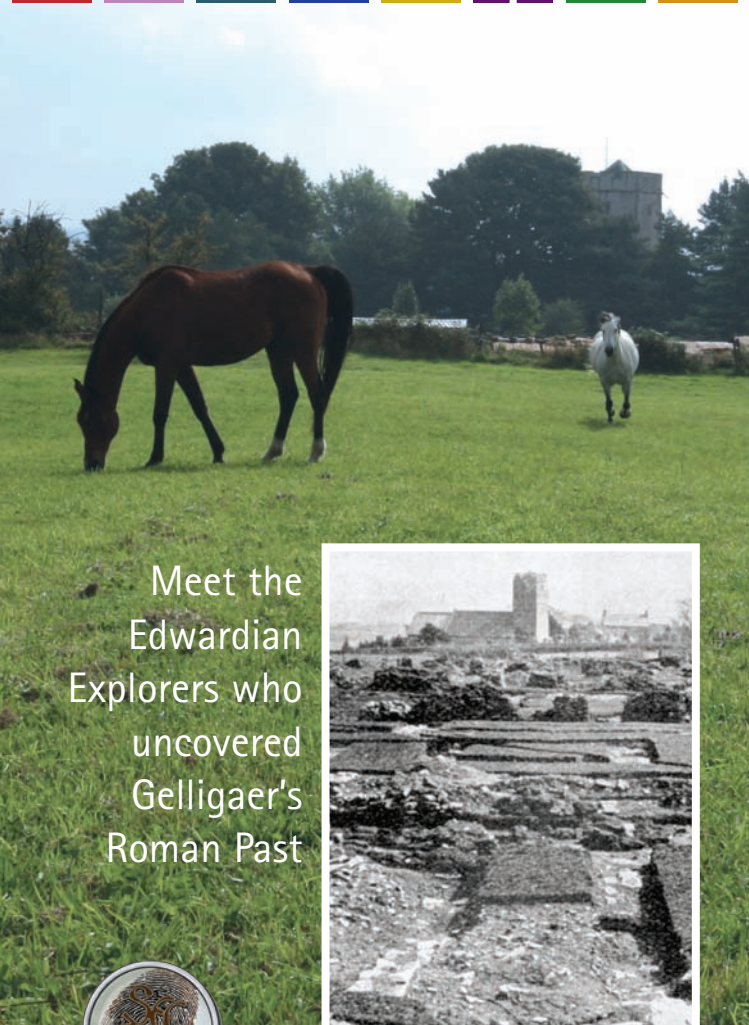
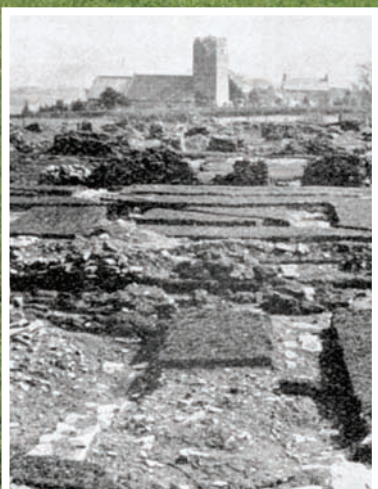


Caer Rufeinig Gelligaer Roman Fort



Meet the
Edwardian
Explorers who
uncovered
Gelligaer's
Roman Past



Guided Walk and Children's Clue
Trail around Gelligaer Roman Fort



Time Team is nothing new!

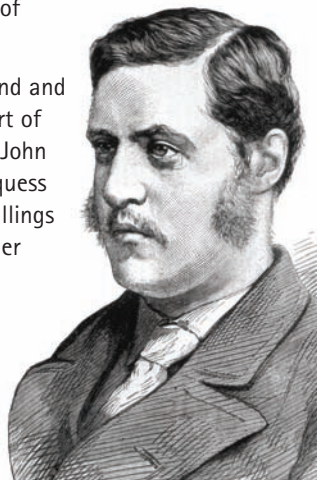
What lies beneath?

A hundred years ago archaeological excavations in Gelligaer uncovered a huge Roman fort, a parade ground, baths, granaries and a pottery. These finds confirmed that a local field name, '*which, from time beyond memory has borne the name of Gaer Fawr - the Great Camp*', really did reflect a long lost Roman fort.

It all began in 1894 when the Cardiff Naturalist's Society visited nearby Llancaiach Fawr. The Rector of Gelligaer, the Rev. T. J. Jones, persuaded them to make a detour so he could show them specimens of Roman pottery found in the Rectory garden. These finds and the humps and bumps in the adjoining Great Camp field, captured the imagination of several Society members. So began an archaeological exploration which would last for nearly 15 years and put Gelligaer on the archaeological map of Great Britain.

The Society set up an excavations fund and was lucky enough to have the support of one of the richest men in the world, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, the 3rd Marquess of Bute, who donated £31 and 10 shillings shortly before his death in 1900. Other donors included the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Western Mail.

