

# Dunse History Society Lecture - 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023

The Dunse History Society much enjoyed a talk entitled 'Dere Street' by David Jones on 25 October. Dere Street the Border Road is the Roman Road from York across the Cheviots to the Antonine Wall and almost to Inverness. The name is part mediaeval (deira means oak in Gaelic) and part Roman (strata means paved road). The area from Rochester, Northumberland to Melrose, Scottish Borders, much of which is now the A68, was the focus of the talk. While built as a substantial road by the Romans, much of it follows much older prehistoric tracks. It was a fairly permanent route north to Hadrians Wall but not used much beyond. As expected, the route is frequently marked by evidence and remains of Roman and other known civilisations from prehistoric until modern times with WW1 and WW2 structures. Roman camps and forts were built at various sites along Dere Street and often 12 to 15 miles apart, the distance a legion marched fully-equipped in a day. The Roman Army owed as much to the spade as to the sword. Initially the camps were built to hold large numbers of Roman troops to combat the Picts to the north. The street was used for both legal (soldiering, trading, droving) and illegal (smuggling, raiding, stealing) purposes. Salt was smuggled from Ireland to Scotland and then south to England. Food and material for the legions would largely have come north from the European mainland in view of the poverty and food shortage of the local inhabitants. To exemplify the potential military problems in this region the area was covered by 2% of the Roman frontier but by 20% of the troops! This region has many examples of the varied use of Dere Street. The fort at Bremenium was occupied intermittently between AD80 and AD340 and housed not only troops from all parts of the Roman Empire but their wives and children and even had a temple to Mithras. Interestingly, buildings nearby show the re-use of the Roman stone, as at the 1852 Rochester School House porch. Another example is the Petty Knowes Tombs, near Rochester, which contains about 100 barrows, cairns in Scotland, used for in situ cremation together with 4 higher status tombs of the drum and cone structure and also artistic carvings. WW1 practice trenches are located NE of Silloans Farm situated within the Otterburn Training Camp. The Scottish Border is marked by the Cross Dykes site used before Roman times, a pre-Roman but also partly Roman site and the Signal Station which gives good views over the border to the north. Woden Law in the North Cheviots is pre-Roman and was probably also used post-Roman and Moat Knowe a Dark Ages post-Roman site is likely a stronghold for a local chieftan. These are just a few examples of the fascinating historical finds over 5000+ years within this 15 miles of Dere Street and which make this area a most informative site of the past.