

The *Notitia Dignitatum* in Britain

Britain's earliest place names are known mainly from these sources:

- Ptolemy's Geography – 129 names with latitude and longitude (+34 tribes);
- Antonine Itinerary (AI) – 110 names with route mileages;
- Ravenna Cosmography (RC) – 307 names listed geographically logically;
- *Notitia Dignitatum* (ND) – 54 names, with 46 Roman army units' names;
- a mixed bag of inscriptions, historical mentions, minor sources, etc.

ND gives no direct information about location, but about half of its names can be located with reasonable confidence because they match names in other sources and/or seem to have survived into Anglo-Saxon times. Here we obsess about the other half, asking whether it is possible to make progress beyond the weak-but-reasonable guesses made by Rivet and Smith (1979). Much of the text of ND, from various manuscripts, is set out on the website of [Luke Ueda-Sarson](#). For a map of ND sites in the northern military district and their archaeological context see [Haynes \(2014\)](#).

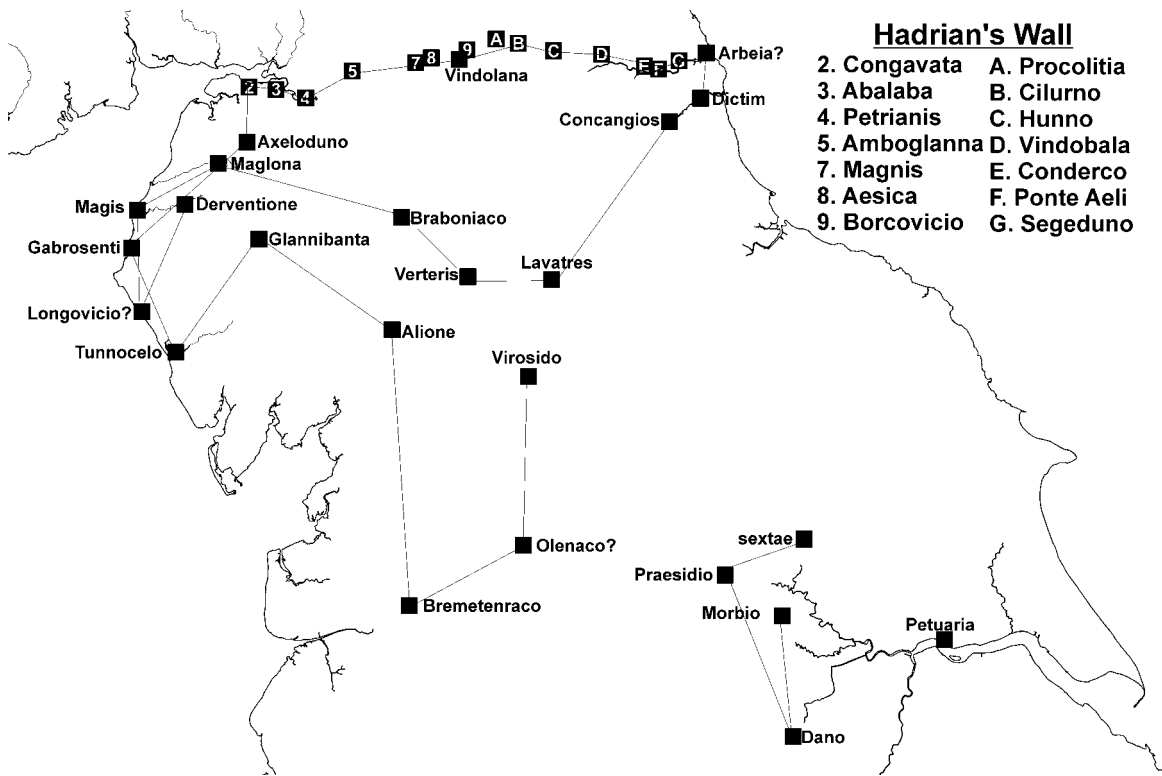
ND supplies 46 names of forts (plus 5 provinces, 2 finance offices, and one unlocated army unit), which we discuss individually on the main [website](#). But what determines the order in which names are listed? How far can we use upon ND the same logic as works so well with RC? With RC it is essential to be sceptical about Celtic etymologies, but also to recognise that the cosmographer read names in sequence off some tolerably accurate ancient maps, tending to follow geographically logical, non-intersecting paths across a modern map, often along known Roman roads.

ND's 9 forts of the *litus Saxonici* 'Saxon shore' have names that persisted into Anglo-Saxon forms, showing that they run clockwise around the coast in two groups, one of three names and another of six names. And 14 names *per lineam valli* run from east to west along Hadrian's Wall, agreeing (with only a few minor niggles) with other sources, followed by three more names running down into Cumbria: [Axeloduno](#) was in the armpit of the west end of the Wall, most likely at **Wigton** (Old Carlisle Farm); [Gabrosenti](#) was almost certainly the coastal fort at **Moresby**, near Whitehaven; and [Tunnocelo](#) has been confidently identified with **Ravenglass**. RC and ND offer noticeably different spellings for names along the wall, which presumably reveals something about chronology.

After the Cumbrian coast, ND's list heads inland, to [Glannibanta](#) (very probably Ambleside), [Alione](#) (probably Low Borrowbridge), [Bremetenraco](#) (definitely **Ribchester**), [Olenaco](#) (possibly Elslack), and [Virosido](#) (possibly Bainbridge). Then trouble starts. Out of the remaining 14 names in ND, only five can be confidently located where Rivet and Smith suggested, and some fairly radical rethinking may be needed about the other nine. This table shows how we currently evaluate the likelihood of various locations: **bold type** = highly likely; question marks = doubtful; ~~strikeout~~ = probably wrong. Suggestions from readers will be much appreciated.

<u>ND name</u>	<u>Rivet & Smith guess</u>	<u>our best guess now</u>
sextae	York	York
Praesidio	?Brough-on-Humber	Newton Kyme
Dano	Doncaster, ?Jarrow	Doncaster
Morbio	?Piercebridge	Roall
Arbeia	South Shields	South Shields or ?Piercebridge
then apparently a big jump here or before the preceding place		
Dictim	?Wearmouth	Sunderland
Concangios	Chester-le-Street	Chester-le-Street
Lavatres	Bowes Castle	Bowes Castle
Verteris	Brough Castle	Brough Castle
Braboniaco	Kirkby Thore	Kirkby Thore
Maglone	?Wigton	Blennerhasset
Magis	?Burrow Walls	Burrow Walls (Workington)
Longovicio	Lanchester	?Braystones
Derventione	Malton	Papcastle

Here is a map of our current thinking about the locations of ND names in the northern military district. In agreement with R&S, *Dictim* is near Sunderland and *Arbeia* is at South Shields. We are not yet brave enough to shift *Arbeia* to Piercebridge and *Segeduno* to South Shields, but matters change from month to month, and this map should be regarded as provisional and likely to change. Please look up individual names for the dilemmas involved.



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