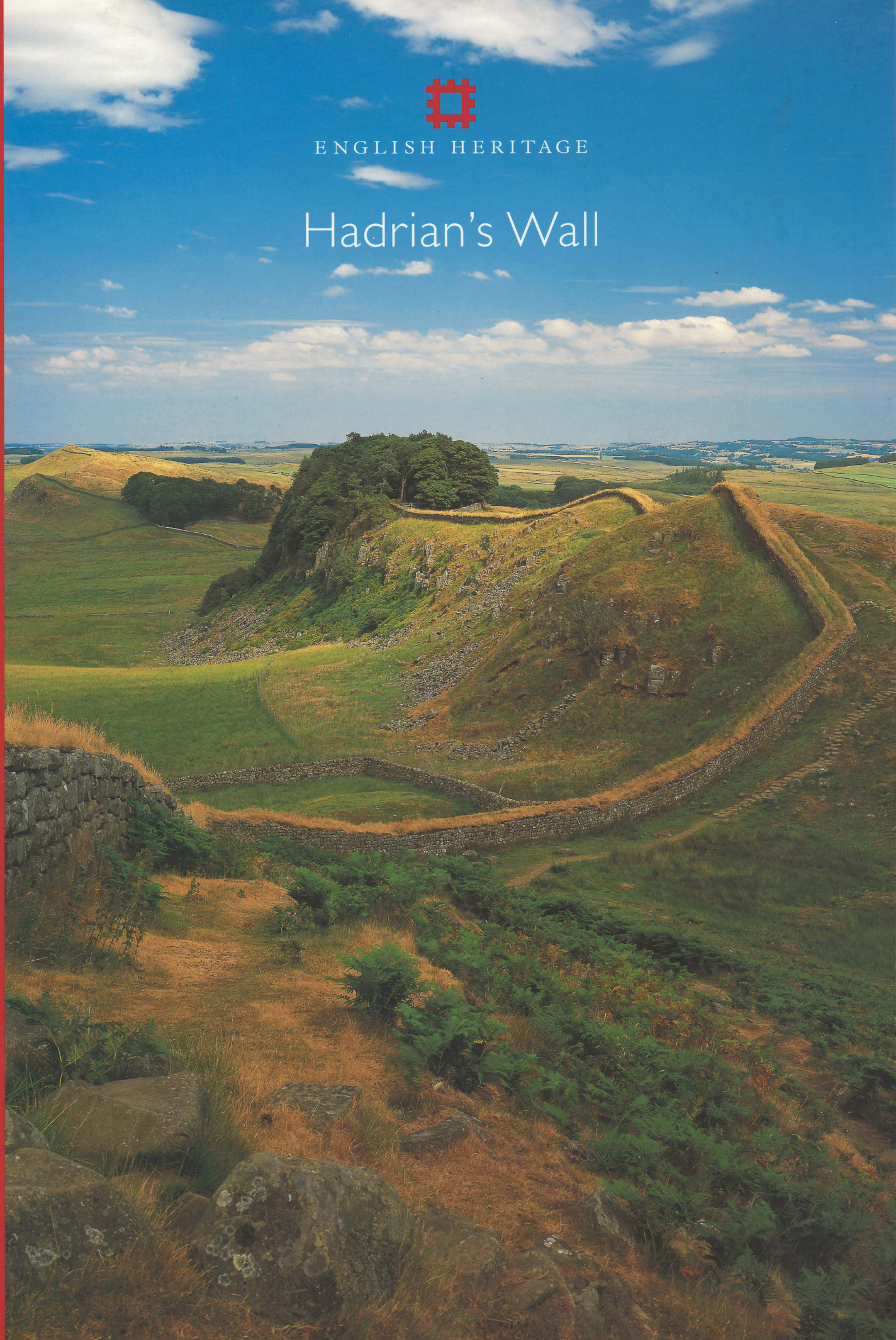




ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Hadrian's Wall

English Heritage Guidebooks





## Highlights of Hadrian's Wall

The north-west frontier of the Roman empire



**Granary at Housesteads** High on a ridge, the fort at Housesteads is one of the iconic sites of the Roman empire. It was occupied for almost 300 years, and the exposed remains, including the headquarters building, hospital, commanding officer's house and barrack blocks, are of different periods.



**Milecastle 42** These guardposts were built at intervals of one Roman mile to control movement across the Wall. This one at Cawfields clings to the hillside within a particularly spectacular stretch of landscape. It was excavated 150 years ago by John Clayton of Chesters.



**Chesters Museum** On the site of the fort at Chesters, this remarkable museum was built more than 100 years ago to house the Roman artefacts collected by the Clayton family, who owned this and four other Wall forts. It has changed little over the years.

**Front cover:** Looking east along the Wall, half a mile west of Housesteads

**Title page:** Bronze sestertius of Hadrian found in the Tyne at Newcastle

Map of Hadrian's Wall including the main sites

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*The milecastles and turrets along Hadrian's Wall are numbered westwards, from a notional 0 at Wallsend to 80 at Bowness*

M74

BOWNESS-ON-SOLWAY

Solway Firth



#### ACCESS ALONG HADRIANS WALL

Much of Hadrian's Wall runs over open countryside and is not recommended for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

English Heritage sites

■ Birdoswald Roman Fort: 01697 747602, fax 01697 747605. Accessible parking, visitor centre, WC, shop, tearoom and part of site.

Swarthy Hill Roman fortlet

Maryport Roman fort

MARYPORT





- Chesters Roman Fort: 01434 681379 (no fax). Accessible parking, site and WC, but assistance is recommended.
- Corbridge Roman Town: 01434 632349 (no fax). Accessible parking, WC, audio tour, museum and perimeter of site.
- Housesteads Roman Fort: 01434 344363, fax 01434 344153. Limited access to site, and assistance is recommended. 50m walk on steep gradient. Accessible parking at site (telephone in advance or ask at

main car park at the bottom of the hill).

- Enquiries: telephone Customer Services on 0870 333 1181; textphone 0800 015 0516. For information on Sundays, contact the site directly. For details, refer to the English Heritage Members' and Visitors' Handbook or visit [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

#### Other sites

- South Shields: for details, telephone 0191 456 1369, fax 0191 427 6862 or visit [www.twmuseums.org.uk](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk)
- Vindolanda: for details, telephone 01434 344277, fax 01434 344060, or visit [www.vindolanda.com](http://www.vindolanda.com)
- Wallsend: for details, telephone 0191 236 9347, fax 0191 295 5858 or visit [www.twmuseums.org.uk](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk)



# Hadrian's Wall

David Breeze









# Introduction

Hadrian's Wall is the most important monument built by the Romans in Britain. It is the best-known frontier in the entire Roman empire and stands today as a reminder of the past glories of one of the world's greatest powers. For nearly 300 years, Hadrian's Wall was the north-west frontier of an empire that stretched east for 2,500 miles to present-day Iraq, and south for 1,500 miles to the Sahara desert.

Hadrian's Wall was built on the orders of the emperor Hadrian, who visited Britain in AD 122. His biographer states that its purpose was to separate the Romans and the barbarians. It certainly did that. At 73 miles (80 Roman miles) long, Hadrian's Wall crossed northern Britain from Bowness-on-Solway to Wallsend on the River Tyne, though frontier installations continued for a further 25 miles down the Cumbrian coast. The original plan was for a wall of turf in the west and stone in the east, with protected gates (milecastles) at intervals of a mile, with two observation towers (turrets) in between the milecastles. To the north lay a broad and deep ditch, except where the lie of the land made this unnecessary. Before this plan was completed, forts were added and a great earthwork, known as the vallum, was constructed a short distance south of the Wall. The Wall was completed to revised specifications, its width and the standard of craftsmanship being reduced.

The construction of Hadrian's Wall was a major feat of engineering. Soldiers from all three legions of Britain came north to build it. Other soldiers from the provincial army, and even sailors from the fleet, helped. It took the army over a decade to build the Wall. Hadrian's Wall was abandoned from 142 for about 20 years when the Antonine Wall was built to the north, but from about 160 for 250 years it remained the north-west frontier of the Roman empire.

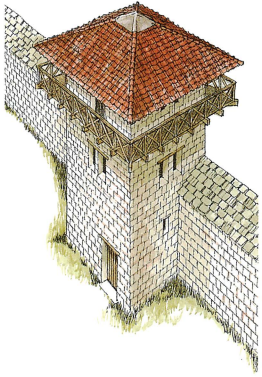


*Above: Bronze head of the emperor Hadrian found in the Thames near London Bridge in 1834*

*Facing page: Hadrian's Wall at Willowford, showing the foundations and two offsets*



# Rome's north-west frontier



**Above:** Reconstruction by Michael J. Moore, based on the depiction of towers on the contemporary Trajan's Column in Rome: the Wall is provided with a sloping top

**Below:** An alternative reconstruction by Peter Connolly of Hadrian's Wall in the central sector, with a turret and wall walk

One hundred years before the time of Hadrian, the Roman empire had been expansionist, exploring and conquering new lands. In AD 43, the emperor Claudius ordered the invasion of Britain, but after his death the rate of conquest slowed. Military disasters in eastern Europe effectively brought the progress of Roman arms in Britain to a halt in the 80s. Only once more, in the early third century, did Rome attempt to complete the conquest of the island. In many ways, Hadrian's Wall is a recognition of the Romans' abandonment of their intention to conquer Britain. They became more interested in controlling the movement of people and goods into and out of their empire, and their once-mobile army became fossilised on the frontiers. Hadrian's Wall was the ultimate contemporary method of frontier control, a problem that concerned the Romans as much as it does us in the 21st century.

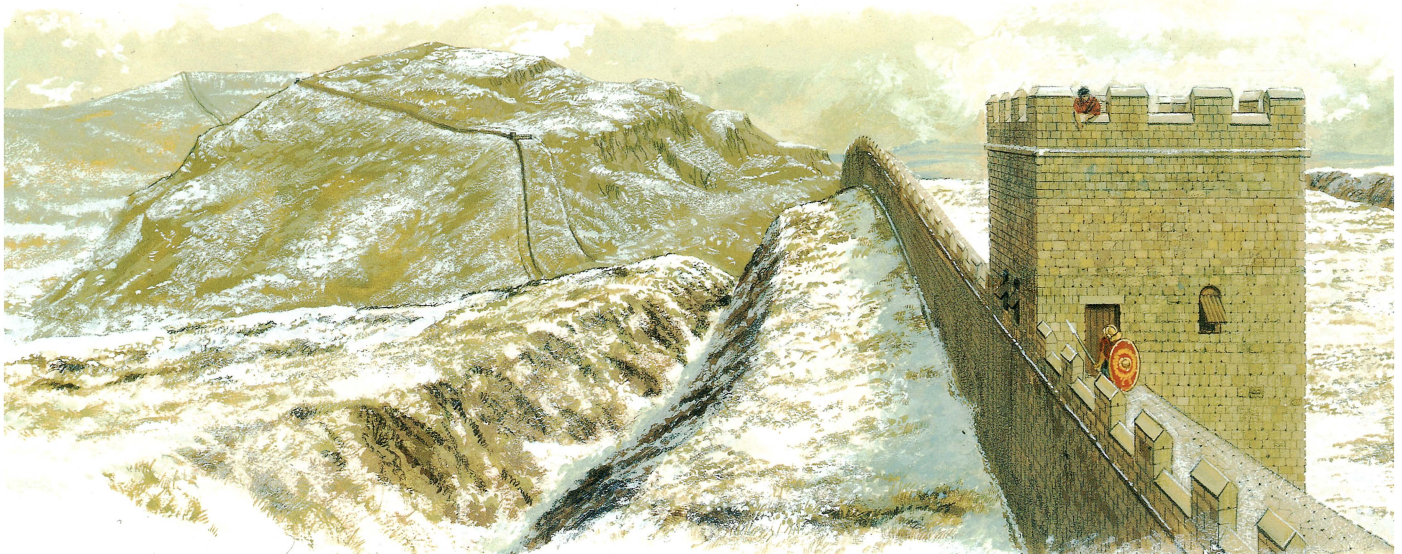
Hadrian's Wall was a substantial barrier, but it was not impenetrable. Gates were placed every mile and a regular series of turrets provided for observation. Whether these turrets rendered the provision of a walk along the top of the Wall superfluous is a problem over which archaeologists still argue.

Hadrian's Wall was built to improve frontier control. Frontier defence was another matter and

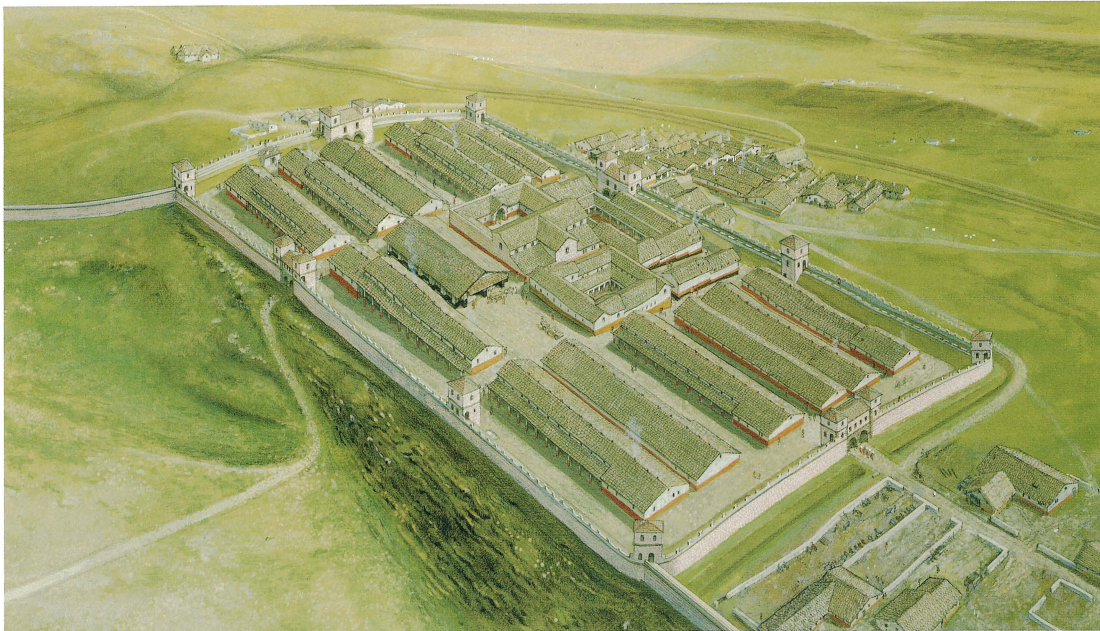
was the responsibility of the regiments based in the frontier zone. During the building of Hadrian's Wall, there was a major change of plan: it was decided to build 12 or 13 forts actually on the Wall line. The position hints at the reason for their construction. For an offensive army such as the Roman, the Wall was an obstacle to movement. Hence the new forts were placed astride the Wall. This was a unique solution not repeated on any other frontier, but it did allow the army considerable mobility.

A subsequent action was the construction of the vallum south of the Wall, probably intended as the Roman equivalent of barbed wire, protecting the military zone from intruders. This may indicate that the building of the Wall met some local opposition. Alternatively, it was simply another method of improving military control of the movement of people, for it was possible to cross the frontier only at a fort where a causeway was provided over the vallum ditch. The number of crossing points was reduced from an original 80 or so to about 16.

Hadrian's Wall was occupied for nearly 300 years. The forts on the Wall bear witness to the passage of years. Barracks were completely redesigned to reflect the new structure of the late Roman army. Open spaces in headquarters buildings were divided up – perhaps to hold







**Left:** Reconstruction of Housesteads fort by Peter Connolly (see page 17)

**Below:** View of Housesteads fort, looking west

records (the Roman army issued receipts in quadruplicate). Gate passages were blocked up and put to other uses. The Wall itself changed: unnecessary turrets were abandoned, milecastle gates blocked or narrowed. Almost all the installations along the Cumbrian coast were abandoned. Most of the changes occurred within a couple of generations of the building of the Wall. Remarkably, thereafter there is considerable continuity in the occupation and use of the Wall and its structures.

The Wall was not simply a one-dimensional military monument. Outside most, if not all, forts sprang up civil settlements where the soldiers' families lived. Until the third century, soldiers were not allowed to marry according to Roman law, but the fact that they might marry according to local law was recognised retrospectively by the army when they and any children they might have were granted Roman citizenship. In the settlement were also shops and inns, a community seeking to live off the soldiers in the fort. Roman soldiers were relatively well paid, certainly in relation to the farmers of the frontier area.

We know little of fighting on the northern frontier: A large army served in the Wall zone in the second century, commanded by senior generals, and there are many references to trouble in Britain at that time, though little by way of detail. After a peaceful third century, a new

enemy appeared in the north – the Picts. These were an amalgamation of several of the tribes listed by the geographer Ptolemy in the second century. This process may have been an unconscious reaction to the power of Rome in the southern part of the island.

Three emperors came to Britain to fight the Picts. Forts were gradually strengthened and the army increased in strength. This army, and its fortifications, remained sufficiently strong to keep Rome's enemies out of her territory until the very end of Roman Britain. After that, we can only assume that the soldiers and their families returned to the soil from which they sprang.







