Life in the Roman Frontier Zone:
a settlement at Faverdale, Darlington

Jennifer Proctor and Victoria Ridgeway

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Front cover: Reconstruction showing interior of the Faverdale bath house, by Jake Lunt.
Back cover: Location of the site; *pilae* stacks in the bath house.

Before archaeological excavations began at Faverdale we expected to find important remains. This map of the ancient township of Whessoe, produced by John Micheson in 1601, shows fields and houses lying just to the north of the area of the excavations, outlined in red towards the centre left of the image (note that north is to the right on this map). This and other evidence suggested that we might encounter the remains of part of a medieval settlement. The nearest Roman period site of any note is Piercebridge some 6km to the south-west.

The Site

The settlement at Faverdale lay within the Roman military frontier zone and between two major north–south Roman roads. The major Iron Age settlement at Stanwick is shown on this map, but this had been abandoned in the mid-first century AD, by the time of the Roman occupation of the region.

The proposed development of a large tract of farmland at Faverdale necessitated a programme of archaeological work to record any remains of note ahead of building work. The site was thought to be particularly important due to its proximity to Whessoe Grange Farm, which lies approximately 500m to the north, long thought of as having medieval origins. Just beyond the northern boundary of the site is an area of land known as 'Village Field'. As recently as the 1950s this field contained earthworks, since ploughed flat, which were thought to be part of a deserted medieval village. In view of the proximity to these probable medieval remains, Durham County Council Archaeology Section recommended archaeological investigations as part of the planning condition for the site.

Archaeologists from PCA were called in and a programme of archaeological investigations, involving geophysical survey and trial trenching, was undertaken between 2003 and 2004. What turned up on the western half of the site in 2004 was a complete surprise; here features of Roman date were revealed – a highly unexpected discovery given that up to that point practically no Roman period remains had been found in the Darlington area. It quickly became apparent that a settlement site of regional significance had been discovered and extensive archaeological excavation began to examine an area of just under 6 hectares in size. This site was to be developed imminently as a new distribution centre for Argos and PCA quickly mobilised a team of more than 40 archaeologists to undertake the excavations.

Some eight years and much study later the archaeological features, artefacts, bones and environmental remains have been analysed and a monograph has been produced detailing the results of this work, generously funded by Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council. However, we still do not know for certain the date of those earthworks to the north of the site…

Aerial photograph looking east, showing the site (outlined in red) towards top of image.

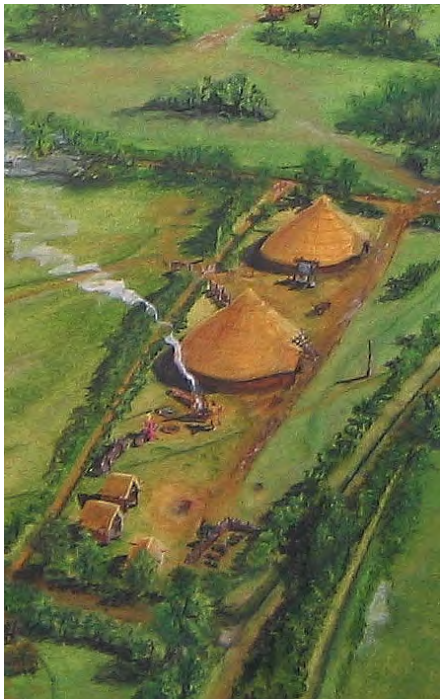
The Ordnance Survey map of 1939 shows earthworks in 'Village Field' which have been interpreted as the remains of buildings belonging to a long-deserted medieval village, in relation to areas of archaeological excavation.

The Settlement

The layout of the settlement in the second century AD, with the large enclosure to the north occupying a high spur of land and network of smaller fields extending to the south and east.

The reconstruction drawing (right) gives an indication of how parts of the Faverdale settlement may have looked, with thatched roundhouses set in enclosures defined by ditches, banks and hedgerows. Reconstruction from an original by Trevor Bishop.