The Marquess of Bute
© Cardiff Castle Collections

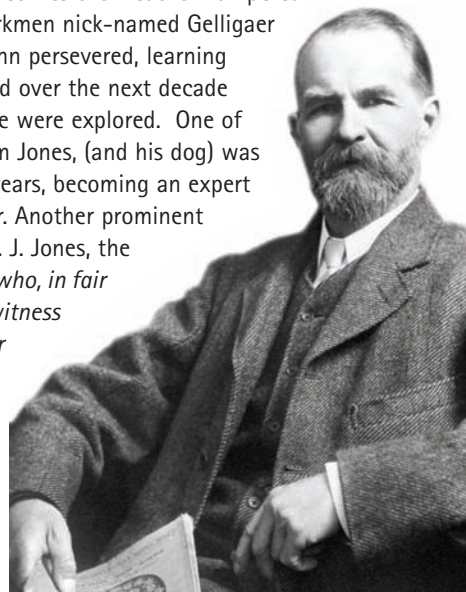


Edwardian Archaeologists

John Ward became the key figure behind the excavations. He was the Keeper of Cardiff Museum. Digging started in 1899 and by 1902 the Society had spent over £400, mostly on employing labourers to carry out the work. Imagine the excitement those amateur archaeologists must have felt as they began to uncover the outlines of a huge Roman fort, which had not been seen for more than 1500 years.

Members of the Society were meant to supervise the dig, but with business interests elsewhere many on the rota failed to turn up. With little supervision many of the early finds were mixed together. Sometimes the weather hampered progress and the workmen nick-named Gelligaer 'the Waterworks'. John persevered, learning from the first dig, and over the next decade large areas of the site were explored. One of the workmen, William Jones, (and his dog) was employed for many years, becoming an expert archaeological digger. Another prominent figure was the Rev. T. J. Jones, the Rector of Gelligaer, '*who, in fair or rain, was an eye-witness of the work whenever parochial and other duties permitted*'.

Above: Visitors to the dig
Right: John Ward
© National Museum Wales



A legacy for today

Black and white photographs and reports, a century old, are now all we have to illustrate what lies beneath the fields of Gelligaer. When you see the scale of what was found it's easy to imagine a Roman sentry on patrol, pacing the battlements of the fort, ready for an attack by the Silures, the local people who fought the Roman invaders for more than 30 years.

We owe a huge debt to those Edwardian enthusiasts who recorded the excavations; John Ward who wrote a fascinating textbook account of the archaeological dig; and the photographers, whose pictures preserve the layout of the stones under the turf. One of these was a teacher at Lewis School in 1904. Arthur Wright was a familiar figure on a bicycle, armed with a camera and tripod. He took some of the photographs in this leaflet.

It's not surprising that in the age of Edwardian exploration the excavations at Gelligaer were reported far and wide - even The Times noted the exciting discoveries. Today, these finds are in the care of Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales and some are on display at the nearby Winding House, New Tredegar.

Some of the workmen
© National Museum Wales



Take a walk around the Roman Fort

Local people have always found Roman objects; if you know where to look, you can find evidence of the Romans too! This walk around the Roman Fort site takes about 30 minutes. Start from the Viewpoint – Number 1 below and follow the numbers around the route.

Earlier Wooden Fort

The original fort was built here around 74 – 78 AD. Housing up to 1000 infantry or 500 cavalry it was destroyed by fire, probably to clear the site before the stone fort was built. This site wasn't excavated until 1963.

Gaer Fawr

The first dig in 1899 found the foundations of a 'typical Roman fort'. The fort wasn't perfectly rectangular. The Roman surveyors' tools, used to measure the site, may have been affected by high winds blowing across this exposed site.

The Rectory

Rev. T. J. Jones, the Rector of Gelligaer lived here. In 1892 the discovery of Roman pottery in the Rectory grounds sparked his interest in what might be found in the surrounding fields. This photo shows the Rector and John Ward inspecting the bath-house sweating room.

The Parade Ground

'A carefully gravelled tract devoid of buildings' was discovered here by John Ward in 1913. This was the parade ground, used for religious ceremonies as well as drill and training.

The natives are restless and dangers abound so I always keep this weapon around.

On winter days with the wind in my face, this helps me keep my cloak in place

I'm not rich, but I've bagged a bit of cash. Can you help me find my stash?

By Jupiter I kept it hidden, this figure was part of my religion

My mother's pin, it's easy to see, reminds me of my family

This vessel is a work of art, and so I stamped it with my mark

To remind me of my home by the sea, I had this brooch made especially for me.

I keep my treasure box under a rock. Can you find the object that undoes the lock?

Bath-house

Local people thought there were more buried walls in this field and, in 1908, John Ward explored this area, finding an annex to the fort which housed the Roman baths – a suite of hot, warm and cold rooms as well as the circular sweating chamber, shown here.

START and viewing area

The Romans began their invasion of Britain in 43AD, but faced strong resistance from the Silures, the local people in this area. To secure their position the Romans built a network of forts and roads. This fort housed 500 men, both infantry and cavalry.

South East Gate

There were four entrances to the fort, one on each side. Fragments of inscribed stone found near the South East Gate allowed archaeologists to date the site to between 103 and 111, when Emperor Trajan was in his fifth consulate.