# Tour of Hadrian's Wall

The monument called Hadrian's Wall consists not only of the visible remains of the Wall itself, but also of its associated forts, milecastles, turrets and earthworks. The entire site forms the most powerful evocation of life on the outermost limits of the Roman empire.

## **FOLLOWING THE TOUR**

*The tour begins at the fort at Maryport on the Solway Coast, beyond the western end of Hadrian's Wall. It continues eastwards, following the line of the Wall, through the spectacular landscape of northern England, taking in the key forts and settlements along the way. A detailed plan of the visible remains of each site is included, alongside a description of the important features. The tour finishes at South Shields, overlooking the mouth of the River Tyne.*





**Left:** Maryport from the air, looking towards the Solway coast

**Below:** This badly worn stone is probably the tombstone of a cavalryman based at Maryport

**Bottom:** A depiction of a god found at Maryport

**Facing page:** Hadrian's Wall south of Hotbank Crag, looking east

## MARYPORT (ALAUNA) AND THE SOLWAY COAST

Hadrian's Wall ended at the modern village of Bowness-on-Solway. Beyond here, the coast was protected by forts, milefortlets and towers. Today, little is visible other than the fortlet at Swarthy Hill and the well-preserved earthworks of the fort at Maryport two miles further south.

The fort at Maryport is one of the largest on the frontier at 2.3 hectares. It was probably built under Hadrian for the First Cohort of Spaniards, which was followed in the second century by the First Cohort of Dalmatians and the First Cohort of Baetasians, a regiment originally raised in the lower Rhineland. The names of the units based here in the third and fourth centuries are not known.

The museum at Maryport, the Senhouse Roman Museum, contains one of the oldest private collections in Britain, having been founded before 1599. It is remarkable for its altars. The gods represented on the altars and other sculpture include Jupiter, Hercules, Mars, Vulcan,

Minerva, the oriental god Sol and the Celtic horse goddess Epona, while the several local gods, included the Celtic horned god.

The dedications to Jupiter were made either on 3 January, two days after all soldiers had renewed their oath of allegiance to the emperor; when vows were paid and undertaken for the welfare of the emperor and for the eternity of the empire, or on the anniversary of the emperor's accession – 11 August in the case of Hadrian. Seventeen of the altars were found in 1870 in a group of pits north-east of the fort: they had probably stood in a nearby shrine to Jupiter.

Maryport appears to possess an almost complete sequence of annual dedications erected by the First Cohort of Spaniards during the reign of Hadrian. They reveal that the average duration of command was three years. The commanders were drawn from Italy, Provence, Noricum (modern Austria), north Africa and possibly Spain. They moved on to posts in the Danubian provinces, Dacia (modern Romania) and Judaea.





### THE BIRDOSWALD AREA

The whole of the western 30 miles of Hadrian's Wall, from the crossing of the River Irthing near Birdoswald to Bowness-on-Solway, was originally built of turf. Twenty Roman feet (6m) wide, it was normally placed directly on the ground. Recent research, however, has demonstrated that in places it lay on a stone base. The milecastles on the turf wall were of turf and timber, but the turrets were of stone, as on the rest of the Wall.

It was late in Hadrian's reign that a start was made on rebuilding the turf wall in stone, and work continued when Hadrian's Wall was reoccupied in the 160s after the abandonment of the Antonine Wall. The first two miles west of the Irthing were replaced on a different line, probably to provide more space south of the Wall around Birdoswald. West of Birdoswald, the remains of the turf wall can still be seen running behind the later stone wall.

The best place to see the structures of the turf wall is around Birdoswald. Four miles to the west of the fort, a short but tall length of the Wall can be seen at Hare Hill: the facing stones were added in the 19th century. Nearby Lanercost Priory contains several Roman stones.

From Banks to Birdoswald, the remains lie beside the modern road. The first three visible turrets were built freestanding to receive the turf wall at each side: they are now abutted by the later stone wall. On the rise to the east of Turret 52a (Banks East) lies a fragment of an earlier observation tower; Pike Hill. Before the Wall was built, the troops posted here communicated back to the forts on the road to the south, the Stanegate. The last visible turret (49b) is a later (but still Hadrianic) stone wall turret, bonded in with the Wall.



*Above:* A phallic symbol on the south face of the Wall between Harrow's Scar milecastle and Birdoswald fort. It represented protection against evil

*Above right:* Hadrian's Wall running eastwards from Birdoswald to Harrow's Scar is the longest visible stretch of Wall rebuilt in stone

*Right:* Banks East turret (52a)





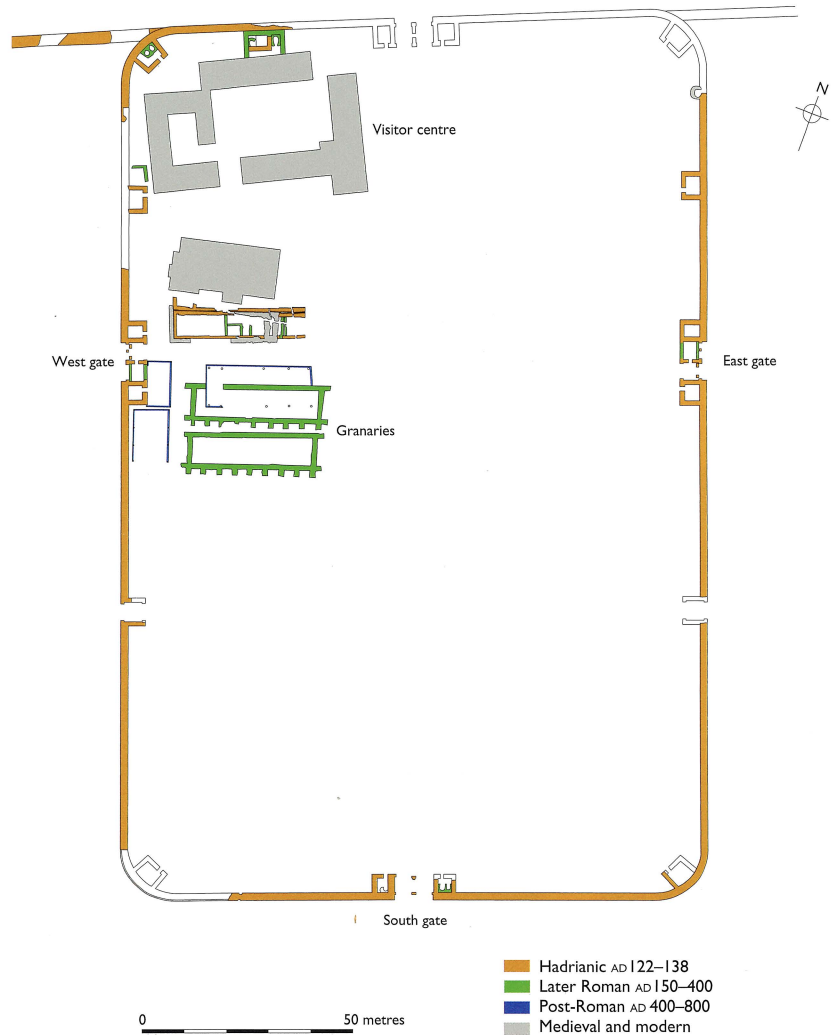
## BIRDOSWALD (BANNA) ROMAN FORT

This fort sits on top of the escarpment overlooking the River Irthing, with splendid views over the valley. The circuit of the walls of the fort can be seen (with the exception of the north wall, which lies under the road), together with gates and interval towers. Within it lie the well-preserved remains of two granaries.

Birdoswald lies in the turf sector of Hadrian's Wall and the original fort here was probably of turf and timber, to be replaced later in Hadrian's reign by the visible stone fort. The first fort lay astride the Wall, but that was soon moved so that it met the northern corners of the fort instead of the towers of the side gates.

The first regiment to be based at the fort is not known, but through the third and fourth centuries the First Aelian Cohort of Dacians was here. This regiment was raised in what is now Romania and, although it will have later recruited from Britain, it continued to display on its altars a symbol of its origin, the curved Dacian sword.

Military occupation of the fort appears to have continued into the early fifth century, by which time the former granaries had been demolished and replaced by a large timber hall, perhaps the home of a local chief. This hall may not have survived the sixth century, but the adjacent west gate, much altered and renewed, continued in use into the medieval period, perhaps even into the 15th century.



*Left: The demolished north granary was replaced by a timber hall rather larger than the granary. The pillars of the hall are marked by modern posts*





*Above:* A statue of Fortuna found in the commanding officer's bath house at Birdoswald. This is one of the most sophisticated works of art from the Wall

*Above right:* Birdoswald fort from the air looking north  
*Right:* Looking east through the west gate along the main road across the fort



**Visitor Centre** The exhibition offers an interpretation of the site and its history.

**West Gate** The gate lies on the former location of the turf wall and its ditch. The outside face of the south tower is built of well-crafted masonry. To the north lie two ovens, the interval tower and the angle tower, again containing ovens.

**Granaries** The two granaries were built in the early third century. In the later fourth century, both buildings were given over to other uses. The northern one was demolished and replaced by a timber hall, now marked by large posts. To the north of the granaries, and across the main street, lie the remains of a workshop or store.

**South Gate** The east tower contains two ovens. To the west of the gate is a post-Roman corn-drying kiln.

**East Gate** One of the best-preserved gates on the Wall. Evidence of its long use is obvious in the renewal of the gate pivot stones, the blocking of

the north portal and the modifications to the north tower. To the north is another interval tower. Between gate and tower, an arm purse containing 28 coins current under Hadrian was found in 1949.







**Far left:** Harrow's Scar milecastle (49) from the air, with the east abutment of Willowford Bridge to its right  
**Left:** Poltross Burn milecastle (48) from the air looking east. The steps (seen below left) allow the height of the milecastle wall, and possibly therefore Hadrian's Wall itself, to be calculated as 4m  
**Below:** Walltown turret (45A)  
**Bottom:** Cawfields milecastle (42)

## BIRDOSWALD TO GILSLAND

East of Birdoswald, it is possible to walk for over a mile along the Wall with two milecastles, two turrets and a bridge abutment visible. In the first stretch, the ditch is impressive, while in the south face several building inscriptions and phallic symbols (to ward off evil spirits) can still be seen.

Harrow's Scar milecastle (49) contains remains of a post-Roman building. From here, a path leads down to a modern bridge over the River Irthing. On the opposite bank is the east abutment of Willowford Bridge, left high and dry following the westward movement of the river. It was originally built for a Wall 10 Roman feet (3m) wide, but was remodelled at least twice, when the bridge was widened to take a road.

The intention was to build the next mile of Wall at a width of 10 Roman feet. In places, the lower courses of this Wall can be seen, with its



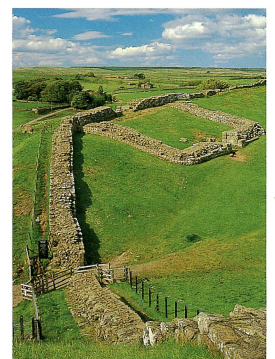
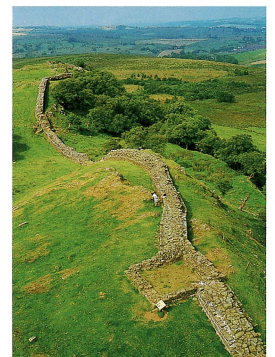
narrower successor sitting on top: this change took place during the reign of Hadrian. At the two turrets (48b and 48a), a vertical point of reduction from broad to narrow wall occurs.

Poltross Burn milecastle (48) is larger than usual and contains the remains of two barrack-blocks. The north gate was narrowed, probably in the third century. In the north-west corner, the remains of several successive ovens survive, and in the north-east a flight of steps. Projecting these upwards indicates that the Wall was 3.66m high measured from inside the milecastle and 4m on the outside.

## WALLTOWN TO CAWFIELDS

The Roman Army Museum stands beside the fort at Carvoran, only visible as earthworks. Quarrying damaged the next stretch of Wall, but it still contains two turrets, both unique. Walltown turret (45a) was constructed before the Wall, which abuts it on each side. Mucklebank turret (44b) sits in a corner of the Wall.

Cawfields milecastle (42) has yielded an inscription recording that it was built by the Second Legion Augusta. The massive masonry employed in the gates appears to be the hallmark of this legion. To the south is a fine stretch of the Vallum. The Wall runs on past Thorny Doors, where it stands 13 courses high, to Caw Gap turret (41a). This was demolished in the late second century and only the lowest courses survive.







*Above: Vindolanda fort and civil settlement from the air looking north-east*

*Right: The wall walk on the reconstructed wall*

### CHESTERHOLM (VINDOLANDA)

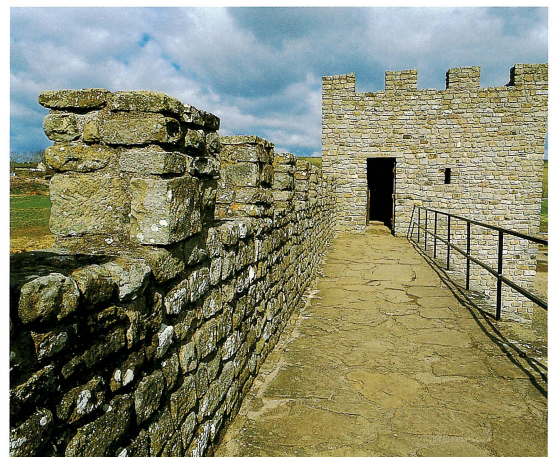
Vindolanda offers a comprehensive view of a Roman fort and its civil settlement, supported by an excellent museum and reconstructions. The fort was the longest occupied on the line of the Wall, being built in about 85 and continuing to the end of Roman Britain. Inside are displayed the headquarters building and the commanding officer's house. To the west, the civilian buildings line the main road and spread along the fort defences. Vindolanda has produced the most important archaeological discovery of the last 50 years – the writing tablets. These documents not only provide valuable information about the minutiae of life on the northern frontier; but also are so similar to the larger collections of records from the Eastern frontier that they allow us to use this material to help illustrate life on the European frontiers of the empire.

**Cemetery** Several burial tombs lie just beyond the main (west) entrance to the site. Recent excavations have uncovered a cache of sculpture here. There is also a small Roman-Celtic temple.

**Civil Settlement** Shops and houses line the street.

One building contains its own bath house and has been interpreted as a house for a senior officer or an inn. Some of the longer buildings may have served as barrack blocks or married quarters.

**Bath Houses** Two bath houses are visible at Vindolanda. On the north side of the civil settlement is the third-century building, while its first-century predecessor was placed south of the fort. Both contained the normal range of facilities, though the later bath house is better







preserved, as its predecessor was demolished by the Romans.

**Fort** Most of the circuit of the defences is now visible together with the gates, which, unusually, are single-portal. Both the north-east and the south-east corners of the fort contain a latrine. In the centre of the fort lies the headquarters building erected in the third century but modified later. It follows the normal design, except that the front veranda and the courtyard aisles served as storehouses, while small rooms were added to the rear of the back rooms. There is no strong room, but a pit was provided to house the money chests. To the side is the commanding officer's house. This is the usual courtyard house, but has the distinction of containing a small apsidal building, interpreted as a church. Under the north and south defences are small round houses. These date to the time of the emperor

Septimius Severus and have been variously interpreted as accommodation for: prisoners-of-war; the hostages of tribes conquered by Severus during his campaigns into Scotland between 208 and 211; refugees from the warfare in the north;



**Left:** Two of the rear rooms of the headquarters building at Vindolanda. The panel would have been balanced by a second on the other side of the entrance to the office



# The Vindolanda writing tablets

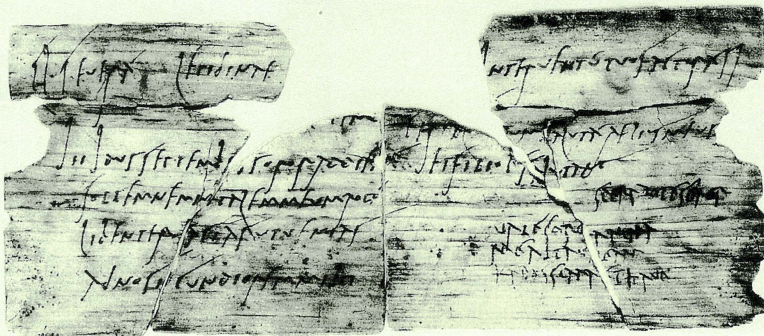
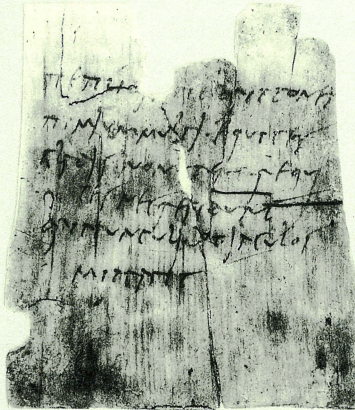
These wooden tablets are an important source of information about life in Roman Britain

The unearthing of the first wooden writing tablet at Vindolanda 30 years ago heralded one of the most important archaeological discoveries in Britain since 1945. The cache of about 2,000 documents is an invaluable source of information about life in the Roman army on the northern frontier in the years immediately before the construction of Hadrian's Wall. The tablets are so similar in many ways to documents found on the eastern frontier of the empire that they allow this more extensive material to be used with confidence to illuminate life in Roman Britain.