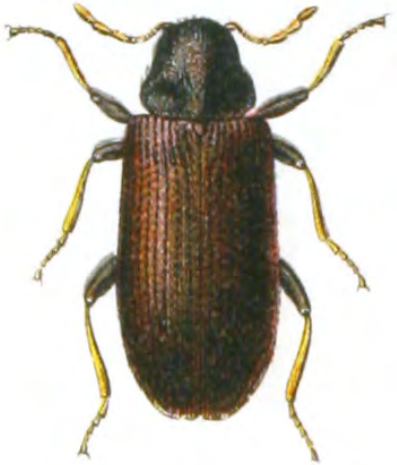
The earliest settlement at Faverdale dated from around the middle to late first century AD. This was an extensive farmstead with roundhouses, stock enclosures and droveways. We know from the remains of animal bones, cereal grains and quernstones recovered that these early settlers were farmers who practised a mixed agricultural regime, with an economy based on arable agriculture and animal husbandry. It is tempting to suggest that displaced inhabitants from Stanwick, the only large focal Iron Age site in the region situated *c.* 10km to the south-west, may have founded the Faverdale settlement following the demise of Stanwick in the mid-first century AD.



In the Roman period Faverdale was located in the northern frontier zone of Roman Britain, roughly 50km to the south of Hadrians' Wall and 6km from the fort at Piercebridge. The site overlooks the fertile Tees Valley, which runs some 4km to the south and which is home to at least three Roman villas at Holme House, Dalton-on-Tees and Quarry Farm, all of which developed on sites with pre-Roman foundations. There are no known roads within the vicinity of Faverdale, which lies between two major Roman north–south thoroughfares, Cade's Road and Dere Street. An overland route may have linked these two roads in the vicinity of Faverdale, though no trace of such has been found. However, the likely importance of the River Tees as a supply route is highlighted by the presence of the three villas and it may be that the inhabitants of Faverdale also used the river for transport and communication.

Faverdale has provided fascinating evidence for social and cultural change; change which appears to have begun immediately after the initial occupation of the frontier zone by the Roman military. In the early second century AD, a large rectilinear ditched enclosure was built on a high spur of land at Faverdale. The area surrounding the enclosure had been heavily ploughed, which had destroyed most of the internal buildings, but pottery, building materials and domestic rubbish excavated from the perimeter ditch show that the enclosure originally probably contained several domestic buildings. These are likely to have been of timber with wattle and daub walls and thatched or tiled roofs and may have resembled traditional Iron Age roundhouses or may have been of more 'Roman' rectangular plan. Within the large enclosure was a very small bath house building. An extensive field system extended to the south, east and probably north (pictured left). Intriguingly the settlement was apparently abandoned towards the end of the second century AD and the large enclosure was deliberately levelled and backfilled. The area was not revisited again until the fourth century AD, when a cobbled road and substantial masonry building were constructed, associated with a few ditches and enclosures.

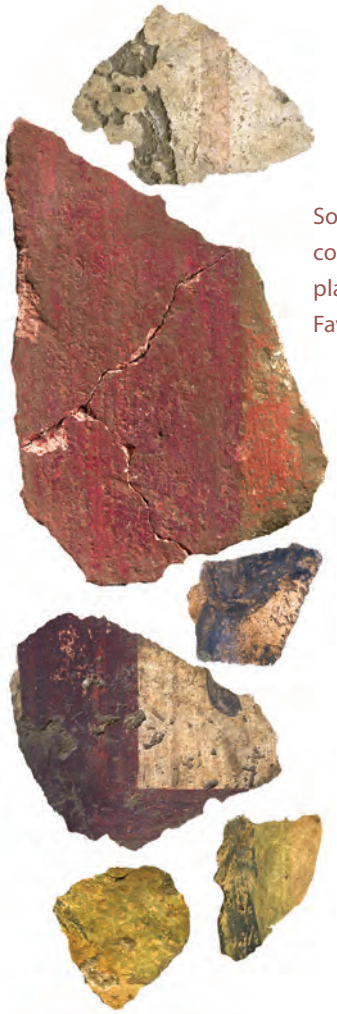
A wattle-lined well was discovered close to the main rectilinear enclosure. Waterlogged deposits in the well preserved the remains of a wide range of plants and insects, providing a wealth of information about the past environment at Faverdale.



