



The 2015 SCPR Conference, Carlisle

by David Higgins

The 2015 annual SCPR conference was held in Carlisle, a part of Britain that the Society had never visited before. This provided an opportunity for delegates to focus on the pipemaking industry of Cumbria as well as hearing about recent research that had been carried out in other areas. The conference brought together a stimulating and well-presented set of papers, combined with the opportunity to examine finds from a number of different sources.

The conference was opened by Tim Padley from the Tullie House Museum in Carlisle, who kindly came along to provide a historical context for the delegates by explaining the history of research into the Roman settlement that underlies the modern city. This had been founded under Vespasian, but it was only from the sixteenth century onwards that antiquaries started to take an interest in the ancient remains. Despite producing some important artefacts, the study of Carlisle itself was often overshadowed by interest in Hadrian's Wall and it was not until the 1970s that the first real excavations under Dorothy Charlesworth began. Since then much has been learned about the Roman city, which seems to have been founded in the winter of 72/73 AD and lasted into the fifth century. This was not only a long-lived Roman settlement but also the most north-westerly city in the Empire. The framework provided by this talk proved invaluable for delegates who stayed on to take part in a walking tour of the city the following day.

The next talk (by the author) moved forward in time to provide an overview of pipes and pipemaking in Cumbria. The early pipes found in the country are dominated by two main sources; the areas to the south of the Lakes by pipes from the Rainford area of south Lancashire and the areas to the north of the Lakes by pipes from Tyneside.

Preliminary results from a survey of pipe clay figurines were then presented by Courtney-Elle Crichton-Turley, who showed that at least some of these must have been made in this country since part of a mould fragment depicting the Madonna and Child has been recovered from London. In order to record and compare these figurines the study has included taking multiple images of them and using 'structure from motion' packages to generate virtual 3D images of the objects. While this study is focussing on pipe clay figurines, the technique will be equally applicable to other artefact types, such as pipes.

After an excellent buffet lunch and opportunity to examine the extensive displays of material that had been brought along for delegates to look at, Chris Jarrett opened the afternoon session with a talk on an assemblage of excavated pipes from Queen Victoria Square in Belfast. Susie White followed this with a fascinating documentary detective story revealing the hitherto unknown pipe making industry in New Zealand, which was established by Scottish emigrants using locally sourced materials. Andy Kincaid then explored the varied sources of the pipes used at the Macon Creek site in Virginia, U.S.A. The afternoon session concluded with a paper by Dennis Gallagher entitled 'A Pipe of Peace', which explored the broader sociological aspects of pipe smoking.

On the Sunday morning many of the delegates reassembled by the Market Cross for a walking tour of Carlisle, led by local historian Dennis Perriam, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the city's archaeology and historic buildings.