The Vindolanda writing tablets include letters from senior officers and their wives, reports of military activities, lists, communications concerning food, clothing and other supplies, building and transport. They provide evidence for local place-names as well as the administration of justice. They even give the price of beer.

**Right:** This writing tablet contains a commentary on the fighting tactics of the Britons: 'The cavalry does not use swords, nor do the wretched Britons mount in order to throw javelins'

**Below:** On 11 September in about the year 100, Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of the commanding officer at Vindolanda, received this invitation to celebrate the birthday of Claudia Severa. This letter contains almost certainly the earliest known example of a woman's handwriting in Latin



a native militia; or conscript labour.

**Museum** This contains the wide range of important and exciting finds from the excavations at Vindolanda. The museum contains a wealth of material, the products of 35 years of excavation: armour, shoes, wooden objects, textiles, as well as the more usual glass, pottery, ironwork, small finds, inscriptions and sculpture. Several of the objects are remarkable, such as the plume from a helmet.

**Milestone** Beside the east entrance to the site, a Roman milestone stands beside the Stanegate. A second milestone lies one mile to the west.





## STEEL RIGG TO HOUSESTEADS

The three miles from Steel Rigg car park to Housesteads offer some of the most exciting walking of the entire Wall. It is strenuous, but the views are magnificent, over Crag Lough as well as the wild Northumbrian countryside. It is particularly interesting to note the way the Wall follows the land, rising over the crags and dropping into 'gaps', where the ditch usually reappears briefly.

In Peel Gap, the first gap to the east of Steel Rigg, sits an additional tower, perhaps built to plug the long space between adjacent turrets. Castle Nick milecastle (39) was probably built by the Sixth Legion. Its gates are not original, having been later modified. Inside are the remains of barracks and other buildings.

Sycamore Gap featured in the film *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* (1991). A particularly fine stretch of Wall survives to a height of 3m. Occasionally, the foundation of the broad wall was not used by the later builders. Along the south face of the Wall can be seen many points of junction where presumably different building gangs met. Elsewhere, the relationship of the Wall to the ground can be noted: on a gentle slope, the courses follow the contour; but when the slope steepens, the courses are laid horizontally and the Wall is stepped down the hill.

The walls of Hotbank milecastle (38) have



**Left:** The north gate of Housesteads milecastle. Some of the arch stones have been replaced

**Below:** The central sector of Hadrian's Wall, looking east from Hotbank to Cuddy's Crag

been robbed out, but the site is easily recognisable. A mile on is Housesteads milecastle (37), one of the best-preserved milecastles. Inscriptions found at these two milecastles demonstrate that they were built by the Second Legion. The gates are of the same massive masonry seen at Cawfields milecastle. The north gate is the better-preserved, with some of the arch stone re-erected. The east half of the enclosure was occupied by a stone-built barrack. The back wall of the building does not exist; it has either been destroyed, or the building rested against the inside face of the milecastle wall. The building is large enough to have housed eight men. A short road connected the milecastle to the Military Way to the south. Either this track or the Wall can be followed to Housesteads fort.



**Facing page, top:** A betrothal medallion made of Whitby jet, found at Vindolanda and probably carved in York

**Bottom:** This Roman milestone on the Stanegate still stands where it was originally erected







## HOUSESTEADS (VERCOVICIUM) ROMAN FORT

Housesteads is the best-known fort on Hadrian's Wall and one of the iconic sites of the Roman empire. Perched high on its ridge, the fort conveys the spirit of the past as well as the beauty of the present. This fort was an addition to Hadrian's Wall, forming part of the second plan for the frontier. It covers two hectares. Today, the exposed remains are of different periods, reflecting the long and complex history of the site, although the overall layout changed little over nearly 300 years of occupation.

**Museum** This displays finds from the site and a model of the fort and civil settlement.

**South Gate** The east portal of this gate was blocked before the civil settlement beyond was built in the third century, for the houses line up on the centre of the gate not its east side. Its eastern tower was extended and a kiln inserted within it when border raiders lived here in the 17th century.

**Commanding Officer's House** This provided accommodation for the commander, his wife and children and slaves. It consists of a series of rooms



*Left: The north granary at Housesteads*

*Facing page: Looking east along the Wall, half a mile west of Housesteads*

round an open courtyard. In the north range is the kitchen containing an oven; the dining room presumably lay near here. The heated room in the centre of the north range served as a bath suite for a time. A latrine, and its later replacement, lay in the centre of the west range. The basements beside the entrance served as stables.

**Headquarters Building** At the front, and poorly preserved, is an open courtyard. The roofs of the verandas which lay on three sides were supported by pillars, later embedded within walls when the covered areas were converted into rooms. A wide door led into the assembly hall, at



*Above: This sculpture of Victory once adorned the east gate. It is now in the museum at Chesters*

*Left: The north wall at Housesteads with turret 36b, partially overlain by later walls*



## TOUR: HOUSESTEADS

*Right: Housesteads fort from the air, looking north*



one end of which was a dais or tribunal for the commanding officer: perhaps he stood here to issue the daily orders. Beside the platform is the side entrance to the building. At the far end lie five rooms where the regimental clerks worked and where the standards of the unit were housed (the two left-hand rooms have been modified by the insertion of a staircase at the rear).

**Hospital** A series of wards faces a central

courtyard, though later rebuilding has obscured the original arrangement. The larger room in the north range may be the operating theatre.

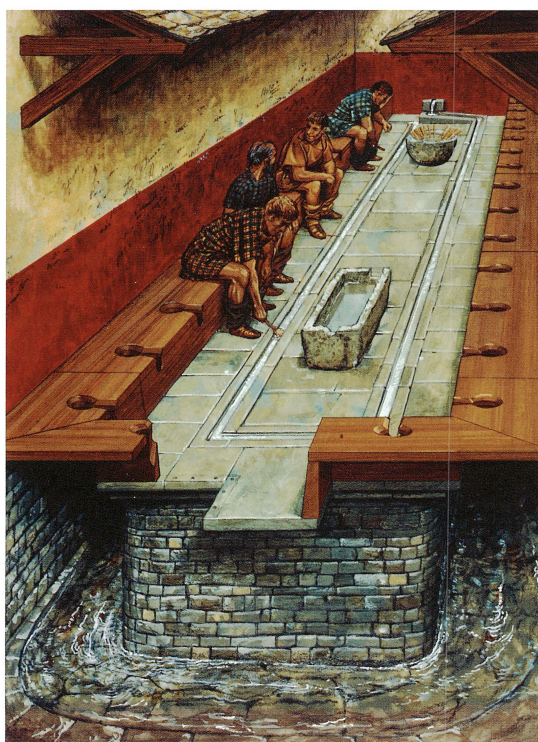
**Granaries** The double granary was originally built as one, with a range of columns down the centre. The floor was of timber resting on stone pillars to help keep the food dry and free from vermin, and the basement was ventilated through holes in the side walls. The door was locked from the inside. The buttresses helped to support the roof.

**Turret 36b** North of the granary lie the foundations of a turret, now obscured by later walls. This was demolished when the fort was built. In order to gain more space on the ridge, the north wall of the fort was moved forward to the edge of the escarpment.

**North Gate** The foundations of this gate are particularly impressive owing to their depth.

**Barrack Blocks** The two existing buildings date to

*Right: A reconstruction by Peter Connolly of the latrine at Housesteads, showing the seating, with the sewage channel below, and the drain, probably used for washing the sponges*



*Far right: The latrine today*





the fourth century. They consist of a series of rooms in which the soldiers lived, with a larger suite at the east end for the officer.

**Storeroom** Next to the barracks is a long, well-constructed building which probably held stores. A small bath house was erected at one end in the fourth century.

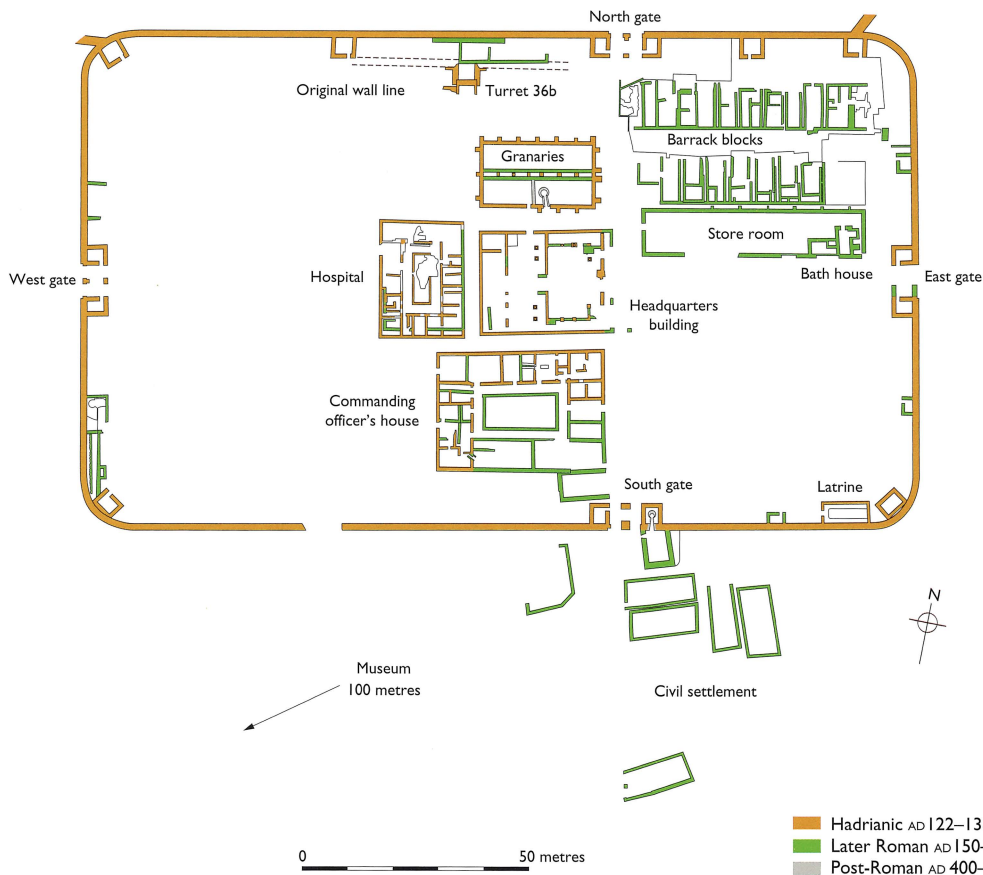
**East Gate** Housesteads faced east, towards the rising sun – one of the preferred directions. Thus, this was its main gate. The southern passage was blocked up at some stage in its history and the tower turned into a coal store. The deeply worn wheel-ruts are 1.4m (4ft 8in) apart. This is the normal width of cart axles from antiquity to the present, and is reflected by the British standard railway gauge.

**Latrine** Carefully placed at the lowest point of the fort, the latrine was fed by water from various tanks. Wooden seats would have covered the main sewer channel. The smaller channel on the platform was used for washing the sponges used instead of paper. A drain carried the sewage



from the corner of the fort down the hill side.

**West Gate** One of the best-preserved gates on the Wall, this has two interesting features: the holes for the bar that was slotted into place when the gate was closed and, by the front corners of the gate, the marking out lines scored by the masons who built it. The upper stones of the gate are not as well dressed as the lower courses and suggest a lowering of standards. It is a short walk from here to Housesteads milecastle (37).



*Above: Part of the commanding officer's house, showing the hypocaust*



# Roman Forts

Most forts on Hadrian's Wall were aligned to face the enemy

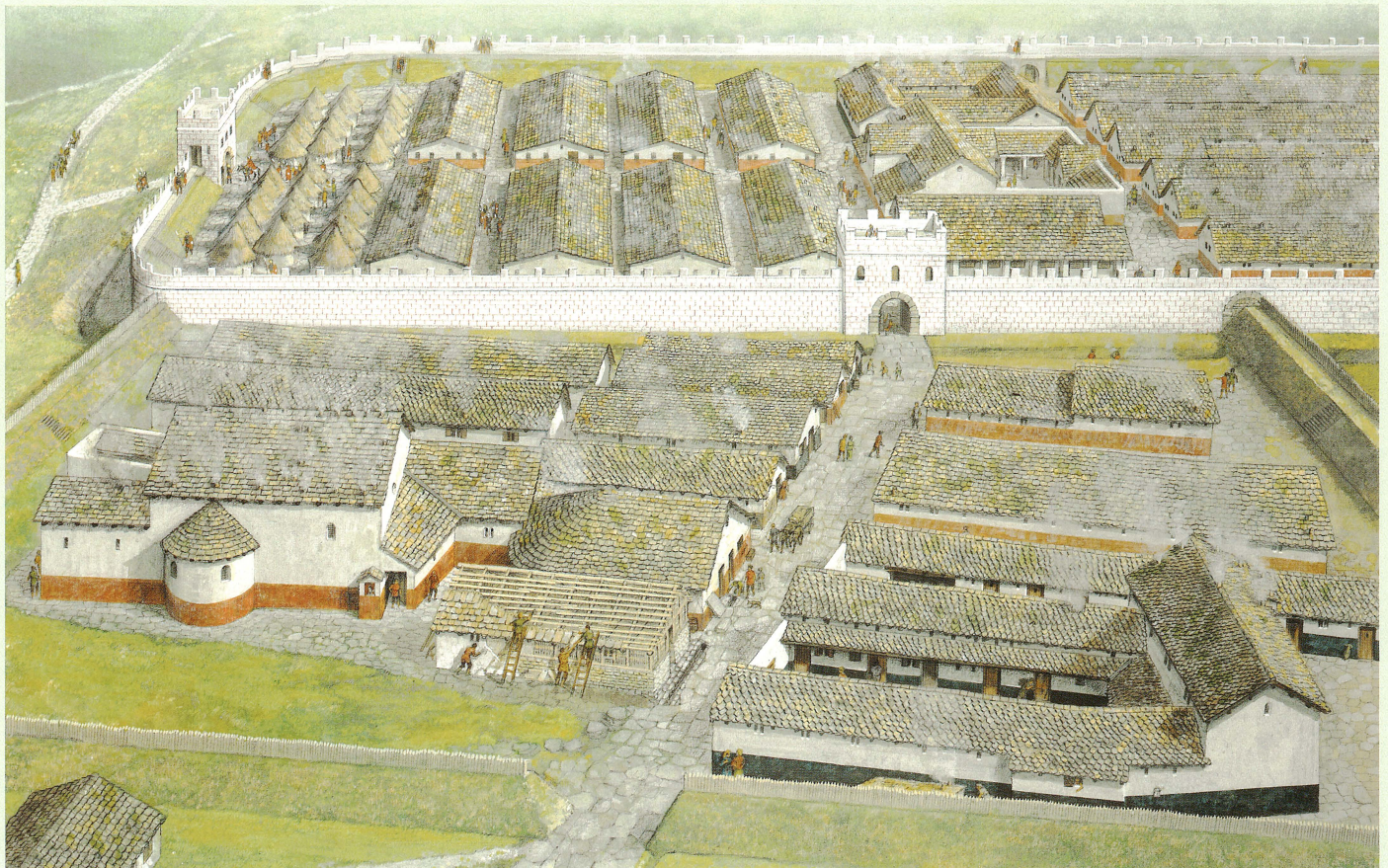
Roman forts tended to be constructed within the same basic framework, though differing in details. The shape corresponds to that of a playing card – a rectangle with rounded corners. The ramparts were of stone or turf, additional defence being provided by ditches, usually two. Each side was pierced by a gate, and at regular intervals along the circuit of the rampart was a tower.

The headquarters building lay in the centre of the fort. Its alignment governed the direction the fort faced, usually the enemy, as in the case of most Wall forts, or the rising sun, as at Housesteads. This was the focal point of the fort, and included an assembly hall, administrative rooms and a temple containing a statue of the emperor and the regiment's standards; the strong room was often here, too. Normally to the right lay the commanding officer's residence, a large peristyle house in the Mediterranean fashion, and to the left a pair of granaries. A hospital might lie within the

central range. The rest of the fort contained barrack blocks, storehouses, a workshop and a latrine; the bath house was outside the enclosure. One building was not provided: a communal mess hall or canteen. It would appear that the soldiers cooked their own food and ate it, perhaps, in their barrack rooms or on the veranda outside.

*Right: Detail from Trajan's Column showing a Germanic auxiliary soldier in a night battle with the Dacians, AD 102*

*Below: Reconstruction by Peter Connolly of the fort and civil settlement at Vindolanda, looking east (see page 12)*







## HOUSESTEADS TO SEWINGSHIELDS

Below the north-east corner of Housesteads fort is an unusual structure, an extra gate through the Wall. The Knag Burn gate was probably inserted in the fourth century, perhaps to allow easier passage through the Wall. It had gates at each end of the passage, suggesting that travellers could be corralled inside and searched.

