

## **Archaeologists unearth unique 5th century chalice near Hadrian's Wall etched in Britain's earliest example of Christian graffiti**

Archaeologists have unearthed a unique 5th-century chalice near Hadrian's Wall that is covered in Britain's earliest example of Christian graffiti on an object.

The cup, that is made of lead, was found at the Vindolanda Roman fort beneath the remains of a 5th or 6th century church during a dig. It is covered with symbols of crosses and chi-rhos, angels, a priestly figure, fish, a whale, ships and letters in Latin and Greek. The markings are thought to have been added by an artist and are now barely recognisable, but have been captured using specialist photography.

According to the Vindolanda Charitable Trust, it is the only surviving partial chalice from this period in Britain as well as being the first to come from a fort on Hadrian's Wall.



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Durham University specialist on the post-Roman period and early Christianity Dr David Petts is now researching the chalice found by new excavations volunteer

Lesley Walker. Dr Petts said: 'This is a really exciting find from a poorly understood period in the history of Britain. Its apparent connections with the early Christian church are incredibly important, and this curious vessel is unique in a British context.'



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The chalice was split into 14 fragments, all with lightly-etched images and symbols representing different forms of Christian iconography

Director of Vindolanda excavations Dr Andrew Birley said: 'We are used to first's and the wow factor from our impressive Roman remains at Vindolanda with artefacts such as the ink tablets, boxing gloves, boots and shoes, but to have an object like the chalice survive into the post-Roman landscape is just as significant.'

'Its discovery helps us appreciate how the site of Vindolanda and its community survived beyond the fall of Rome and yet remained connected to a spiritual successor in the form of Christianity which in many ways was just as wide reaching and transformative as what had come before it.'