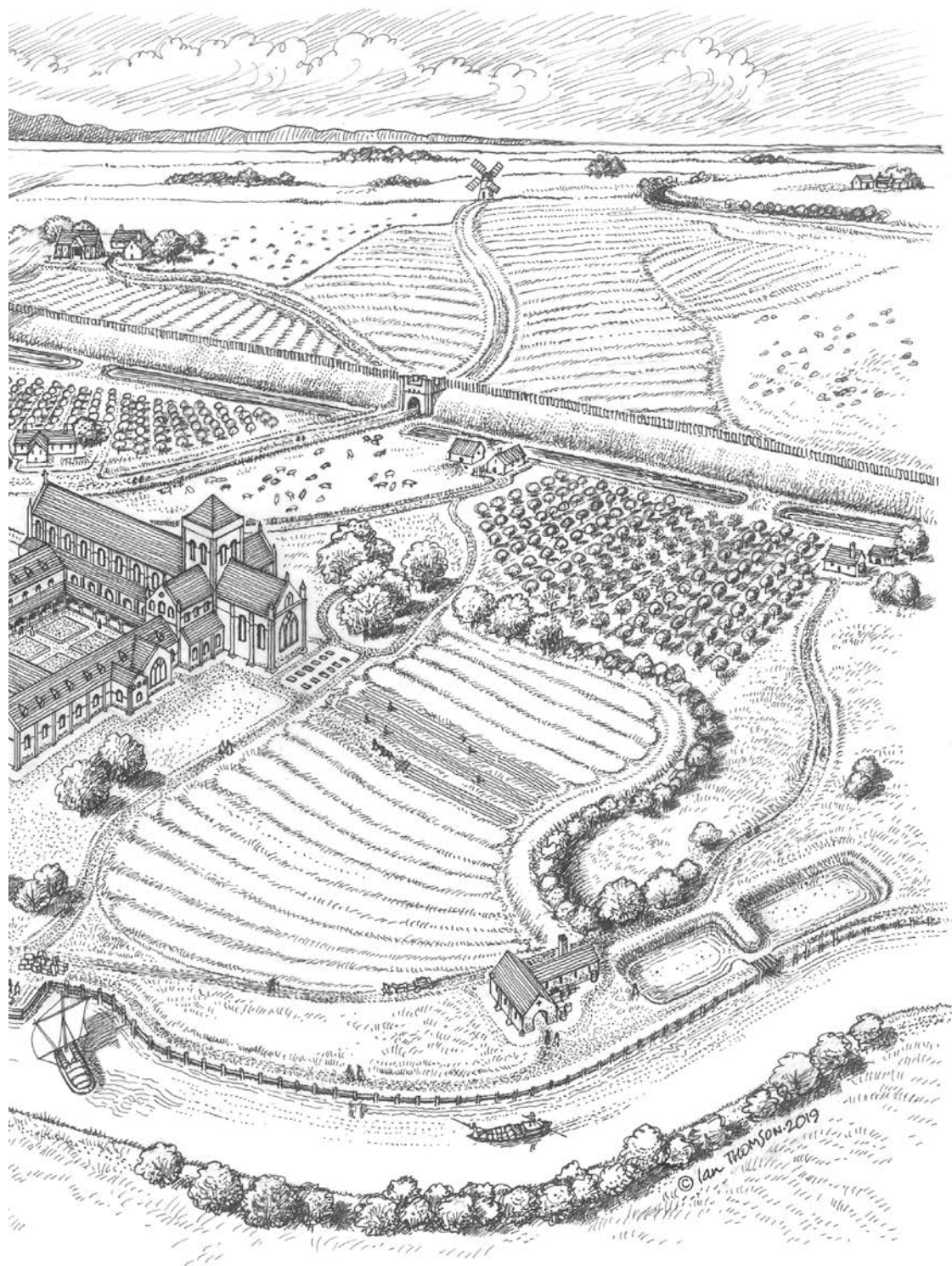
THE WHARF

The discovery in 2016 of a wharf below Holme Cultram emphasises the importance of the Solway as a transport and trading route. The wharf sat on the banks of the River Waver and could have been reached at high tide by flat bottomed boats.