Over the next three miles, several stretches of the Wall, some turrets and Sewingshields milecastle (35) are visible. In places, the Wall foundations are as wide as 11 Roman feet (3.25m), though the Wall itself, built after the decision to narrow it, is usually about 2.4m wide. One stretch is particularly interesting for, in a dip, the Wall is stepped down on one side while riding with the contours on the other. An inscription found at turret 33b records its construction by the Sixth Legion. The turrets were demolished in the late second century and their northern recesses built up, presumably to aid the stability of the Wall.

There is now no north gate at Sewingshields milecastle, but the rebuilt north wall has destroyed any evidence that may have existed for a gate in the Hadrianic period. The original

barrack accommodation in the south-east corner of the milecastle is overlain by its early third-century successor. The jumble of walls in the western half of the milecastle belongs to the third- and fourth-century buildings. The site was reoccupied in the Middle Ages when a farm was built here.

To the east of the milecastle, the Wall comes down from the crags and the ditch starts again.



**Above left:** The vallum at Sewingshields. The modern road drops dramatically into the vallum ditch

**Above:** Turret 33b looking east. This turret went out of use in the later second century. At first the door was blocked and then the turret was demolished down to the bottom four courses, and the recess on the north side blocked up

**Left:** Sewingshields milecastle (35) from the air, looking east



# Religion in the Roman Army

Religious belief was a personal affair, not an occasion for a public gathering



**Right:** These three gods wear the cucullatus, a cloak rather like a duffel coat without sleeves

**Below:** Silver plaques dedicated to Cocidius, a local version of Mars. They were found in the headquarters building at Bewcastle, an outpost fort north of Birdoswald

**Far right:** Reconstruction of the mithraeum at the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle. It reminds us that Roman buildings were once brightly painted

Religious belief is represented on the Wall at both an official and a personal level. Dedications were often made to Jupiter (as well as to Juno and Minerva).

At Maryport there is a unique collection of dedications to Jupiter by the commanding officers of the First Cohort of Spaniards. Special ceremonies were held at the beginning of each year, on the emperor's birthday and on the anniversary of the emperor's succession – 11 August in the case of Hadrian. On that day, prayers were made to the gods for the wellbeing of the emperor and the oath of allegiance was administered to the troops.

Personal religion was often in the form of a bargain with the gods. A soldier going on a journey, for example, vowed that, if a particular god

preserved his life, he would dedicate an altar to that god or sacrifice an animal, or even build a shrine. Some of these gods were peculiar to this area, such as Antenociticus, Belatucadrus, Cocidius and the Veteres. Sometimes these were equated with Roman gods, thus Mars with Belatucadrus and Apollo with Maponus. Other gods were introduced to the area by incoming units, such as Mars Thincsus at Housesteads. The temples of these gods were small buildings, for, to the Romans, religion was a personal affair, not the occasion for a public gathering.

Eastern mystery religions are also represented on Hadrian's Wall, the most famous being Mithraism. Temples to Mithras have been excavated at Rudchester, Housesteads and Carrawburgh, where it is still visible. These temples may have been singled out for special destruction by Christians, who saw Mithraism as a parody of their own beliefs.







### CARRAWBURGH (BROCOLITIA)

The fort is in private ownership, but English Heritage looks after an area around it that includes the remarkable temple to the god Mithras. The fort was an addition to the Wall, probably being built in the 130s. By this time, the vallum had been constructed and its ditch had to be filled and its mounds levelled when the fort was built over it.

The temple to Mithras – known as a mithraeum – was probably built in about 200. Following its excavation in 1950, the original altars, statues and timber posts were replaced in concrete: the originals are in the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle.

The altars were dedicated by the commanding officers of the First Cohort of Batavians stationed at the fort in the third and fourth centuries. Behind them, and seated on the ledge, would have been a sculpture of the central action of the religion, Mithras capturing and killing the primeval bull in a cave. From this slaying sprang all the benefits of mankind. In order to reflect the scene, mithraea were dark and gloomy.

A door led into an ante-chapel. This was used for initiation tests, which worshippers had to pass before being allowed to proceed to the next grade in the temple hierarchy. There were seven grades: Raven, Bridegroom, Soldier, Lion, Persian, Courier of the Sun, and Father. In the right-hand corner is a copy of a small statue of a mother

goddess. To the left was a hearth used for ordeals or preparing ritual feasts.

Cautes and Cautopates guard the nave: they were supporters of Mithras. Here benches lie on either side of a central passage on which worshippers would recline during ceremonies. At the far end of the nave is the sanctuary containing the altars. On one altar, Mithras appears as the Charioteer of the Sun; this stone has been carved out so that a lamp placed in the hollow behind will cause the rays to light up.

Mithraism was especially disliked by Christians who saw in the mithraic ritual of taking bread and water a caricature of their own holy sacrament. Thus it may have been Christians rather than barbarians who destroyed this temple in the fourth century, smashing the sculpture of Mithras killing the bull, but leaving intact the altars dedicated by the commanding officers.

Immediately outside the temple was a shrine to the Nymphs, of which only one side of the water tank is visible. Beyond the mithraeum is Coventina's Well (not in the care of English Heritage). A pool on the site of the sacred spring is all that survives of this temple to the water goddess Coventina. When the temple was examined in 1876, 13,490 coins were recovered, as well as altars, sculptures, pottery vessels, incense burners and brooches, all thrown in to honour or help win favours from the goddess. Many of these objects can be seen at Chesters Museum.



**Above:** An altar to Mithras from the mithraeum. A lamp placed in the recess at the rear would light up the rays

**Top:** The mithraeum at Carrawburgh





## CHESTERS (CILURNUM) ROMAN FORT

Chesters fort lies in the pleasant valley of the North Tyne river. Here, in the parkland laid out by the Clayton family in the early 19th century, can be viewed the remains of the fort, the well-preserved bath house and the remarkable museum built more than 100 years ago to house the great collection brought together by John Clayton.

Chesters was first occupied by a cavalry regiment, 'called Augusta for valour', according to an inscription, but throughout most of its life it was the base of the Second Cavalry Regiment of Asturians. The fort was placed astride the Wall, with three of its four main gates opening north of the Wall. Access south was increased by the provision of an extra pair of side gates. The circuit of defences, only part of which can be seen, was strengthened by the provision of towers at the

four corners of the fort and at intervals along the walls. One or two ditches, now filled in, lay beyond the fort wall. Outside the fort was the bath house, one of the best preserved buildings of Roman Britain, and a civil settlement, which has not been excavated.

**Museum** Opened in the 1890s, the museum has been little altered since. It contains many finds from Chesters and the four other forts on the Wall once owned by the Clayton family.

**North Gate** Two roadways passed through this gate. A drain left the fort below the west (right) road.

**West Gate** Remarkably, the iron collars which formally held the pivots on which the doors rotated survive here. A water channel leads into the north (right) tower where there was a tank, and beyond it is an oven. Hadrian's Wall abuts the south (left) tower.

*Above: Chesters from the air looking north. The headquarters building lies in the centre of the fort, with the commanding officer's house to the right. Parts of three barrack blocks lie to the upper right. To the right, outside the fort and beside the river, is the bath house*

*Facing page, top: One of the corner towers on the fort wall*

*Facing page, bottom: An armpurse from Birdoswald, part of the Clayton Collection*





**South Gate** This shows much evidence of use, the final road surface lying 800mm above the Hadrianic level.

**Interval and Corner Towers** These stand up to 11 courses high. Beside them are the columns which once supported the veranda of a barrack block.

**Side Gate** The minor east gate led down to the bath house. It contains a panel which perhaps once bore a painted inscription.

**East Gate** This is one of the most impressive gates on Hadrian's Wall, with one pier still standing to the beginning of the arch. The Wall meets the fort at the south tower.

**Commanding Officer's House** The present maze of rooms is the result of additions and rebuildings over many years. Its small bath house lies beside the fort wall in the shade of the yew tree.



# The Bath House

The bath house lay outside the fort to minimise the risk of fire

The Romans understood that a group of men housed together were susceptible to disease, hence hygiene was an important concern. Each fort appears to have been provided with a flushing latrine, and many with a hospital. The other important building was the bath house. This was normally located outside the fort, presumably because of the fire risk.

Many bath houses offered two forms of bathing: the steam treatment or Turkish bath (so-called because the Turks took it over when they conquered Constantinople), and the hot, dry bath or sauna. Soldiers first entered the changing room, and then had the choice. Each room was hotter than the last, the final room being above the furnace. The fires here heated the basement below the floors, so sandals had to be worn. The hot air passed through vents up the walls to escape at the roof. The soldiers could recline on the stone benches, and perhaps play board games. Their bodies would be anointed with oil, and the dirt and oil scraped off with a blunt knife or strigil. After such treatment, the soldier could take a dip in the cold bath before returning to the fort.



**Above:** A glass flask, found at Corbridge, which would have held the oil used in bath houses; oil was used instead of soap

**Below:** A cutaway reconstruction of the bath house at Vindolanda, showing the methods of heating the floors and the walls. A replica of Chesters bath house can be seen at Wallsend (see page 33)







*Right: The changing room at Chesters. The purpose of the niches is uncertain*  
*Facing page, top: The museum at Chesters, which houses the Clayton Collection*  
*Facing page, bottom: A statue of a river god, possibly Neptune, found in the commanding officer's bath house at Chesters*



**Headquarters Building** The large courtyard is surrounded by a colonnade; possibly notices were pinned up here. Beside the well, on the paving, is a phallic symbol – a good-luck charm. A wide door leads into the assembly hall, with its dais or tribunal to the right, now reduced to its lowest courses. Beyond, the back rooms are better preserved. The two to the right were probably used by the clerks of the regimental office, and the two to the left by the accounts clerks. In the centre was the unit's shrine, where a statue of the emperor and the regimental standards would have been placed. Leading off this is the strong room. When opened up in the 19th century, its oak door disintegrated on exposure to the air.

**Barracks** In the north-east corner of the fort are parts of three barrack blocks. There were probably either eight or ten rooms for the





soldiers in each building but only five are visible. Each room was probably divided into two by a timber partition. It is believed that eight men probably occupied each double room. At the rampart end are the houses for the officers. One is particularly well preserved, containing several rooms and a latrine.

**Bath House** This is a complex building, rendered more difficult to understand by the lack of floors in the heated rooms. The porch – a later addition – leads into the changing room, itself secondary. The floor was complete when the room was excavated: the purpose of the niches is uncertain. To the left is the latrine, and ahead the door leading into the heated rooms. Here the bather was faced with a choice between the hot dry treatment (sauna) or the Turkish (steam) bath. To the right of the first room, a vestibule, are the two rooms of the hot dry suite (some of the flags are modern). Ahead is the steam range. The floors have been robbed, so today we walk around in the basement. The first room, formerly two, was the hottest and therefore the last in the



## Granaries

Raised floors  
kept food dry  
and vents in  
the walls  
allowed air  
to circulate

The Roman historian Tacitus, writing a few years before the construction of Hadrian's Wall, remarked that forts should contain sufficient supplies to last for a year. The primary storehouses for food were the granaries. Their floors were raised to help keep the food fresh and dry and restrict access by rodents. Vents in the exterior walls allowed the circulation of air. The other key feature of the granaries is the buttresses supporting the walls. These were probably built to provide stability for the long walls, which were otherwise unsupported by partitions. It is not clear whether grain was stored in bins or sacks, which certainly existed in the Roman world.

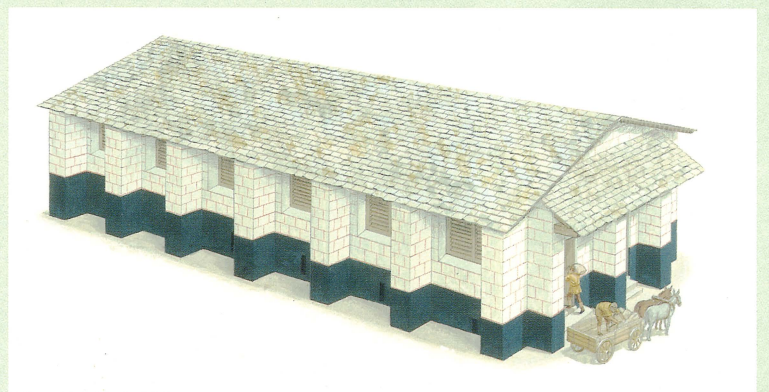
Excavations have provided considerable evidence about the range of foods eaten by soldiers. This has been supplemented by the Vindolanda writing tablets (see page 14). Together, these demonstrate that, while cereals formed the staple part of the diet, soldiers also ate meat (cattle, sheep, pig and other animals), fish, shellfish, vegetables (lentils, cabbage, peas, beans, carrots and celery), nuts and fruit (apples, pears, plums, cherries, peaches, grapes, apricots, strawberries and raspberries).

Seasoning, such as coriander and opium poppy, might have been brought from afar – from the Continent in some cases. Wine and beer were both drunk, though where they were stored is not known.

*Below left: A bronze corn measure, found at Carvoran, which may have measured a soldier's weekly ration and could reflect an early official use of the seven-day week*

*Below right: A corn mill found at Chesters*

*Bottom: Housesteads granary reconstructed by Peter Connolly (see page 18)*







*Above: The bath house at  
Chesters, with the latrine in  
the foreground, the changing  
room beyond and the  
steam range to the left  
Right: The strong room  
in the headquarters building  
Below: A statue of the  
goddess Juno Dolichena  
standing on a heifer*

sequence; the two warm rooms to the left were entered first by the bather. At the far end of the hot room lies the furnace, where the boiler formerly sat (at one time, this may have served as a hot bath). To the right is the hot bath with a window above: note the plaster on the wall beside the bath. To the left of the vestibule lay the cold room containing a basin for cold water and a cold bath later replaced by the smaller cold bath to its left. Here the bather went to close the pores and cool down before returning to the fort. Outside the bath house are some wedge-shaped stones from the roof; they are made of a lightweight rock called tufa.

**Bridge** Beyond the fort, the Roman road along the Wall, the Military Way, led to the river and the bridge, of which only slight remains survive of the west abutment.







### THE CHESTERS AREA

Across the river from Chesters fort, and accessible from the east side of the modern bridge, lies the east abutment of the bridge over the River North Tyne. There are two main phases to the bridge. A pier embedded in this abutment probably formed part of the Hadrianic bridge. This is thought to have had eight stone piers supporting stone arches. The position of the robbed east abutment of the bridge and a section of the paved riverbed can be seen in the bottom of the later tower:

The visible abutment, built in the later second century, carried a road (now removed) over the river. This bridge probably contained four arches and stood 10m above the water. Many carved stones from the superstructure of this bridge



remain on the site. A water channel passing through the tower may have led to a mill further down stream.

The narrow wall moves uphill from the tower; it sits on a broad foundation which projects to the south. To the north is the Wall ditch.

Eastwards from Chesters Bridge, and a few metres from the modern road, lies Brunton turret (26b). This stands nearly 2.4m high. From its western side runs the Wall built to the original specification, 10 Roman feet (2.9m) thick. On the east side, a much narrower Wall, about 2m wide, rides up over the turret's wing wall. The differences probably resulted from changes in plan during the construction of the Wall. Nearly three miles to the west, another turret is visible at Black Carts (29a). This seems to have continued in occupation into the fourth century.

Half a mile to the east of the Brunton turret a short length of Wall can be seen at Planetrees. Here there is another point where the Wall was reduced from the original 10 Roman feet (2.9m), again to about 2m. It is clear that the soldiers laying the Wall's foundations had progressed quicker than the builders of the superstructure, as the foundations continue on past the point of reduction. Interestingly, the foundation builders also appear to have laid the drain, most of which is incorporated into the narrow wall.

**Above left:** Milecastle 26 at Planetrees from the air, looking south. The Wall ditch passes to this side of the milecastle, while the vallum is visible top right

**Above:** The bridge abutment at Chesters

**Below:** Brunton turret (26b)





**Top:** The Corbridge lanx, a silver plate dating to the fourth century, found in the Tyne in the eighteenth century. The original is in the British Museum

**Above:** A second- or third-century man's gold ring found at Corbridge and inscribed in Greek, 'the love-token of Polemios'

**Right:** The east granary looking north. The walls are supported by buttresses; narrow gaps in the walls allowed cool air to enter and circulate below the stone floors of the granaries

CORBRIDGE (CORIA) ROMAN TOWN

This site was occupied longer than any other along the line of Hadrian's Wall. A fort was established here in the 80s and continued in occupation into the 160s. Thereafter, the nature of the military presence changed. Two compounds were constructed in the southern part of what had been the fort (they were later amalgamated), while the granaries were rebuilt and continued in use. Around this military core grew a town which at one time extended to 12 hectares. The importance of Corbridge sprang from its position at the junction of the Stanegate road, which ran westwards to Carlisle, and Dere Street, leading southwards to London and northwards into Scotland. It was also, until the construction of the bridge over the River Tyne at Newcastle, the lowest crossing point on the river.

In the centre of the town lay an impressive fountain and a group of temples, which have produced some remarkable sculpture. Gods from the Orient as well as local deities were worshipped here, reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of this town on the very edge of the Roman world.