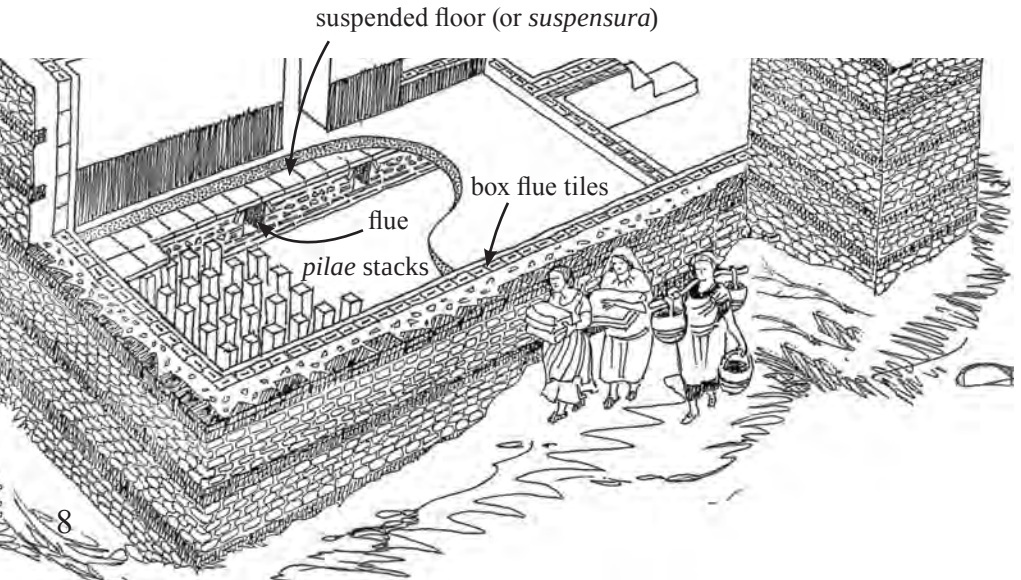
Two species of beetle were found which suggest that the climate around Faverdale in the second century may have been somewhat warmer than now. One of these, *Anobium fulvicorne* (pictured above), has also been discovered at a Bronze Age trackway site at Thorne Moors, South Yorkshire. Today, however, the most northerly record of this species is from Worcestershire.

The Bath house

The discovery of a small, two-roomed stone building in the southern part of the enclosure was quite unexpected. This unusual building had a hypocaust heating system, similar to those used in larger Roman bath houses. The floor (at ground level) would have been of stone slabs supported on stone columns, or *pilae* stacks; the building only survived due to the depths of its foundations. A fire would have been set in a chamber to the south of the building and hot air would have passed beneath the floor and through flues which ran vertically up the walls. The northern room is likely to have been slightly cooler than that to the south, as it was further away from the source of heat (the firing chamber). The building was decorated internally with painted wall plaster, with a dado section in shades of red towards the bottom of the walls, and panels above decorated with designs of flowers or leaves. This decoration would have been carried out '*buon fresco*' – while the plaster was still damp. It is clear that the construction and decoration of this building involved considerable investment of skills and materials.