Dendrochronology (tree ring dating) of the timbers discovered has given the late 12th or early 13th century as the most likely felling date of the tree. The timbers show evidence of reuse and originally appear to have been part of a substantial building. The timber may have come originally from Scotland, but it is also possible it was cut in Inglewood Forest as the monks were licensed to do this in the abbey's original charter. The wharf was faced with dressed sandstone that retained a fill of compacted stone. At the south end there was a clay platform butted up to and retained by preserved timber planking.







The abbey was built of red sandstone believed to have come across the Solway from quarries near Annan, and was repaired after the Scottish raids with stone from Aspatia. The actual wharf was probably used from the establishment of the abbey to bring building stone to Holme Cultram by boat. It would also have been used for trading purposes and the River Waver at this point was probably canalised; craft from Skinburness could have docked on the tidal waters at Holme Cultram. It would also have supplied a good rush of water to the abbey mill.



Dundrennan Abbey and New Abbey (Sweetheart Abbey) on the north side of the Solway Firth have very similar geographical features to Holme Cultram and it is likely that they too had wharves. Mary Queen of Scots spent her last nights in Scotland at Dundrennan Abbey before boarding a ship to England to seek the help of Queen Elizabeth. Although it was also possible to cross the Solway on foot at low tide, the importance to Holme Cultram Abbey of access to sea transport cannot be overstressed.

THE CHAPELS

The abbey controlled several chapels in outlying areas including St Roche at Holme St Cuthbert, St Christians at Sanden House, north of Abbeytown and St John at Skinburness. These were probably built of the traditional clay dabbin, leaving no trace on the ground, as despite using geophysical surveying and excavation, little real evidence has been found of them.

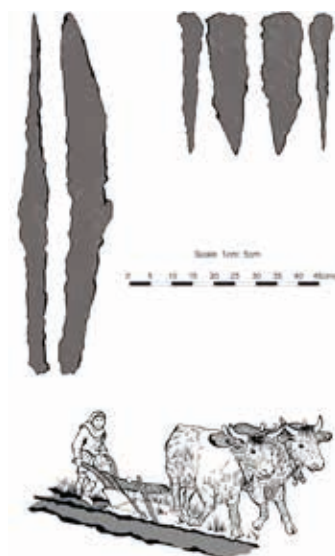
THE MILLS

Milling was closely controlled within the lands of Holme Cultram, with strict conditions on where tenants were allowed to grind their grain. Burgh Mill was established by the 13th century for the use of all tenants and later Dubmill on the Solway coast north of Allonby was built. There was also a mill solely for abbey use just south of the infirmary. As well as these watermills there was a windmill near Sanden House and the monks received revenue from mills used by tenants as far afield as Flimby, Ellenborough (Maryport) and Blindcrake near Cockermouth.

LAND USE

A ploughshare was found during excavations at Friars Garth, the area to the south east of the present church. Holme Cultram was probably responsible for agricultural improvement on the fringes of the mosses and settlement in those areas. It is often stated that the monks drained the marshes to improve grazing but this is not supported by either documentary or archaeological evidence. They did use the mosses for inferior grazing but mainly to gather peat to fire salt pans. They held better quality grazing at places such as Lazonby in the Eden Valley.

The monks were in continuous legal dispute with the King's representatives over their use of Inglewood Forest, the royal hunting ground. The stags frequented the mosses and no deforestation was allowed. The dykes (banks) built by the abbey on the moss referred to in the Royal Charter of 1189 are boundary earthworks and flood defences some of which, such as Monk's Dyke, can still be seen. The mosses were not enclosed and improved until the nineteenth century Enclosure Acts.



Drawing of excavated plough share and reconstruction of its use

THE CISTERCIAN DIET

The diet of a Cistercian monk was very austere consisting of oat and barley-based meals supplemented by some fish and eggs. In later medieval times the diet was more relaxed and comparable with that of the aristocrats entertained at the abbey. During the excavations extensive soil samples were taken, and analysis undertaken of the plant remains, burnt cereal grains, fish and animal bones found. Locally grown barley and oats were the most common cereals and were used for bread, pottage, and beer. Food from further afield was found in the latrine samples. This included fig and grape seeds. Cattle and sheep were commonly consumed, as well as domestic geese and chickens.

Red deer and roe deer bones as well as a vertebra from a minke whale demonstrate that food not available to the peasants was eaten on site. It was reported that when Edward I held court at Carlisle in 1307 whale meat was among the food provided.