**Museum** The rich harvest of sculpture and inscriptions from the fort and town is displayed here together with an interpretation of the site.

**Granaries** Immediately in front of the museum are two substantial buildings – the granaries. Both had stone floors supported on low walls to help keep the food dry and fresh. The side vents in the walls were partially closed by mullions: one survives in the east wall of the east granary. A porch over each entrance was







*Far left:* The strong room in the headquarters building of the west compound

*Left:* Corbridge from the air, looking north

*Below left:* The Corbridge lion. This once adorned a fountain in a house south of the military compounds. It was probably originally designed for a tomb

*Below:* The only surviving mullion in a granary ventilator slot in Britain is in the east granary at Corbridge

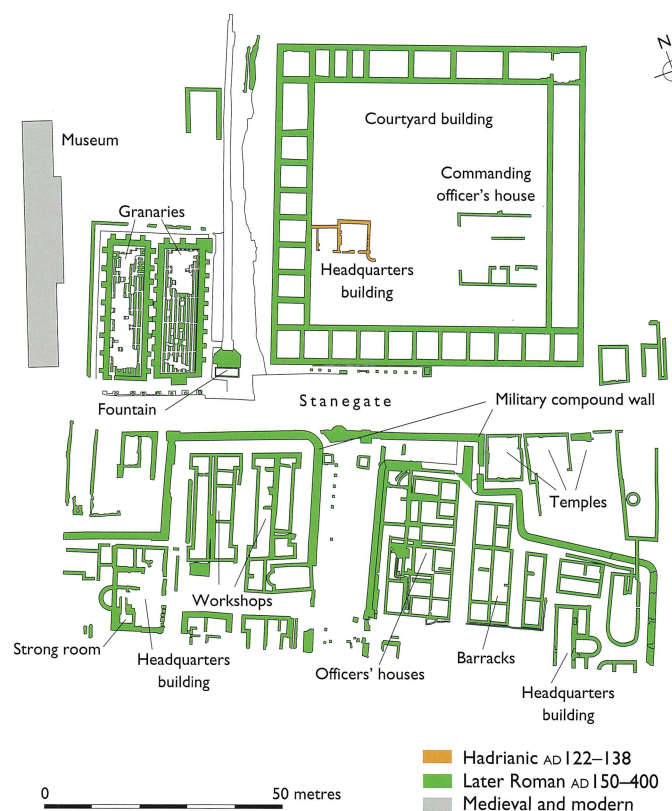
supported by the columns in the roadside. The right granary retains its loading bay.

**Stanegate** The broad road passing through the site was the Stanegate, which here also served as Dere Street. It was resurfaced many times during its long life, raising its height considerably.

**Fountain** An aqueduct from the north fed the fountain and its great water tank. Below the front of the water tank are the remains of an earlier military building.

**Courtyard Building** This vast building was abandoned unfinished, as is clear from examination of its remains today. It may have been intended to serve as the headquarters of a legionary fortress, a forum for a civil town, or a storehouse. Within the courtyard lie (left) the headquarters building and (right) commanding officer's house of an earlier fort.

**Compounds** On the other side of the Stanegate are the military compounds. The eastern compound contained two houses and other buildings, while the western had workshops and a small headquarters building in which there is a strong room. The wall surrounding the compounds twists and turns to avoid earlier buildings, some of which appear to have been temples.







**Above:** The temple of Atenociticus at Benwell

**Below:** The head of the god Atenociticus

**Above right:** The broad wall at Heddon. A medieval kiln built into the Wall is visible in the foreground

**Below right:** The vallum crossing at Benwell, looking north towards the site of the fort

## HEDDON-ON-THE-WALL TO NEWCASTLE

At Heddon-on-the-Wall can be seen the longest visible stretch of broad wall, 10 Roman feet (2.9m) thick. The stones were originally set in clay, but in modern times this has been replaced by mortar for stability. On the south face towards the east end of this stretch, the white mortar adhering to some stones is probably Roman and has been taken to indicate that the Wall was plastered or rendered. A circular structure in the thickness of the Wall is a kiln of post-Roman date.

In the western outskirts of Newcastle, the Wall is visible in various places. Denton Hall turret (7b) was built with the broad wall. It contains a platform for a ladder to the upper floor or floors. Unusually large stones were used here, and in the stretch visible across the A1 to the west. A few metres to the east of Denton Hall turret lie two short stretches of Wall, the more easterly in the grounds of the petrol station.

Benwell has two particular claims to fame: the vallum crossing and the temple of Atenociticus. The fort is buried beneath the 1930s housing, but to its south lies a causeway across the vallum, the only one visible on the Wall. When the vallum was constructed, the number of places where the Wall could be crossed was reduced from an original 80 or so to about 16. Now travellers could pass through the



Wall only under the watchful eye of the officers at the forts. Between the Wall and the vallum lay a small temple to a local god, Antenociticus.

## NEWCASTLE (PONS AELII) ROMAN FORT

A small fort was built here in the late second century, probably to guard the bridgehead. Fragments of the headquarters building, commanding officer's house and granary are visible under a railway arch beside the castle keep.





## WALLSEND (SEGEDUNUM) ROMAN FORT

Wallsend, as its name implies, lies at the very end of the Wall. In the 19th century, the fort was lost to housing, but, following excavations in the 1970s, the whole fort has been laid out, reconstructions erected and a new museum and visitor centre opened. The fort is owned by North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council and managed on its behalf by Tyne & Wear Museums.

The fort was built under Hadrian. A short length of Wall ran down to the river and, after being removed elsewhere, has been returned to the site and re-erected.

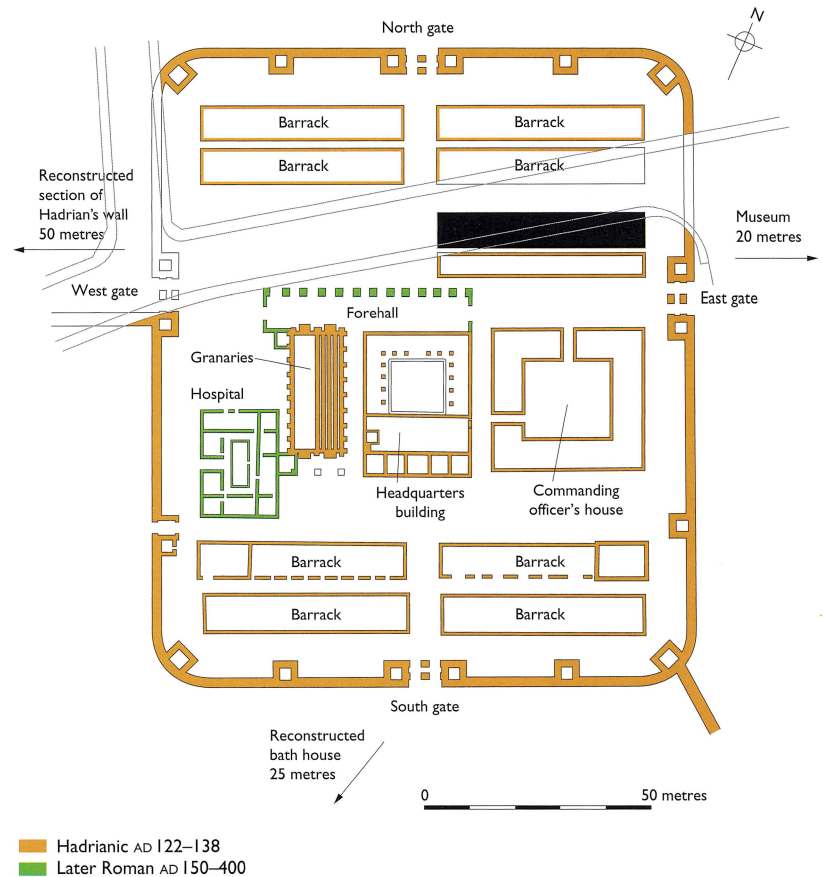
**Museum/Visitor Centre** The modern tower above the museum offers an aerial view of the fort with computer graphics tracing its history. The museum displays artefacts from the fort.

**Defences** Although the modern road crosses the fort, the whole circuit of defences is otherwise visible, though poorly preserved. The sites of all the fort's five gates can be seen.

**Headquarters Building** This follows the normal plan, with a courtyard to the north, assembly hall and five rooms at the back for the regimental clerks and, in the centre, the regimental standards; here there is a strong room. There is no well, but a water tank in the courtyard. An unusual feature is a forehall which was added over the street to the north of the building. This may have been used for training and perhaps also special ceremonies.

**Commanding Officer's House** This courtyard house has been laid out in plan form.

**Granary** A double granary sits on the other side of the headquarters building, with entrances to both north and south.



**Hospital** This small building lies beside the granary.

**Barracks** Wallsend contained ten barrack blocks, enough for the mixed infantry and cavalry unit, nominally 500-strong, which we know was stationed here at one time. The most interesting barracks lie to the south of the headquarters. These buildings housed both soldiers and their horses. The hearths of the barrack rooms have been restored with red mortar and the drainage pits in the stables in grey mortar and gravel.

**Bath House** Beside the fort is a full-scale reconstruction of Chesters bath house. This offers a totally different feeling of space from the ruins visible at Chesters, and an informed idea of what such buildings would have been like.

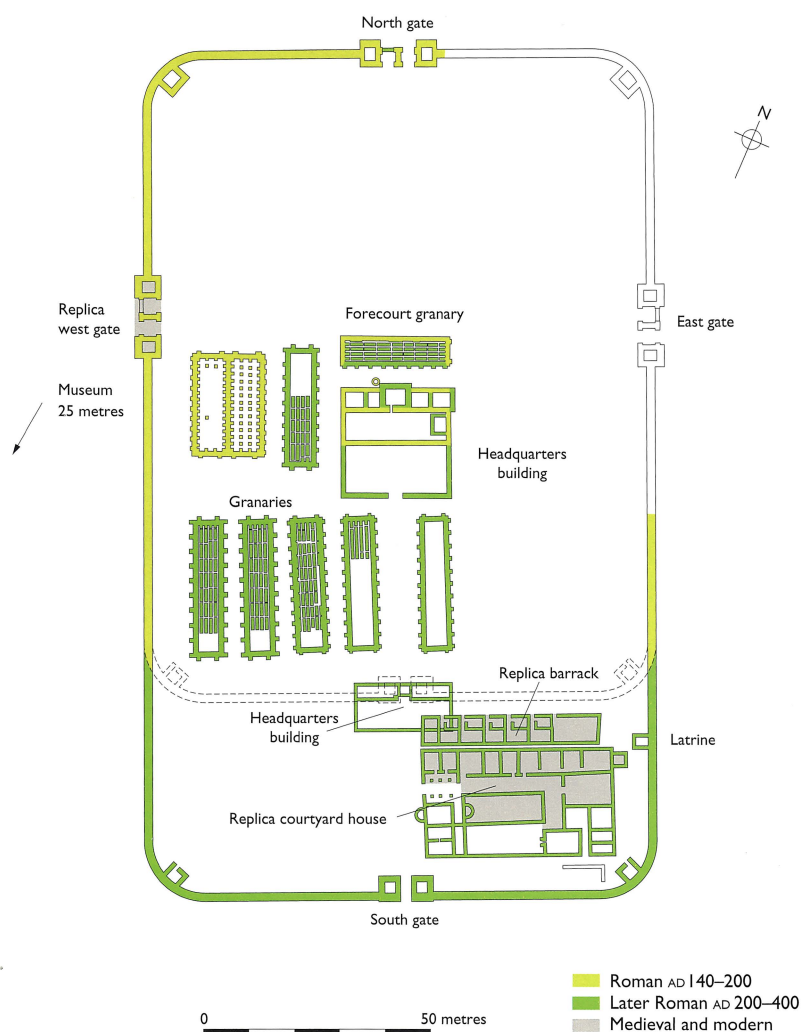
**Wall** A few metres west of the fort, a stretch of Wall has been excavated and placed on display. Beside it is a reconstructed section of Hadrian's Wall, complete with string course, wall walk and suggestions of exterior finish. On the berm (the space between the Wall and ditch) posts indicate the position of additional defensive obstacles. Evidence for these has now been found at several locations along the eastern 11 miles of the Wall.



**Left:** The fort at Wallsend looking east, with the commanding officer's house in the foreground

**Above:** A reconstructed double lavatory seat. Only the central top stone is Roman





### SOUTH SHIELDS (ARBEIA) ROMAN FORT

Overlooking the mouth of the River Tyne lay a fort at South Shields. The archaeological ruins were first laid out here in 1875 as the People's Roman Remains Park; they are now owned by South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council and managed on its behalf by Tyne and Wear Museums Service. The west gate of the fort was rebuilt in 1986–87 and the barrack block and part of the courtyard house in 2000–1.

The visible fort was probably built under the emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180), replacing an earlier fort elsewhere dating to the reign of Hadrian. Shortly after 200, the south wall of the fort was taken down and the fort extended, increasing its area from 1.7 to 2.1 hectares. Many of the buildings were replaced by 13 granaries. These changes, converting the fort into a supply

base, were no doubt connected with the campaigns of the emperor Septimius Severus and his intention to occupy the remainder of north Britain. A further six granaries were later constructed, bringing the total to 22. When his plans were abandoned, the site appears to have continued as a supply base for the Wall. Following a disastrous fire about 100 years later, the fort was rebuilt to a different plan. The former granaries were adapted as barracks; a new headquarters building was erected, and a large courtyard house occupied the south-east corner of the fort.

**Museum** The museum contains objects from the fort, and other material is displayed in the west gate.

**West Gate** This replica is faithful to all the known evidence and offers a valuable impression of the might and majesty of a Roman fort. A good view of the fort can be obtained from its roof. In front of the gate, the butt ends of the ditches have been excavated.

**Defences** Over half the circuit of defences can be seen. The north gate shows much evidence for modification. The west passage was blocked and the eastern arch propped up by a pile of stones, yet the entrance continued in use into the fourth century. The south gate survives poorly, but, beside it, the chamfer on the lower courses of the fort wall is visible. The fort's latrine occupies a position in the east wall behind the replica barracks.

**Headquarters Building** The final building dates to the years on either side of 300, when it faced south. One of the columns of the courtyard veranda has been re-erected. The rear rooms include a strong room constructed of large stones, with part of the windowsill surviving. The

*Right: The granaries. These were turned into barrack blocks in the fourth century*







**Left:** South Shields from the air, looking north. The partially restored courtyard house is in the foreground, with the reconstructed west gate to the left

**Above:** The tombstone of Regina, a Catuvellaunian woman, freed and married by Barathes of Palmyra

**Below left:** The replica west gate of the fort

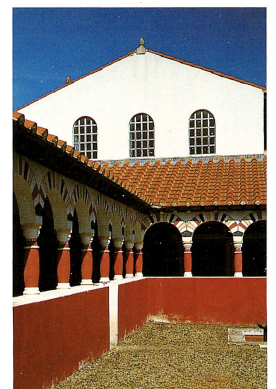
**Below right:** The replica courtyard house

offices to each side were heated by hypocausts. Behind is the well that lay in the courtyard of its second-century predecessor. This building faced north, and its rear rooms lay under the courtyard of the final building. The assembly hall lay in the same location in each period, though the tribunal was moved from one end to the other.

**Granaries** Parts of nine granaries are visible. The earliest, built of white magnesian limestone, was a double granary. Following its demolition, its site was occupied by kilns. The remaining granaries were converted into barracks: the partition walls of this period cross the dwarf walls of the granaries. Running under the end of four granaries was an earlier building.

**Replica Barrack** This is a replica of a third-century barrack. Inside, different possible internal arrangements are offered. As there was no gutter, the water runs off the roof and splashes mud on to the lower parts of the walls.

**Replica Courtyard House** This was the large house of the commanding officer of the fourth-century regiment based here: it gives the lie to the impression that the late Roman army was in decline. The splendid courtyard led to the dining room at the far end. The rooms have been decorated in the style appropriate for the time of their use.







# History of Hadrian's Wall

For 300 years, Hadrian's Wall separated the Romans from the barbarians in the North and protected the province from attack. There is little writing from the time concerning the role of the Wall and its forts or describing life on the frontier: much evidence is provided by archaeology. When it was finally abandoned by Rome at the start of the fifth century, the Wall fell into disuse.

## READING THE HISTORY

This section aims to answer the central questions about the nature of Hadrian's Wall, looking at its function and setting it within the context of the wider Roman empire. It also looks at life on the Wall and how it might have affected the local population. There are special features on Hadrian and early archaeologists.



## WHAT IS HADRIAN'S WALL?

Roman armies first invaded Britain under Julius Caesar in 55 BC, but permanent conquest only began in AD 43. In that year, the emperor Claudius launched an invasion of the island. Forty years later, the Romans defeated the Caledonians at the Battle of Mons Graupius and the conquest of the island seemed complete. Subsequent reverses on the Danube led to troop withdrawals from Britain and thus, shortly after 100, the northernmost army units in Britain lay along the Tyne–Solway isthmus. The forts here were linked by a road, now known as the Stanegate, providing ready communication between Corbridge and Carlisle, both situated on important north-south routes.