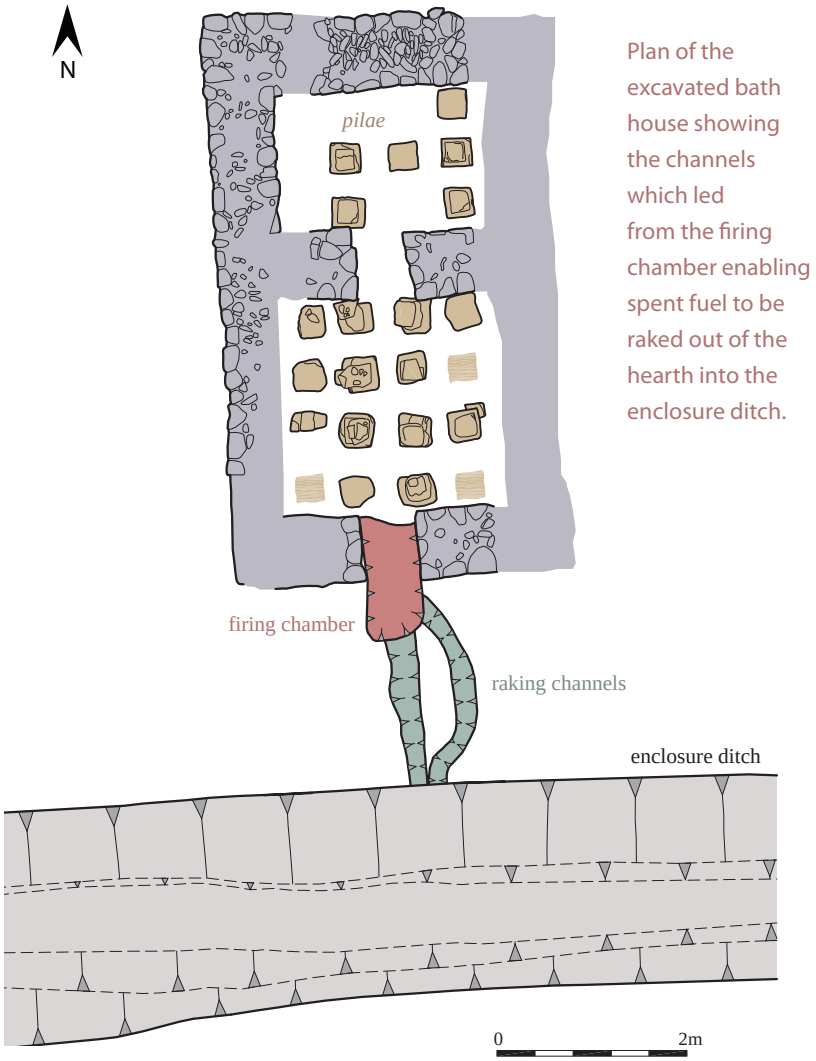


Some of the coloured wall plaster found at Faverdale.



Cutaway reconstruction showing how the heating system at Faverdale would have functioned. Hot air enters the hypocaust from an external furnace, circulates beneath the suspended floor, between the *pilae* stacks and flows up through the flue tiles, which line the walls, to be vented out of the top of the building. Here two flues are shown on the side of the building, but at Faverdale the flue was central, in the southern wall of the building. Reconstruction based on an original by Sarah Kensington for PCA.

This building measured just over 6m long by 2.8m wide and was too small to have functioned in the same way as traditional Roman bath houses, which generally had several rooms ranging from cold to very hot and were often supplied with plunge pools. There was no evidence that the Faverdale structure was supplied with running water, but it may well have been used in a similar way to a sauna or steam room with water brought in by the bucketful and poured onto the floor to create steam. A similar, but even smaller, structure was found nearby at Quarry Farm and it appears that these buildings may represent a local adaptation of a Roman building tradition. The building was apparently not only used for bathing; the recovery of the remains of oysters and other shellfish suggest that people may have snacked as they bathed. Above all, the building would have been a status symbol for its owners, and may also have been constructed to attract traders to the settlement, offering a warm and comfortable place in which to meet and do business.



Plan of the excavated bath house showing the channels which led from the firing chamber enabling spent fuel to be raked out of the hearth into the enclosure ditch.

Box flue tiles, square in section, and similar to those pictured left, as well as half box flue tiles (with just three sides) would have acted as flues carrying hot air up through the walls. The scoring on the outside of the tiles helped plaster to stick to the walls.

The Finds

This complete jar made in the local handmade pottery tradition is only about 11cm high and 7cm in diameter. Its shape resembles many of the jars found on site, some of which reached up to 40cm in diameter, and seems to be a copy in miniature of some of these much larger vessels. Most of the pottery was in a fragmentary state, and was probably discarded once broken. However, this vessel was recovered intact, from an enclosure ditch to the east of the main enclosure, which suggests it was deliberately placed there.