The distribution of animal bones is still being studied, but initial impressions are that those from poorer cuts of meat used in stews prevail around the kitchen and lay brothers' lodgings area while the abbot and monks dined on better cuts.

There was a large number of fish bones, including herring and cod which could be caught locally, but also from more exotic species. Roach and carp for instance were found which may have stocked the abbot's fishponds at the Stank. Eels were also eaten; Eel Kist was the name applied by the monks of Holme Cultram to the pond near the River Waver in which they kept their eels alive. The road to it was known as Eel Kist Lane. Oyster, cockle and mussel shells were found in quantity and must have formed a substantial part of the Cistercian diet.

Pottery from the building identified as the lay brothers' lodging also included cisterns, used for serving small beer. There may have been leather production near the vaulted stone cistern where bones typical of skinned animals were found.

TRADE

Sheep were an important product of Holme Cultram's economy and wool was exported from holdings of land owned by the abbey as far away as Hartlepool. At Lazonby the abbey grazed a flock of around four hundred sheep although the wool was generally considered to be of inferior quality to that of Rievaulx Abbey. It was illegal for the church to borrow money and to get round this there is documentary evidence that the monks sold the wool for delivery up to twenty years in the future, thereby getting their money in advance.

Holme Cultram also traded extensively in salt, controlling twenty one salt pans on the coast between Angerton and Seville Cote. The salt was known for its high quality and would have been used for preserving and curing meat and fish as well as for flavouring food. It was produced by collecting and concentrating brine. This was then evaporated by heating in lead pans over peat fires at the 'salt cote.' 'Sleeching' mounds and 'kynches' can still be seen on the marshes. Sleeching mounds were produced after salt-rich sand had been collected and washed with brine to concentrate the salt before evaporation; kynches are ponds used to trap the salt water at high tide. Holme Cultram salt panners may also have employed a unique method of damming the sea at high tide at the head of the marsh as there is a record of men drowning in subsequent floods.



A survey of the marshes undertaken as part of the archaeological studies discovered a total of nine clapper bridges probably built to facilitate movement of goods and people on the Solway.

The weight found in demolition debris in the warming room and dating to 1340 to 1400 may well be a salt weight; it weighs 454 grams; approximately one pound.

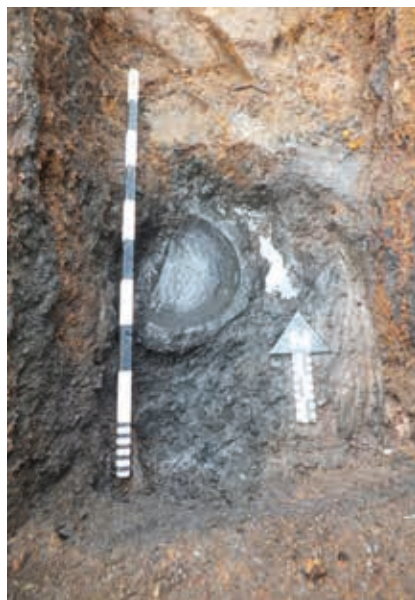


INDUSTRIAL WORKING

Evidence of ironworking has also been found. Holme Cultram's precincts possibly extended to a ditch and gatehouse on the west side, where the Wheatsheaf Inn now stands. Within these precincts, at Friars Garth across the road from the current abbey, excavations discovered archaeological evidence of iron working. Coal was used, possibly mined at Egremont and analysis of the slag recovered indicates the iron ore was roasted at Friars Garth prior to smelting.



Book strap end



Wooden bowl during excavation

The Friars Garth excavation also established there was a large yard, with possible stabling on the north side. It seems that this was an industrial area outside the immediate living area of the abbey. Excavations have produced wasters - tiles and pottery distorted during firing in a kiln - and it seems likely that both a tile kiln and pottery kiln were located in this area, under the present houses. Part of a wooden bowl and leather shoes were preserved in waterlogged conditions and have been conserved. Experts advised that the bowl was placed in alcohol to protect it prior to professional conservation. Being unable to obtain ethyl alcohol, vodka was used!

A quantity of leather, well preserved by the waterlogged conditions, was also found at Friars Garth. There were at least six shoes as well as off cuts showing leather working on site. The shoes showed evidence of

stitching and laces. There was also a strip identified as a possible girdle. Metal fittings had been removed, and the shoes were all well-worn.