It was on this line in the 120s that the emperor Hadrian ordered the construction of the Wall that now bears his name. When eventually completed, Hadrian's Wall ran for 80 Roman miles

(73 miles) from Bowness on the Solway Firth to Wallsend on the River Tyne and was of stone throughout its length.

The prior existence of the Stanegate, as well as the geography of the area, governed the position of the Wall. It ran along the crags to the north of the Stanegate from Carvoran to Sewingshields. To the east of Sewingshields, it headed for the vantage-point of Limestone Corner and then turned to make for Newcastle. After crossing the North Tyne at Chesters, it followed the northern rim of the Tyne Valley. West of Carvoran, the Wall crossed the Irthing at Willowford and lay north of the river until, at Carlisle, the relationship was reversed and for its last 15 miles the Wall ran along the south shore of the Solway.

As first planned, Hadrian's Wall was to consist of a turf wall running from Bowness to the River



*Left: Hadrian's Wall at Walltown Crags, in the central sector*

*Facing page: Steel Rigg, in the evening, looking east*







Irthing, a distance of 30 miles, and a stone wall (normally bonded in clay) for the 45 miles from the Irthing to Wallsend. The wall was not an impenetrable barrier; for at mile intervals there were gates, each defended by a small guard post, known today as milecastles. Two observation towers (turrets) were placed between each pair of milecastles, and it is probable that there was a tower over the north gate of each milecastle, ensuring an unbroken pattern. The turrets were of stone, on stone and turf walls alike. On the stone wall, the milecastles were of stone; on the turf wall, they were of turf and timber. North of the Wall lay a ditch, except where the crags and the Solway coast made it superfluous. The material from the ditch was tipped out on the north side to form an outer mound.

The Wall crossed three main rivers: the Eden, the Irthing and the North Tyne. Bridges were provided to aid lateral communication. Another new bridge was probably built at the same time across the Tyne at Newcastle and named *Pons Aelii* (Aelius was Hadrian's family name).

Originally, the troops based in the milecastles and turrets were probably drawn from the army units stationed south of the Wall, for at first there was no intention to place complete units on the Wall line itself. These regiments would remain in their existing bases in northern Britain, and the Wall was built as a separate, and additional, element to this network of forts.

The system of milecastles and turrets was continued for at least another 26 miles down the Cumbrian coast to Maryport. No wall was built here and, although in some places the frontier line appears to have been defined by a pair of ditches, the sea was considered a sufficient barrier.

This first plan for Hadrian's Wall was never completed. While work was still in progress a number of modifications were made. First, it was decided to move some regiments up on to the Wall itself. The new forts built at this time lay astride the Wall wherever possible. Secondly, south of the Wall was now constructed the vallum, a great earthwork consisting of a ditch with a mound set back on each side, stretching along the whole length of the frontier from the Tyne to the Solway. This probably served as the Roman equivalent of barbed wire, defining

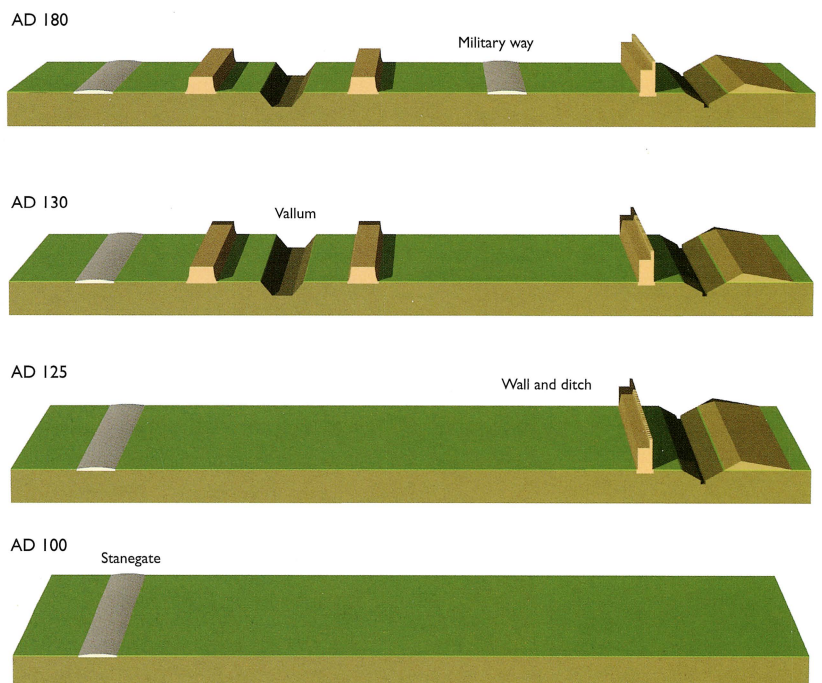


**Left:** The replica turret at Vindolanda

**Below:** The development of Hadrian's Wall through the second century, from (bottom) the original Stanegate road, through the first plan for the Wall, the addition of the vallum, and, finally, the construction of the Military Way

**Facing page:** Hadrian's Wall at Sycamore Gap, near Steel Rigg, Northumberland (see page 15)

the rear of the military zone. Crossings through the vallum were provided, but only at forts; no provision was made for crossing at milecastles. In order to construct both forts and vallum, troops were taken off building the Wall. When they returned to the Wall, its width was reduced from the original 10 Roman feet to 8 feet or less, presumably to speed up progress. This was not the last alteration to be made to Hadrian's Wall. One or two more forts were added, including Carrawburgh, and a start was made on rebuilding the turf wall in stone, to be completed later in the century. A road – the Military Way – was later constructed south of the Wall, linking the forts.





## HISTORY: WHAT IS HADRIAN'S WALL?

**Right:** Hadrian's Wall at Cawfields, from the air looking east. Cawfields milecastle (42) lies beside the quarry and the Wall runs on along the crags. The vallum follows the easier ground to the right





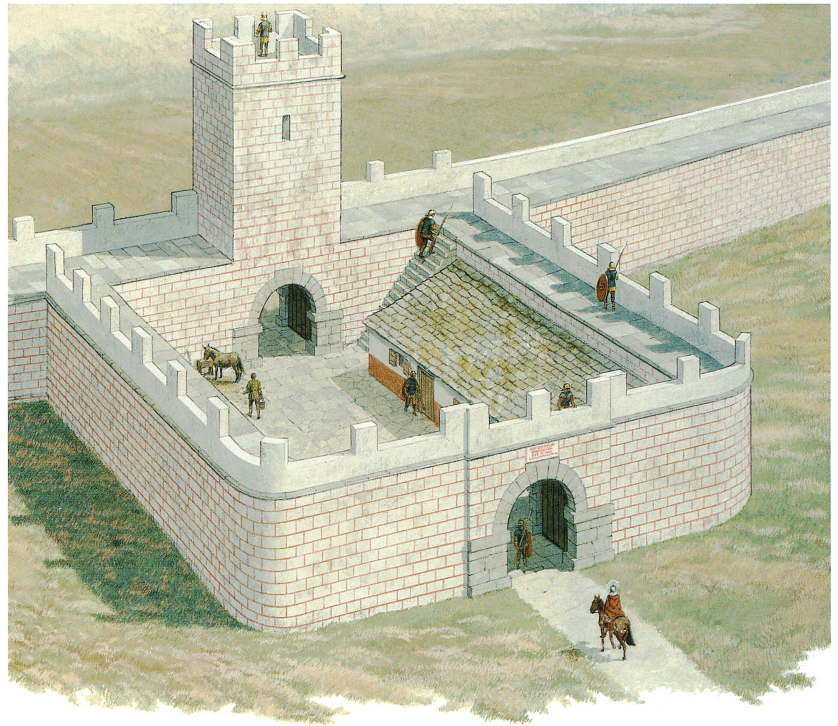
## WHAT WAS THE WALL FOR?

There were two separate elements to Hadrian's Wall. One was the barrier itself, together with the milecastles and turrets. The other was represented by the forts. The function of the barrier, in the words of Hadrian's biographer, writing 200 years later, was to separate the Romans and the barbarians.

We know from other frontiers that barbarians – as the Romans called the people beyond their boundaries – could only enter the empire unarmed, proceeding under military escort to specified markets, where fees were payable. One function of the Wall was to ensure that these regulations were kept. Another role, no doubt, was to put a stop to the casual disturbances rife on frontiers, such as small-scale raiding.

Hadrian's Wall did not operate like a medieval town wall, which protected a community within a defended circuit; it was more like the Berlin Wall. It ran for 73 miles across open country serving as a demarcation line. There is no evidence that there was a patrol walk along the top of the Wall; some Roman frontiers were merely fences and so could not be controlled in this way. In any case, Roman soldiers, unlike their medieval successors, were not best equipped to fight defensively from the tops of walls. Indeed there were not enough soldiers available to man the Wall in sufficient numbers to defend it adequately from an enemy which might attack in strength at any one point.

The addition of forts to the Wall blurred the separate functions of frontier control and military defence. The purpose of the regiments stationed in these forts was to protect the province from attack: moving the forts into the Wall itself aided military manoeuvrability in the frontier zone. The distinction between these two roles is emphasized



by the first plan for the Wall. In that scheme no regiments were stationed on the barrier itself.

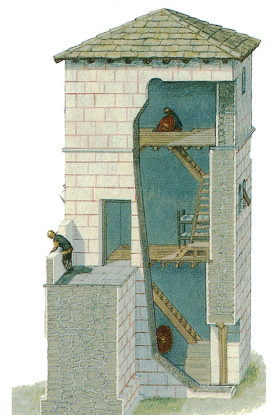
We know little of how the command structure operated on Hadrian's Wall, but we assume that each regiment would supervise its own locality. In the event of an attack on the province, several could combine to form a force capable of countering an attack in the field, where the Romans were pre-eminent. In such circumstances, mobility was important and a barrier of little help.

Hadrian's Wall and the army of the North were but two elements in the protection of the province. In later years, the existence of Roman army scouts patrolling north of the Wall is recorded, and it seems possible that some surveillance was carried out from the time of the Wall's construction. Rome often concluded treaties with the tribes beyond her boundaries. Towards the end of the second century, the long arm of Roman diplomacy stretched over 100 miles beyond the Wall to the Caledonians, with whom the Romans concluded a treaty, and this may not have been the first such alliance. These relationships were sometimes strengthened through the payment of subsidies. Rome was well versed in the diplomatic, as well as the martial, arts.

**Above:** Reconstruction drawing by Peter Connolly of milecastle 37 (see page 15)

**Below:** Reconstruction drawing by Peter Connolly of a turret

**Below left:** This hoard of nearly 2,000 silver denarii was buried at Falkirk near to the abandoned Antonine Wall in or soon after 235. The hoard may have been formed from subsidies paid by the Romans to local chiefs





### FRONTIERS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In 1987, Hadrian's Wall was declared a World Heritage Site. In 2005, it became part of a new multi-national World Heritage Site called Frontiers of the Roman Empire when the German frontier was also designated a World Heritage Site. Other countries have announced their intention to nominate their sections of the frontier over the next few years. These are Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and the UK, which intends to nominate the Antonine Wall in Scotland.

The frontiers are an important memorial to one of the greatest states that the world has known, for, in effect, they defined that state. Today, the Roman frontiers contain some of the most iconic monuments of the Roman empire: the earthworks of Ardoch in Scotland; Housesteads; the reconstructed fort at the Saalburg in

Germany; Eining on the River Danube; the fourth-century towers of forts in Austria; Porolissum in the Carpathian mountains of Romania; and Capidava on the lower Danube.

These various structures help us to understand the Roman response to attack and defence as well as frontier control. Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall in Scotland and the Germany frontier, 500km long, are all 'artificial' frontiers. Elsewhere, rivers or mountains were generally used to define the edge of empire and, in north Africa and the Middle East, the desert. Everywhere, the Romans found practical solutions to their problems and in that way, too, the frontiers are a reminder of the resourceful and flexible mind of the Romans which helped their empire to survive so long.

Roman frontiers took decades to develop.

*Below: The Roman empire in the second century, showing both Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall in Britain*







Since the intention of the Romans into the first century AD was to conquer the rest of the world, they had no need for frontiers. But, as this expansion slowed, the boundary of the empire came to be strengthened by the construction of forts and towers along its line. It was Hadrian's achievement to take the next step and create artificial frontiers where natural features were insufficient to define the edge of the empire. In Germany, he ordered the construction of a substantial fence, a palisade of timbers 30cm in diameter. In Britain, he built a wall. It is possible that only the lack of good timber in Britain prevented its construction in the same material as its German counterpart. In north Africa, parts of a linear barrier known as the *Fossatum Africae* also date to the time of Hadrian. In this case, the wall was of mud-brick with a ditch beyond. The wall was interrupted by gates with a single tower between each gate and at wider intervals lay forts. Short stretches of linear barrier, of stone or earth, are also known in the Carpathian Mountains which formed the northern boundary of the province of Dacia in

modern Romania. These also were supplemented by towers and forts.

Hadrian set the pattern for many years to come. Although his wall in Britain was abandoned in the mid-second century, it was replaced by a similar linear barrier across the Forth–Tyne isthmus, the Antonine Wall. This frontier had a short life

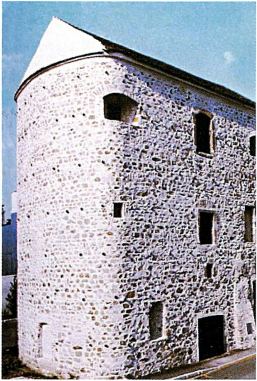
**Above:** The remains of the turf rampart of the Antonine Wall at Rough Castle, Falkirk, looking east, with the ditch to the left

**Left:** The tombstone of a soldier found at Croy Hill, north Lanarkshire, on the Antonine Wall. The man in the centre is presumably the father of the younger men to each side





## HISTORY: FRONTIERS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE



and, following its abandonment, Hadrian's Wall was re-commissioned and thereafter, over many decades, was gradually modified to suit changed circumstances. Exactly the same development can be seen on the other frontiers of the empire.

In one important respect, Hadrian's Wall did not keep up with changing fashions. Roman forts in the fourth century were very different from their predecessors. They were more defensive with thicker and taller walls, often resembling a medieval castle. Such forts survive in Britain along the south coast. Here they formed part of the defensive arrangements known as the Saxon Shore. Similar forts are known on the Continent. Perhaps the enemy that the army of Hadrian's Wall had to face was not as powerful as that which menaced other frontiers.

Ultimately, Roman frontiers were unsuccessful. They were useful for frontier control, but the empire still needed to be defended by its army. When that was no longer possible, the frontier defences ceased to have any value.



**Top left:** The fourth-century tower of the Roman fort at Tulln, Austria

**Top right:** The gate of the fort at Traismauer in Austria still stands to wall-head height, though wrapped in modern plaster and capped by a modern roof

**Right:** The imposing walls of the Saxon Shore fort at Pevensey Castle, East Sussex



# Hadrian

Hadrian wished to consolidate rather than extend the limits of his empire

Hadrian was born in Rome in 76, the son of a senator from Italica in Spain. He would have led the normal life of a nobleman in the emperor's service but for the fact that his father's cousin, Trajan, was chosen to succeed the emperor Nerva in 98. Trajan was childless and Hadrian became the heir presumptive, becoming emperor in 117.

Hadrian was a great traveller, visiting many parts of his empire. In 121 he was in Germany, and the following year in Britain, where, according to his biographer, 'he put many things to rights, and was the first to build a wall, 80 miles long, to separate the Romans from the barbarians'. His visit to the island was commemorated in a poem by Florus: 'I would not like to be Caesar, to walk through Britain.'

Hadrian wished to consolidate, rather than to extend, the limits of his empire. He was content to see it prosper within the boundaries he had inherited; indeed, he even gave up some of the conquests of his relation and predecessor Trajan.

Hadrian appreciated two important facts relevant to the safety of his people: the army must be continually trained so that it was ready to defend the empire at any time, and the construction of artificial frontiers would help prevent disruption



*Right: Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, outside Rome*

*Below: Brass sestertius of Hadrian showing on the reverse the emperor on horseback addressing the army of Britain – 'EXERC[ITUS] BRITANNICUS'*

of life in the frontier areas by unruly elements beyond. Thus Hadrian spent considerable time inspecting the army, supervising its training and improving morale.

Hadrian died at Baia near Naples in 138 and the following year his ashes were placed in the great mausoleum he had built for himself in Rome. This was turned into a fortress in the Middle Ages, and is now known as Castel Sant'Angelo.





### WHO BUILT HADRIAN'S WALL?

The construction of Hadrian's Wall was carried out almost entirely by soldiers from the three legions of the province: the Second Legion based at Caerleon near Newport in south Wales, the Sixth from York and the Twentieth stationed at Chester. It is a common fallacy to envisage the Wall being built by slave labour. This was not a practice followed by the Roman army. Within their ranks, the legions contained architect-engineers, surveyors, masons, carpenters and glaziers – in short, all the skills required for even the most massive building task. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that local civilians were drafted in to aid in transporting materials.