The excavation produced a highly significant and very varied pottery assemblage. Around 4,300 sherds were recovered, an unusually high number for a site in this area. Around half of these were locally manufactured using established Iron Age techniques. But, as well as the traditional forms of jar which had been in use for centuries, new forms of handmade pottery inspired by Roman vessels were manufactured using local clays and simple, low temperature, 'bonfire' firing techniques.

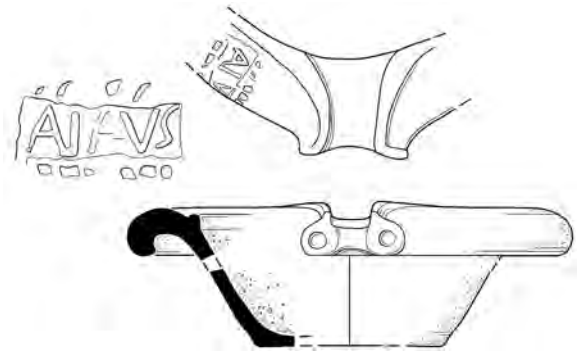
The other half of the assemblage comprised a range of locally-produced Romano-British wares and pottery from other parts of the province and the wider Empire. Mortaria sherds suggest Roman ways of processing food. Mortaria are large, shallow bowls, with small sharp angular stones, or 'trituration grits', incorporated into their bases and pouring spouts on one side. They functioned in a similar way to the mortar part of the modern pestle and mortars still used in many kitchens today, the grits serving to help grind up food. Alongside the many mortaria found, one appears to be a unique, handmade example.

Samian, a glossy red pottery used to serve food, was recovered in some quantities from the site – a total of 228 sherds were found – testifying to the wealth of the Faverdale settlement. The quantity of first-century South Gaulish samian (from La Graufesenque, near Millau in Southern France) demonstrates that from its earliest inception this was a site of some standing. Most of the second-century samian originated from Lezoux in Central Gaul (in the Auvergne region in Central France) and includes many decorated vessels including several sherds from a bowl with figures of Apollo and Mercury.

Above: A small samian drinking cup is stamped inside the base with a maker's mark, which tells us that it was manufactured by Beliniccus (right), and graffiti scratched into the underside of the vessel (see page 13) indicates it was probably owned by a man called Januarius.

This tiny first-century AD object measures less than 4cm across and was originally part of a copper- alloy wine jug. It would have formed the base of the handle at the point at which it was attached to the vessel.

As with the pottery, the assemblage of objects of metal, worked bone and glass finds from Faverdale displayed a fascinating mixture of indigenous and Roman material. Elements common to rural settlements in northern Britain in the early Roman period included a bone weaving comb (right) and glass bangle fragments (see page 13); the artwork of an ostentatious horse harness (see page 13) also displays strong native British influence. Numerous finds also point to the adoption of Roman cultural material, particularly objects relating to dress and grooming, such as a bone toggle, copper-alloy tweezers and several brooches, and to high status eating and drinking, such as the high quality glass tableware. A first-century AD copper-alloy jug mount (see above) was particularly unusual for a northern 'rural' settlement and is likely to be of Italian manufacture. Interestingly, a very similar example was found nearby at Sedgefield.



Mortaria were often stamped with the name of the maker. The recovery of the remains of vessels including 'waster' sherds bearing the stamp of the potter Anaus, known to have been working in the North East, suggests a production centre close by.

Weaving combs and glass bangles (such as the one shown overleaf) are common finds on native settlements in the area.

Life at Faverdale

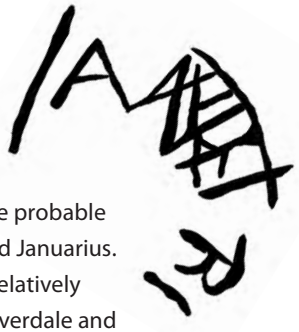
The reconstruction of the interior of the bath house (front cover) illustrates one aspect of life at Faverdale in the second century AD. The copper-alloy jug and samian vessels represent items imported from across the empire. The building itself, with its hypocaust system and painted, plastered walls demonstrates access to Roman technology and yet it was clearly used in a different way from a 'traditional' bath house. The settlement probably enjoyed a lively and regular trade with the coast, as shown by a fragment of salt container, or briquetage, as well as the oysters and other shellfish found.