MORE FINDS FROM THE EXCAVATIONS

TILES

Many of the tiles found use reverse inlay decoration and were probably made locally. The tile kiln has not been found, though a number of 'wasters' have been, indicating a kiln producing tiles for Holme Cultram in the area. It is likely to be to the west of the abbey. The tiles vary widely with only a few of each design; maybe they were reused at the time of the Dissolution. Could they be in a local house, as is much of the stonework?



Plan of tile pavement excavated in 1906

GLASS

The glass found was mostly window glass of a plain geometric design known as *grisaille*, (painted in grey scale) which was favoured by the Cistercians. This reduced the need for more costly coloured glass.



COINS AND TOKENS

A number of medieval coins were found, mainly silver pennies. A gold angel from the reign of Edward IV (1471-83) was also found. It was minted in London. It shows the archangel Michael slaying a dragon and on the reverse an English galley. At the time it would probably have paid for four months' worth of masses at the abbey.



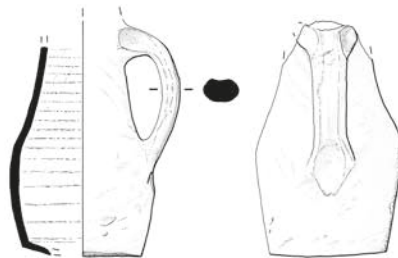
Over seventy tokens have been found in the vicinity of the chapter house. This is one of the largest excavated collections of lead tokens and it is rare to find so many in one place with such a diversity of design. They feature lettering on one side and designs on the other which may indicate different work done or goods offered at specific locations in the abbey's landholdings. The likely period of use was late 13th - early 15th century and they can be thought of as an early system of credit in which goods and services could circulate, without the need for real money.



POTTERY



Some large pots during excavations



Reconstruction drawing of pots

Most of the medieval pottery found was probably made locally, but the foreign contacts of Holme Cultram are also shown by pottery from the Saintonge region of France and early German Raaren stoneware.

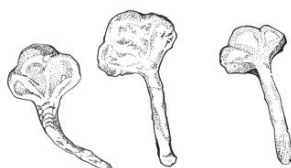
Cistercian ware was made in south west Yorkshire and Derbyshire and is found all over England. It was not manufactured by the monks but gets the name Cistercian because it was first found on monastic sites. The decorated examples continue until the 16th century and later vessels are plain.

The photograph is of a three handled tyg, or drinking cup. It was found in 2019 in the reredorter along with early German stoneware and the base of a cistern (a large pottery vessel with a bung hole used to serve small beer). The tyg may represent a change in drinking habits in late medieval times with the contents being shared. Tygs can have up to six handles.



STONE MOULD

This is carved into a fragment of sandstone column. It is probably a mould as when reversed the initials are R C – Robert Chambers – with possibly a crozier separating them. The 'sun of splendour' surrounding the initials was a heraldic device used by several royal families.



Medieval wall sconce (candle holder) found at Friars Garth



*Holm Cultram Abbey; West Door by William Henry Nutter, watercolour about 1833.
From the collections at Tullie House Museum, Carlisle*

HIGHLIGHTS ON DISPLAY IN THE ABBEY

- Robert Chambers' statue of the Virgin Mary and a chained bear can be seen above the West Porch of the church. The chained bear was his rebus from 'Cham – ber'. (A rebus is puzzle in which words are represented by combinations of pictures)
- Robert Chambers' tombstone (now in the ambulatory)
This is unusual in that it bears an inscription in English, saying, in part '*and amongst his brethren*'. Seventeen monks are portrayed; five on one side, three on either side of the Abbot holding his bishops crook on the front and six on the other side.



Details of Robert Chamber's tombstone

- Original western doorway to church.
- Possible musket ball holes in the facade of the western porch
- Display panels in the church and ambulatory showing the history of Holme Cultram Abbey
- Panels in the ambulatory describing West Cumbria Archeological Society's work along with a case containing finds from the excavations.
- Information panel on outer wall of the tea room showing layout of cloisters

FURTHER READING

- Greene, J.P. '*Medieval Monasteries*' 1994, Leicester University, which is a good introduction to monastic history and archaeology.
- Jan Walker and Mark Graham, '*St. Mary's Abbey, Holme Cultram, Abbeytown Cumbria*' 2013, Cumbria Archaeological Research Reports Number 4. This has an extensive bibliography.
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Contact us by email  westcumbriaas@gmail.com or
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