The building of Hadrian's Wall was to occupy the legionaries for at least six years, and modifications were still being carried out at the time of Hadrian's death in 138. As so often happens, the scale of the building project grew and thus yet more soldiers were drafted in to help. These included men from auxiliary units, the other main branch of the provincial army, and also from the British fleet.

The construction of Hadrian's Wall would not

have been a costly venture for the imperial treasury. The builders were soldiers already employed by the state, while the materials were there for the taking, if not actually imperial property. If built by civilian contractors, the cost of the Wall would have been astronomical, probably well over £100 million at today's prices.

**Below:** Roman tools: a chisel, mason's hammer, plumb bob and slater's hammer

**Right:** This diploma (certificate of privileges) was issued on 17 July 122 to Gemellus, son of Breucus, who had just retired from the First Pannonian Cavalry Regiment. He had been discharged by the previous governor, Pompeius Falco, but the diploma was not issued until A. Platorius Nepos assumed office. This dates the arrival of Nepos very closely



**Right:** This scene on Trajan's Column in Rome shows legionaries building a fort rampart of turf, and digging the surrounding ditch. They work in armour, with their helmets, spears and shields close at hand







### WHO MANNED HADRIAN'S WALL?

The most persistent myth about Hadrian's Wall is that it was guarded by soldiers from Rome or Italy. In fact, the troops based in the forts and milecastles of the Wall were mostly recruited from the north-western provinces of the Roman Empire. The units might have had exotic names, such as *ala I Pannoniorum* which had originally been raised in Pannonia (modern Hungary) or *cohors I Thracum* from Thrace (modern Bulgaria), but, once posted to Britain, the regiments started recruiting locally. Thus, by the time of Hadrian, many soldiers stationed on the Wall could have been British. Nevertheless, the army of Britain continued to receive some recruits from the Continent and throughout the history of the province there was always a number of Gauls and Germans, for example, serving in the island.

A common language – Latin – and loyalty to the emperor helped to enforce coherence.

Although mainly built by legionaries, the Wall was manned by auxiliaries. These were the second line troops of the Roman army and their name literally meant 'helpers'. Each fort on the Wall appears to have been built to hold a single auxiliary unit. There were six different sizes and types of auxiliary regiments and all are attested on the Wall. The most common type of unit was the 500-strong mixed infantry and cavalry regiment. This appears to have been the multi-purpose unit of the Roman army. The 500-strong infantry regiment was also well represented.

Cavalry regiments were comparatively rare on Hadrian's Wall. The only British example of the most prestigious type of auxiliary unit, the 1,000-strong cavalry regiment, was based on the Wall, at

*Above: Tombstone of an archer, found at Housesteads*

*Above left: Drawing by Peter Connolly showing the centurions presenting their daily report to the prefect*





Stanwix near Carlisle. Its commanding officer was the highest ranking officer on the Wall line, but that does not imply that he had any special authority over the other commanding officers on the frontier. There is no evidence for any local command hierarchy and it is not known what part the commander of the legion at York played in the command structure. It seems highly probable, nevertheless, that some system existed for co-ordination and combination of units.

The commanding officers of auxiliary units were drawn from the gentry and aristocracy of the empire. They came to their first appointments with little, if any, military experience, and many did not receive further appointments. These men moved freely about the empire commanding



regiments and a few rose to the very pinnacle of the imperial civil service.

Infantry units were divided into *centuriae* (centuries), each probably 80 strong (the old link to 100 had long been lost), while the cavalry was subdivided into troops, each probably containing 32 men. The century was commanded by a centurion, the cavalry troop by a decurion. These officers had generally risen from the ranks and they formed a professional officer core to the army. They also provided continuity since the commanding officers were career postings, usually held for about three years. Each centurion and decurion would normally have had at least 15 years' service in the ranks. A few, however, were appointed to their posts directly from civilian life. Centurions and decurions might have continued in post for decades: the longest known tenure of office by a legionary centurion is 61 years.

**Top left:** Many units had a symbol. The boar was the emblem of the Twentieth Legion

**Top right:** Tombstone of Anicius Ingenuus, a medical officer, buried at Housesteads

**Right:** The shield boss of Junius Dubitatus, a legionary of the Eighth Legion Augusta. It was found near the mouth of the Tyne in 1867

**Above:** Germanic auxiliary soldier in the first battle by Trajan against the Dacians at Tapae in 101 from Trajan's Column





## MILITARY LIFE ON THE WALL

There is no contemporary evidence to illustrate daily life on Hadrian's Wall. We do not know how long particular duties lasted or what sort of distances were covered by soldiers on patrol. Nevertheless, on the basis of evidence from other parts of the Roman empire, we can say something about life on the Wall.

The soldier's day started with breakfast. This may have been something like our porridge. The main meal of the day was in the evening. The Roman soldier had a varied diet, eating bread, soup, meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, and drinking beer and cheap wine.

Part of the day might have been given over to training. Roman military manuals stressed that all soldiers should receive regular weapons drill and physical training, and should participate in military exercises. Special cavalry exercises included mock battles: those performed by the Roman army in Africa in 128 were observed by the emperor Hadrian.

Many soldiers would be occupied for at least part of the day with fatigues. These included guard duty, cleaning the centurion's uniform and

looking after the bath house. All such tasks were recorded both on duty rosters and on soldiers' files. In the Roman army, even horses had their own records, while receipts had to be completed in quadruplicate. Some soldiers had special jobs in the building serving as maintenance staff or as clerks in the regimental office; others were adjutants, standard bearers, or buglers who sounded the watch and indicated orders on the march.

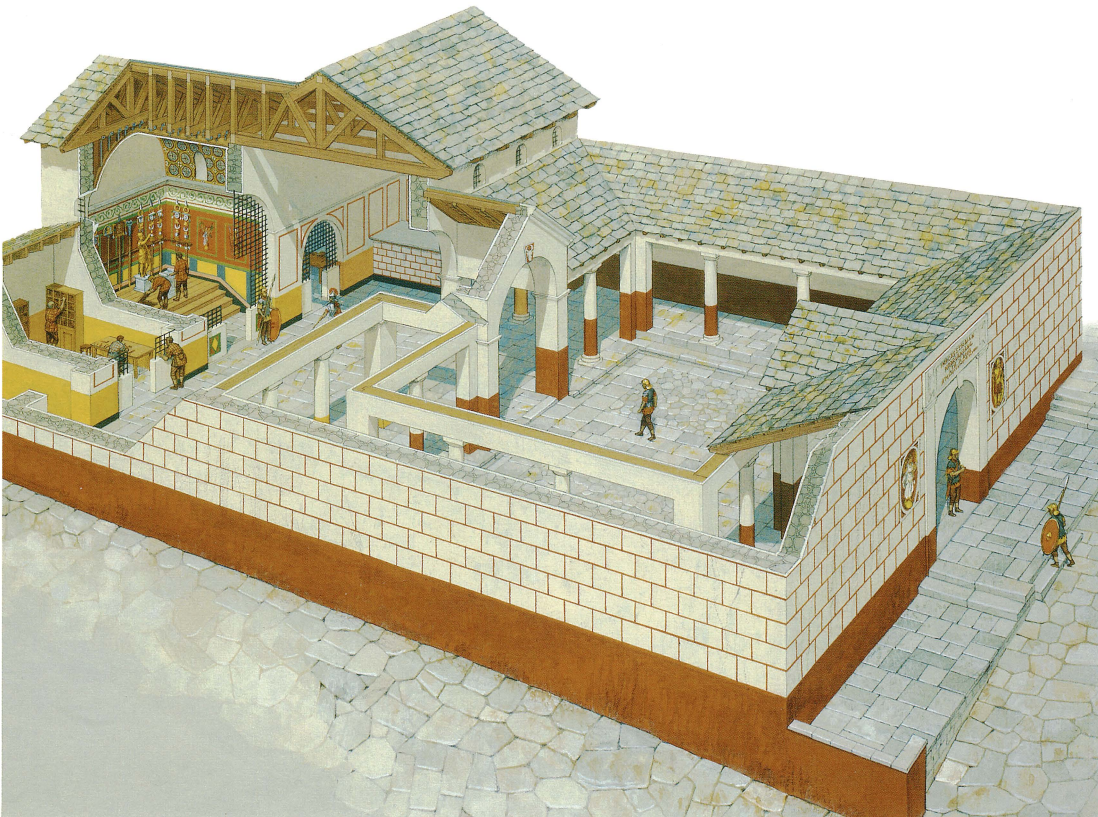
There would always have been some soldiers on duty – or ill – at the fort, but many would have been serving elsewhere. Supplies in transit needed protecting, while some regiments sent men to serve on the governor's staff in London. The main activity, however, was probably patrolling, either along the Wall or in the lands to the north. Surveillance would have been maintained over the tribes beyond the frontier; many probably being in treaty relationship with Rome. We know from other frontiers that treaties might strictly define the time and place of a tribe's assembly and that it should be supervised by a Roman officer. Such activities might have taken soldiers far beyond the Wall.



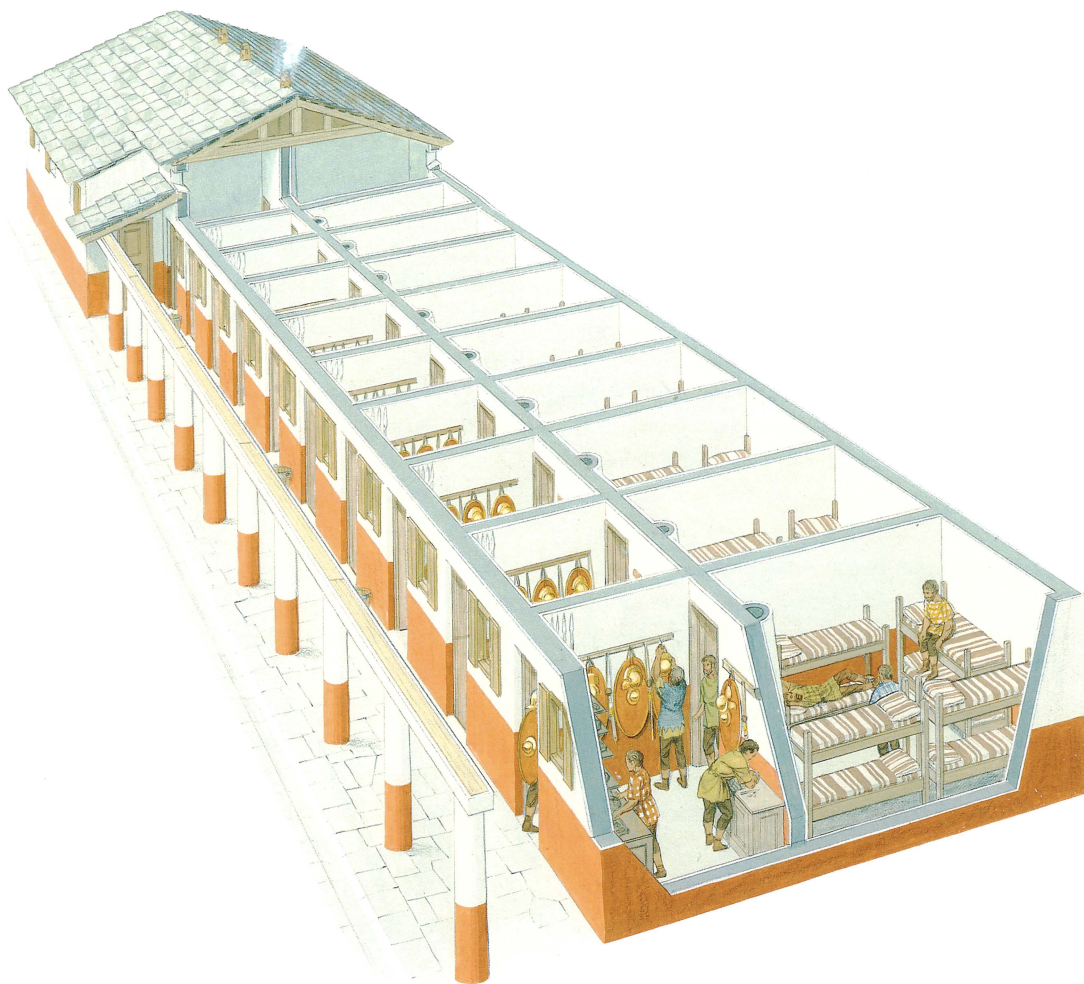
*Above: The tombstone of Marcus Aurelius Victor, who died aged 50*

*Below: Pottery bowls and a jar, made in Britain and found at Corbridge*

*Left: Reconstruction by Peter Connolly of the headquarters building at Housesteads (see page 17). To the right is the courtyard, with a colonnade. An arch leads to the assembly hall, and beyond is the shrine of the unit, where the standards were kept*







**Top:** Reconstruction drawing by Peter Connolly of a barrack block. The soldiers appear to have slept in the back room and kept their armour and belongings in the front room

**Above:** Detail of a relief figure of a dog from the Hunt Cup found at Corbridge

**Right:** Figure of Mars, the god of war, on a sword found at South Shields

### THE SOLDIER'S PERSONAL LIFE

Every army has its followers. They followed Caesar around Gaul, and others no doubt arrived in Britain in the wake of Claudius's army in AD 43. As the army moved north, it was presumably accompanied by various civilians who set up house outside the new forts.

One important group in the civil settlement would have been the soldiers' families. During the second century, a Roman soldier was not allowed to marry, but there was nothing to stop him from contracting a union with a woman according to local law, and such 'marriages' were subsequently recognised in Roman law when the soldier retired, and his children were legitimised. Inscriptions record soldiers' wives, children, fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers. The tribune commanding the regiment at Chesters and his wife buried their 'most sweet' daughter Fabia Honorata beside the North Tyne, while at Carrawburgh a decurion erected a tombstone to





his wife, Aelia Comindus, who died aged 32. Pusinna was presumably the wife of Dagvalda, a soldier in a Pannonian cohort from modern Austria or Hungary, whom she buried at Cawfields milecastle. The tombstone erected by Aurelius Marcus at Carvoran to his wife Aurelia Aia, daughter of Titus, from Salonae in Dalmatia, stated that she was 'a very pure wife who lived 33 years without any blemish'.

The Roman soldier was relatively well paid, and he attracted people who wanted to part him from his money. These included merchants selling food and wine, clothing, pottery and knick-knacks.

There was no such thing as the weekend or 48-hour pass in the Roman army. Soldiers had to apply to their centurions for leave and frequently bribed them to obtain it. We do not know how often leave might have been obtained. Similarly, we know nothing about the number of hours a soldier might have been expected to work each day. We do know that there were a number of religious festivals throughout the year – perhaps 50 in total – and these may have been treated as holidays.

It may be suspected that in general soldiers would try to get away with doing as little work as possible – and obtain as much as possible from civilians without payment. This natural state of affairs was exacerbated by the perennial problem of the peace-time army; as it was not fighting, it had little to do. When Corbulo took over the army of Syria, he found (according to Tacitus), that it contained soldiers who had never been on guard duty and did not possess armour. Good emperors and generals, such as Hadrian, tried to compensate for this inactivity by training and manoeuvres. Nevertheless, it would not be surprising if the civilian settlement was as much a home to the soldier as the fort itself.

In the past, archaeologists have seen a clear



distinction between the fort occupied by soldiers and the settlement outside its gates inhabited by civilians. Recent research, however, has demonstrated that this division is not so clear cut, with evidence now found for women in forts and soldiers living outside.

**Above:** A reconstruction of the interior of a barrack room at South Shields

**Left:** Tombstone of Victor the Moor, freedman of Numerianus, cavalryman in the First Cavalry Regiment of Asturians, found at South Shields. Many soldiers appear to have kept slaves

**Below left:** An enamelled bronze pan found in Staffordshire. It bears the names of four forts in the western sector of the Wall and may have been made as a souvenir









## HOW DID THE WALL AFFECT LOCAL PEOPLE?

Contemporary written sources for Hadrian's Wall are scarce, and they tell us nothing about the local people whose lives would have been drastically affected by this massive building project. Archaeology, however, seems to provide positive evidence for at least one result of the construction of the Wall. At Milking Gap, one mile west of Housesteads, between the Wall and the vallum, a farmhouse was abandoned, probably because it now lay within the military zone: here the hand of the army may be suspected.

The Wall would have had an effect on farming rather similar to that of a motorway: slicing through farmland, destroying old access routes and cutting off fields from the farmsteads. Possibly the Knag Burn gate at Housesteads was broken through the Wall to provide ease of movement for farmers and their beasts.

The building of Hadrian's Wall increased the number of troops based in this part of Britain. The soldiers required feeding, and the army preferred to obtain its supplies locally. Thus it might be expected that the arrival of the Roman army in northern Britain in the late first century, and then its strengthening under Hadrian, would lead to changes in local farming patterns and particularly increased cereal production. There is some archaeological evidence to support this assumption, but unfortunately there has not yet been enough work in this field of research to quantify any change.



One major change brought about by the presence of so many Roman soldiers on the Wall was the growth of the settlements outside forts. As well as the soldiers' families and merchants, these may also have attracted farmers from the northern countryside; the army probably attracted local boys, too, as recruits. No evidence for either survives, though a Brigantian from modern Yorkshire is known to have served on the Antonine Wall. Certainly, Roman objects found in rural settlements demonstrate some contact between soldier and civilian, but the nature of this is unclear.