Roman Pottery Kiln

'In digging graves we have come across considerable debris – roofing tiles, brick and urns', wrote the Rector in 1913. This was the site of a Roman pottery kiln.

Roman Cemetery

Romans, by law, had to bury their dead away from inhabited areas. Cremation was common at this time and urns were found here and near the Harp Inn in 1910, suggesting a cemetery in this area.

To Practice Camps

Training in the Roman army involved felling trees, cutting timber, digging ditches and making ramparts – all good practice for building camps. You can see several of these 'practice camps' either side of the Roman road as it crosses Gelligaer Common.

Heol Adam – Roman Road

Countless Roman soldiers marched along this road, a vital communication link between Cardiff and Brecon. Typically very straight, Roman roads linked forts a day's march apart. Even today, the Roman road stretching north across Gelligaer Common stands out as a straight line on the map.

Rectory Road

Look out for square dressed stones in the walls of Rectory Road. As the Roman fort fell down local people reused the stone. This photo shows the stone outline of the North West Gate in Gaer Fawr.

Lewis School

This was the site of Lewis School, built from stone from the fort. The old school house was used to store and sort items found during the archaeological dig; 'by the end of the exploration there were several wheelbarrow-loads of finds'.



If you are really adventurous (and have some paper and a crayon handy) you can do a rubbing of the shapes and join them together to form a bigger picture of an animal often connected to the Romans.



All pictures on this page © National Museum of Wales and Caerphilly County Borough Council.



A century of discovery



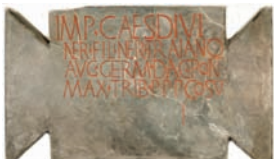
1900 Large scale excavation of the stone fort by Cardiff Naturalists Society. Two granaries discovered (the Roman army always kept a year's supply of grain). This is the North West Granary.

1901 Commandant's house excavated; finds of tile and glass show it had a tiled roof and glazed windows.



1902 These glass discs, found during the dig, were probably used as counters in a game. Some had five dots of coloured enamel on the top.

1908 Bath-house discovered - *'the abundance of flue-tiles proved that it contained at least one room heated by a hypocaust'*.



1909 The discovery of this inscribed stone dates the construction of the fort to between A.D. 103 and 111.

1913 Excavation of the Roman tile and pottery kiln in the churchyard, by the Rev. T. J. Jones. Some of the pottery discovered was scratched with inscriptions, probably the name of the potter.

1963 First proper excavation of the earlier timber fort by Professor Michael Jarrett.

2003-04 Trial excavation and geophysical survey (which can reveal buried features without disturbing the ground) of wooden fort area failed to find new evidence.

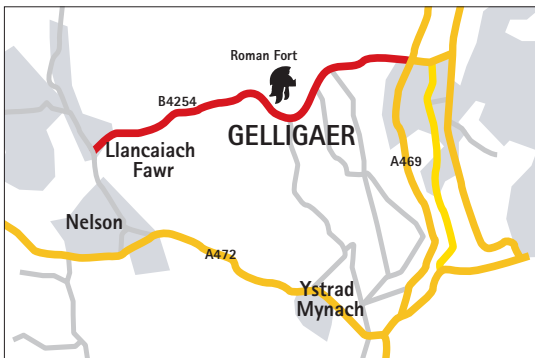
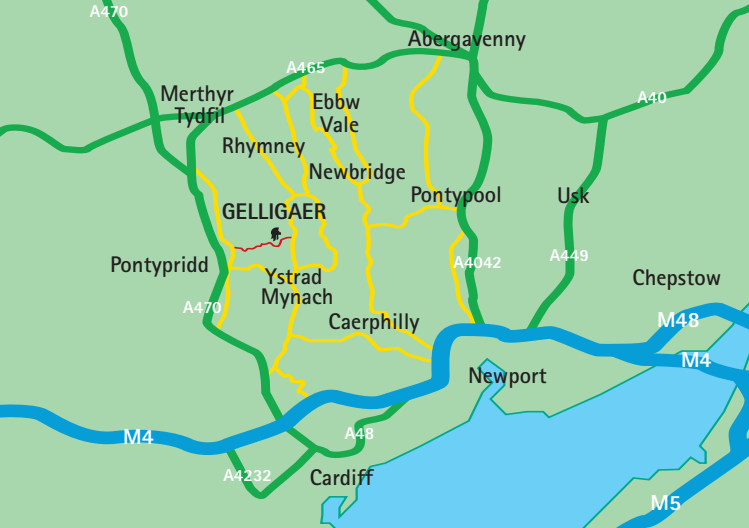
Images this page and front cover

© National Museum Wales & Caerphilly County Borough Council.

Aerial photograph

© www.webbaviation.co.uk





Find out more about Gelligaer at www.roman-gelligaer.org, from the panels around the Roman fort, or pick up a detailed guidebook to the fort and the village from Neuadd St Cattwg Community Hall.

www.romangelligaer.org

Produced by Gelligaer & Pen-y-Bryn Partnership and Gelligaer Community Council. Mapping and aerial photography © Crown copyright. CCBC, 100025372, 2010. For ideas about other places to visit nearby contact: Visit Caerphilly Centre on 02920 880011 www.visitcaerphilly.com

