Revealing Trimontium

The Correspondence of James Curle of Melrose, Excavator of Newstead Roman Fort

edited by Donald Gordon, Fraser Hunter and Phil Freeman

DESCRIPTION:
The Roman fort of Trimontium, near the village of Newstead in the Scottish Borders, is renowned internationally thanks to the work of James Curle (1862-1944), a solicitor in nearby Melrose. He led the excavations of 1905-1910, with their spectacular discoveries, and produced an exemplary publication. This volume brings together key sets of his correspondence which illuminate his intellectual networks and connections. They reveal a web of local, national and international contacts and travels that equipped him with an impressively broad knowledge of Roman provincial archaeology and turned him into a sought-after advisor for his expertise and knowledge of a range of topics, especially Roman pottery.

Yet his interests went beyond the Roman military. His early interests in Swedish archaeology were rekindled after the Trimontium excavations, with a series of papers on aspects of Viking brooches, while a long-running interest in finds of Roman material beyond the frontiers of the empire shows his concern to understand the Iron Age societies of Scotland and Scandinavia.

The letters are provided with a critical apparatus to explain their context, while introductory chapters consider Curle's background, his local links, his connections with the great Romano-British archaeologist Francis Haverfield, and his wider antiquarian networks.

The letters cast fresh light on the intellectual networks of the early 20th century, when professional archaeology was still in its infancy and gifted amateurs such as James Curle played a key role in laying the foundations on which scholarship still builds today.

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Donald Gordon received a degree in Classics from Glasgow University, subsequently moving from
teaching into Director of Education for Selkirkshire and then Deputy Director of the Borders Regional Council from 1973-95. He founded the Trimontium Trust in 1988 and served as honorary secretary until 2019, running the museum, coordinating a series of walks, talks and outings, and editing the distinctive annual Trimontium Trumpet. He was awarded an MBE in 2008 for services to the Trimontium Trust and to the community in Melrose, Scottish Borders.

Fraser Hunter is Principal Curator of Iron Age and Roman collections at National Museums Scotland, where the finds from Trimontium form the backbone of the Roman collection. He co-edited a volume to mark the centenary of Curle's landmark publication of the site. His research interests include the impact of the Roman frontier on the local populations of Iron Age Scotland, and Iron Age and Roman material culture.

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