Beyond the main enclosure and the bath house the interconnected fields and smaller enclosures were used for a variety of purposes; some contained roundhouses that were clearly lived in, while others enclosed shelters for metal-working. Crop-processing and the corralling of stock were also important. The settlement practised mixed arable and pastoral agriculture and probably exploited an extensive area of land, extending far beyond the site's boundaries. Pigs, sheep and cows were all reared at Faverdale and formed the main meat component of the diet, but older sheep and cows were also exploited for their wool and milk and for traction. Horses were also kept as were dogs, some probably as hunting animals. Hens, geese and ducks could all have provided eggs. Spelt wheat and barley were grown and ground here and a large number of quernstones of both Roman flat type and Iron Age 'beehive' shape were found; the grit from these probably contributing to the excessive wear seen on the teeth of some of the skeletons recovered.

The fragmentary remains of only seven human burials were encountered during

A double burial dating from the second century AD of an adult female and child aged between 2 and 4 years (few of the child's bones survived due to the acidic soil conditions).

This copper-alloy fob or strap fitting probably formed part of a horse harness. Its openwork triskele motif demonstrates substantial native British influence.



Graffiti scratched onto the base of a samian drinking cup tells us the Roman name of the probable owner, a man called Januarius. Such cups were a relatively common find at Faverdale and traditionally would have been used for drinking wine, but little evidence for wine amphora was recovered - perhaps these vessels were used to consume locally brewed beer and mead.

the excavations. Due to soil conditions at the site the preservation of bone was poor. One of the burials was in a stone-lined coffin, or cist, and a further two empty cists were found representing burials where the bone simply did not survive. This small number cannot reflect the entire population of the settlement; other individuals may have been buried close by, beyond the limits of the settlement, while others still may have been afforded different rites at death. Hobnails found in two of the graves along with a hobnailed leather shoe recovered from a waterlogged pit indicate that some of the Faverdale inhabitants had adopted Roman-style footwear. One of the graves (pictured left) contained a double burial, presumably of a mother and her child.

This native settlement, lying towards the edge of the Roman Empire, clearly experienced considerable social and cultural changes following the occupation of the frontier by the Roman military. The inhabitants evidently had close contacts with the Roman military and the civilian settlements (*vici*) attached to the forts in the region and were trading or exchanging goods with them. The presence of two pieces of graffiti, scratched onto sherds of pottery, shows that some of the population were able to read and write, demonstrating close integration with the Roman community. Yet aspects of the indigenous culture remained important; handmade pottery continued to be made at the site in traditional Iron Age jar shapes along with new types inspired by Roman vessels. The presence of lids suggests the adoption of 'Roman' ways of cooking, but this was set alongside more traditional methods.

Evidence from the excavations at Faverdale and other sites located in the Tees Valley area is beginning to show that far from being a landscape of distinct native farms and Roman military stations, as was once thought, life in the northern frontier zone was a dynamic and varied experience for the local population.

A fragment of glass bangle found at the site.

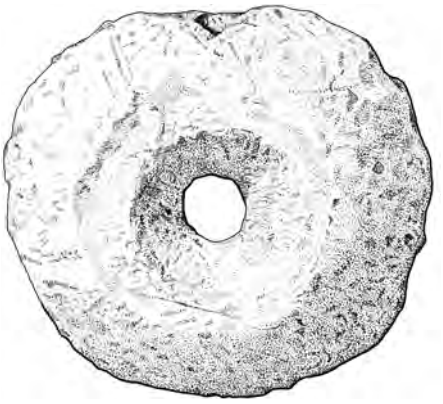
Acknowledgements

The archaeological excavations at Faverdale were undertaken ahead of the construction of a new Argos distribution centre to the north of Darlington. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) commissioned Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA) to undertake the archaeological work with Robin Taylor-Wilson as project manager. The roles of John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment at the time of the fieldwork, and Richard Alty, Assistant Chief Executive for Regeneration at the time of the monograph publication, are particularly acknowledged.

The fieldwork and publication of the site would not have been possible without the financial contributions of DBC (fieldwork, post-excavation assessment and publication), Argos (fieldwork) and Durham County Council (publication). Particular thanks are extended to Durham Principal Archaeologist David Mason and Senior Archaeology Officer Lee McFarlane for their efforts in securing funding for the publication. Lee McFarlane is also thanked for her important curatorial role during the fieldwork.

Thanks are extended to Robbie Belmore of Lysander Associates, Project Manager for Argos during the fieldwork, and Colin Lynas, of Cundall Johnston and Partners, for his role during the initial set-up of the fieldwork. PCA would also like to thank the following people from DBC for their project roles: Louise Allen (Strategic Project Development Officer), Jenny Dixon (Estates Officer), Guy Metcalfe (Estates and Property Manager) and Jenni Hopper (Acting Personal Assistant for the Director of Development and Environment).

The authors and PCA would like to extend their thanks to the people of Darlington and the surrounding area. The tremendous local enthusiasm and support for the project were demonstrated in the hundreds of people attending the site during an open day held in September 2004. A more recent event to launch the publication of the monograph on the findings of the excavation was held at the Centre for Local Studies in Darlington Library on the 26th May 2012; it was the tremendous success of that event that provided the impetus for producing this booklet.



Complete 'upper' quernstone, one of many found at the site.

Site supervisor Gavin Glover leads a team of visitors on a tour. The open day was particularly well attended with hundreds of people visiting the site.

The contributions of Hayley Baxter (graphics), Strephon Duckering (finds photography), Lloyd Bosworth (samian photography), Jake Lunt, Sarah Kensington and Trevor Bishop (reconstructions), Adrian Bailey and Cate Davies (finds and pottery illustration) are all gratefully acknowledged. Helen Hawkins, Gavin Glover and Jim Leary all supervised stages of the excavation. Finally the authors would like to extend sincere thanks to all those who contributed their extensive knowledge to the monograph and without whom this publication would not be possible: James Gerrard, Steven Willis, Kay Hartley, Roger Tomlin, Lucy Cramp and Richard Evershed, Berni Sudds, Howell Edwards and Rebecca Widdowson, Philippa Walton, James Bruhn, Elizabeth Wright, Roderick Mackenzie, Kevin Rielly, Kathelen Leary, Charlotte O'Brien, Stephen Davis, Barry Bishop, Catherine Langdon and Rob Scaife. Any errors, omissions or misinterpretations remain our own.

Following site work a programme of analysis culminated in the publication in April 2012 of a monograph by Jennifer Proctor describing the excavations entitled 'Faverdale, Darlington: Excavations at a major settlement in the northern frontier zone of Roman Britain', published by Pre-Construct Archaeology.

This is available to purchase from www.pre-construct.com, from the Archaeology Section, Durham County Council www.durham.gov.uk or from www.oxbowbooks.com.

Second-century samian from Lezoux with images of Apollo (second from left) and Mercury (second from right).

PCA NORTH
Unit 19A, Tursdale Business Park
Durham DH6 5PG
0191 377 1111
email: info.north@pre-construct.com

PCA SOUTH	telephone: 020 7732 3925	email: info@pre-construct.com
PCA CENTRAL	telephone: 01223 845 522	email: info.central@pre-construct.com
PCA WEST	telephone: 0771 4134099	email: info.west@pre-construct.com
PCA MIDLANDS	telephone: 01858 468333	email: info.midlands@pre-construct.com

PCA

PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

It is the early second century AD, close to the northern frontier of Roman Britain. Inside a small stone building within a settlement overlooking the Tees Valley, a local farmer entertains an important visitor. Despite the cold outside, the two are warmed by the hypocaust system which heats the building. It is quite dark inside, the interior illuminated by flickering oil lamps. The walls are decorated with painted frescoes. While the two men bathe in steam generated by ladling water from a bucket onto the hot floor, the host pours a drink from a shining bronze jug imported from Italy into a samian cup made in Central France. As they converse, concluding some matters of trade, they enjoy some oysters imported from the coast.

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