Rome would have imposed peace (and taxation) on the north. This peace would have extended well beyond the Wall into the areas under Roman surveillance. The presence of the army was not wholly advantageous to the local people. Numerous contemporary documents from other parts of the empire record extortion and thieving by Roman soldiers. Other documents show that while the army might have brought peace it could not wholly eradicate pillaging. Dealing with such activities fell to the army in the absence of a police force in the Roman empire and would have been another duty drawing soldiers away from the Wall.

**Left:** The Romano-British settlement at Milking Gap, from the air. The ruins of five round stone houses lie within and beside the farmyard wall

**Above:** A reconstruction drawing by Judith Dobie showing how such a settlement might have looked

**Facing page:** Hadrian's Wall and milecastle 39, looking east beyond Crag Lough



## THE LATER ROMAN HISTORY OF THE WALL

Remarkably, within months of Hadrian's death in July 138, his successor, Antoninus Pius, had decided to abandon the newly built Wall and move the frontier northwards by nearly 100 miles, building a new wall across the Forth–Clyde isthmus. This new wall, the Antonine Wall, was built of turf throughout its length of 40 Roman miles (37 modern miles). After an occupation of about 20 years, it, too, was abandoned, this time in favour of a return to Hadrian's Wall.

When Hadrian's Wall was reoccupied in the 160s, the Wall and its buildings were repaired and the ditches cleaned out. One new feature was added – a road, the Military Way. Previously the Stanegate, running a mile or so south of the Wall along the river valleys, had been the main line of communication across the isthmus. The new road was placed between the Wall and the vallum, sometimes utilising the north mound of the vallum.

Twenty years later, there began a troublesome time for the Wall. There was a major invasion of the province by the northern tribes; victory took four years to achieve. In 197, the new governor found both the principal barbarian tribes in the north, the Caledones and the Maeatae, eager for war. Without the resources to mount an offensive himself, he had to purchase peace by the payment of a considerable sum of money. Even so, trouble rumbled on in the north for the next ten years.

In 208, the emperor Septimius Severus came to Britain with his two sons, intent on solving the problem of the British frontier for good. His aim was to complete the conquest of the island. He campaigned against the Caledones and Maeatae and forced them to submit, but at the time of his death at York in February 211 both tribes were in revolt. His sons, eager to return to Rome and consolidate their power, reversed his policy, making treaties with the enemy, evacuating their territory, and returning to Rome.

Throughout the third century, little is heard of north Britain. So far as we can tell, the frontier was at peace. But, at the very end of the century, in 297, we first hear of the new enemy that was to menace the northern frontier – the Picts. There were several campaigns against them during the fourth century, some led by the



emperor himself. Trouble in the 360s peaked in a conspiracy of all the barbarian tribes in 367. Order was restored and the defences repaired by Count Theodosius.

Hadrian's Wall slid into obscurity; it did not end in catastrophe. In 407, the British army chose its own emperor, Constantine III, but, aiming higher, he also departed for the Continent to try to win the imperial throne. He probably took his field army and other troops with him. Britain became cut off from the rest of the empire and rule from Rome was never restored.

No mass evacuation of Roman troops and officials took place. British cities – the basis of local government in the island – were left to manage their own affairs. It is doubtful if the army on the Wall was withdrawn in 407. It was no longer a mobile force, merely a static frontier garrison. When the pay chests failed to arrive, the soldiers would have turned to other activities such as farming and pillaging, or left to seek opportunities elsewhere. The Wall was left to decay. It had, however, achieved its purpose. It had protected Roman Britain for nearly 300 years and no Picts ever settled in the shadow of Hadrian's Wall.

**Top:** Bronze 'as' of Antoninus Pius, builder of the Antonine Wall. The figure of Britannia has a shield by her side and a Roman flag is nearby, perhaps symbolising the protection granted by the Roman army

**Centre:** Gold aureus of Septimius Severus, who campaigned north of Hadrian's Wall from 208 until his death in York in 211

**Bottom:** Gold medallion of Constantine I Chlorus, who recovered Britain from the usurper Allectus and later campaigned against the Picts. He is shown on the reverse raising Britannia from her knees

**Facing page:** The Picts have left many records on their enigmatic symbol stones. This stone, from Aberlemno, Angus, and probably dating to the eighth century, shows a group of Picts hunting

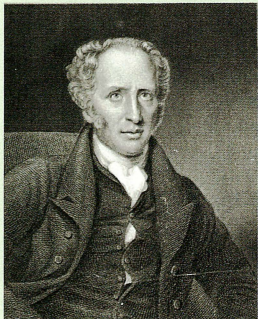






# Early Archaeologists and Historians of the Wall

It was not until 1840 that John Hodgson concluded that the Wall had been built by the emperor Hadrian



**Above:** The Rev John Hodgson (1779–1845) was the first to suggest that Hadrian's Wall, its forts and the vallum, were all built under Hadrian

**Right:** John Collingwood Bruce (1805–92) with the Housesteads Victory at Lanercost Priory. Bruce led the first 'pilgrimage' along Hadrian's Wall in 1849 and wrote the first guidebooks to the frontier

**Right:** John Clayton of Chesters (1792–1890), who did so much to preserve the Wall and reveal its secrets in the 19th century

Visitors to Hadrian's Wall have been recording their impressions since the 16th century. One of the more remarkable was William Hutton who, at the age of 78 in 1801, walked from Birmingham to Carlisle, and from there to Bowness, to Wallsend, back to Carlisle and then home – a journey of 601 miles, as he proudly recorded.

The modern study of Hadrian's Wall can be said to have started in the middle of the 19th century. In 1840, John Hodgson, curate of Jarrow, re-examined all the available evidence for the history of Hadrian's Wall and concluded that it had been built on the orders of Hadrian, rather than Severus, who had been the favoured candidate for the last 250 years. In 1849, John Collingwood Bruce, a schoolmaster and minister in Newcastle, led the first tour or pilgrimage along the Wall and two years later published his first edition of *The Roman Wall*. His work helped to raise public interest in Hadrian's Wall. Finally, between 1852 and 1854 Henry MacLaughlan surveyed the whole frontier, producing a map that was not superseded until the publication of the first Ordnance Survey map of Hadrian's Wall in 1964.

Another of the great leaders of Wall studies at



this time was John Clayton of Chesters. He inherited the Chesters estate in 1843 and steadily expanded his holding along the Wall so that by his death in 1890 he owned five forts. He had his workman uncover and rebuild many miles of the frontier and excavate several buildings, including Coventina's Well and the bath house at Carrawburgh, Black Carts turret (29a), the milecastles at Housesteads (37) and Cawfields (42), Chesters bridge and parts of Chesters fort. The museum at Chesters, though not built until after his death, is essentially his collection of relics.

Modern scientific excavation can be said to have started in the 1890s with the investigation of Mucklebank Turret (44b), the examination of Housesteads fort and a campaign of work led by Professor Haverfield, aimed at elucidating the history and relationship of the various linear elements to each other. Some problems took many years to solve, and it was not until the 1930s that the nature of the turf wall was understood. Excavation continues to this day, examining and laying bare the structures that form Hadrian's Wall.



## AFTER THE ROMANS LEFT

We know very little of life on Hadrian's Wall during the centuries following its abandonment by Rome. The English (Anglo-Saxons) began to take over in southern and eastern England in the fifth and sixth centuries, and, in the north, in the late sixth and seventh centuries. North of the Wall, it was in the fifth century that, according to tradition, the Scots from Ireland began to settle on the west coast of the country that was later named after them – Scotland.

A few Anglo-Saxon objects have been found towards the east end of Hadrian's Wall, but in the main the newcomers largely passed it by. More evidence about the later history of the forts is coming to light. The tombstone of Brigomaglos, dating to about 500, has long been known at Vindolanda. Excavations at Birdoswald have indicated that some buildings continued in occupation beyond 400, when the fort may have become the base of a chieftain.

The Wall is also recorded in the literature of the time. Gildas, writing in about 540, knew of both Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall, but placed their construction 250 years too late. He thought they had been built against the Picts and Scots, an erroneous view of the function of Hadrian's Wall that has persisted to the present day. The Venerable Bede, in his *History of the English Church and People*, completed in 731, followed Gildas on the date and function of Hadrian's Wall, but added the information that it was eight feet wide and 12 feet high. These dimensions may well have resulted from his own observations, as his monastery lay close to the eastern end of the Wall.

Through the centuries that followed, the Wall was frequently plundered for stone used to build the churches, houses and field walls of northern England. Stones were carried many miles: inscriptions from Birdoswald have been found five miles away at Lanercost Priory, for example. This use of the Wall as a convenient quarry continued into the late 19th century. Despoilers occasionally sought other plunder. During the reign of King John, in 1201, there was an excavation to seek treasure but none was found. In later centuries, the local gentry carried off inscriptions and sculpture to adorn their houses. In the late 18th century, the Military Road running westwards out

of Newcastle was actually built for many miles on top of the demolished remains of Hadrian's Wall.

The Wall was recorded on Matthew Paris's 13th-century map of Britain, but the era of serious observation and enquiry did not begin until the 16th century. The accounts of early visitors are still useful sources of information about the Wall. It was only in 1840, however, that the whole of the frontier complex was first correctly attributed to Hadrian, though this was not immediately generally accepted. It was also about this time that archaeological excavations began on the Wall.

*Below: This map of Britain, prepared by Matthew Paris in the 13th century, shows both Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall*







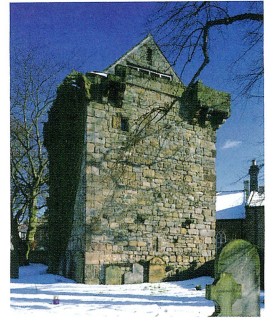


## THE REUSE OF STONES FROM THE WALL

For nearly 2,000 years, Hadrian's Wall has stood as a significant feature in the landscape. It has been used as a boundary between parishes, administrative districts and estates. Yet at the same time it has been reduced in scale as local people removed its stones for use elsewhere.

Churches, castles, farms and field walls all benefited from the reuse of Roman stones. As many as about three dozen churches and a similar number of castles contain Roman stones, sometimes very many. An arch was removed, presumably from the Roman town at Corbridge, for reuse in the church, while columns, possibly from Chesters, adorn the church at Chollerton. The agricultural revolution of the 18th century led to further destruction as new land was brought into cultivation, and the despoliation continued well into the 19th century. The entreaties of William Hutton may have saved a section of Wall at Planetrees in 1801, but stones were still being removed from Carrawburgh in 1838 to rebuild farm walls.

Today, where all surface trace of the Wall has disappeared, it often survives in place-names. Wallsend, Heddon-on-the-Wall, Walbottle, Walwick, Walltown, Thirlwall, Walbowers, Walby, Walton, Old Wall and many more are potent reminders of the former existence of the Wall.



**Above:** The vicar's pele tower at Corbridge, built in the early 14th century of Roman stones

**Below:** A building stone from Hadrian's Wall recording the name of a centurion – Cassius Priscus – reused at Lanercost Priory

**Facing page:** Walltown Crag, looking east





## THE 21ST-CENTURY CHALLENGE

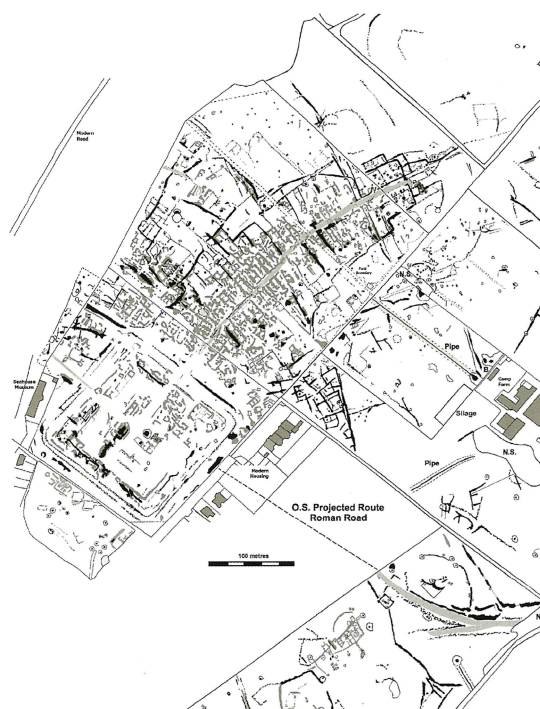
Modern excavation began in the 1890s and still continues. During the years up to 1939, many of the major problems concerning the Wall were solved through excavation. Nevertheless, there still remain large areas where our knowledge is very imperfect, in particular concerning the history and layout of forts and the history of the whole Wall through the third and fourth centuries, while, with the exception of Vindolanda and Housesteads, civil settlements have been little explored, and cemeteries not at all.

It was in 1933 that Corbridge was taken into the care of the nation and this was followed in 1934 by part of Hadrian's Wall. Since that date, several miles of the Wall, including turrets, milecastles and forts, have come into State care; they are all now looked after by English Heritage. In addition, other parts of the Wall are owned by local authorities, including the forts at South Shields, Wallsend, Rudchester and Birdoswald, while the National Trust owns the fort at Housesteads and the Wall thereabouts. All these fragments of the great frontier complex built over 1,850 years ago are carefully preserved in the public interest and open to visitors. Most of the Wall is, however, privately owned, with owners and occupiers readily giving access to the remains on their land.

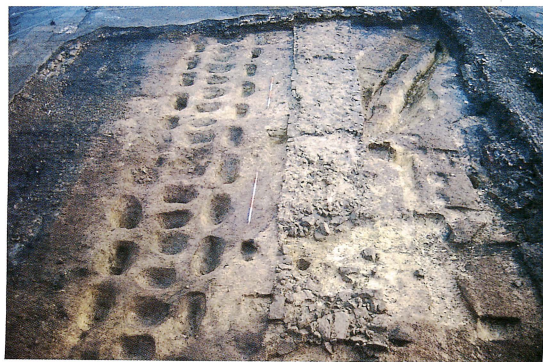
A monument like Hadrian's Wall requires continual attention. Mortar decays and requires replacing. The pressure of feet on turf leads to erosion of grass and then soil. Visitors climbing on walls dislodge stones. Interpretation moves on and information panels need renewing. New discoveries lead to the necessity to upgrade site displays and museums. Thus, the staff of English Heritage, the National Trust, Tyne and Wear Museums Service, the Vindolanda Trust and other bodies concerned with Hadrian's Wall are kept busy.

For archaeologists, Hadrian's Wall is an incomparable archaeological resource. Over 100 years of scientific excavation, and before that observation and recording, has led to the creation of a vast body of material capable of being re-examined and reassessed. In addition, new excavations take place on Hadrian's Wall every year. Each year, our view of this great frontier changes subtly as a result of this work.

The traditional methods of excavation and aerial photography have been supplemented over



recent years by remote sensing – geophysical survey in particular – through which a plan of the remains below the ground surface can be produced without recourse to the spade. However, the plan thus produced is undated, and, while it may be possible to identify a particular building as Roman, it is not possible to date it within the 300 years of occupation of Hadrian's Wall. Excavation is expensive, though, and geophysical survey offers an exciting way of learning much more about both military and civil structures along the frontier. The challenge faced by all those concerned with Hadrian's Wall is safeguarding this precious monument so that it continues to be investigated and interpreted, conserved and maintained to the highest standards to the benefit of the monument itself and the enjoyment of visitors.



**Top:** A geophysical survey of Maryport fort (page 7) and civil settlement by TimeScape Surveys. It reveals the complexity of surviving Roman remains at this site

**Right:** Pits found on the berm – the space between the Wall (right) and ditch (left) – at Byker, to the east of Newcastle, during building operations demonstrate that archaeological features can survive in unprepossessing circumstances





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Map of Hadrian's Wall continued  
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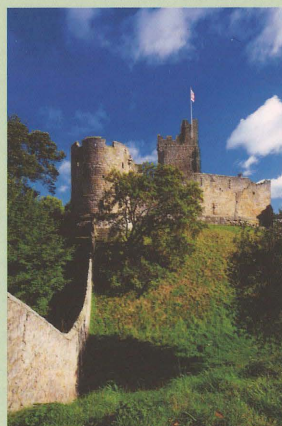
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Visit Lanercost Priory, Prudhoe Castle, Tynemouth Abbey



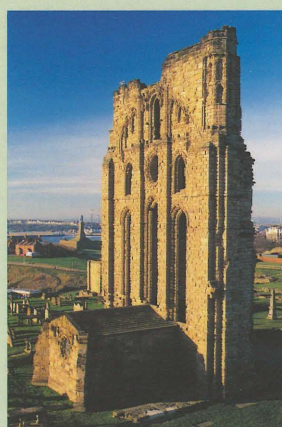
#### Lanercost Priory, Cumbria

Founded in 1166 only 15 miles from the Scottish border, this Augustinian priory was sacked at least four times during the Anglo-Scottish wars. The priory was suppressed by Henry VIII in 1537, but, remarkably, the church survives to its full height, part now forming the parish church.



#### Prudhoe Castle, Northumberland

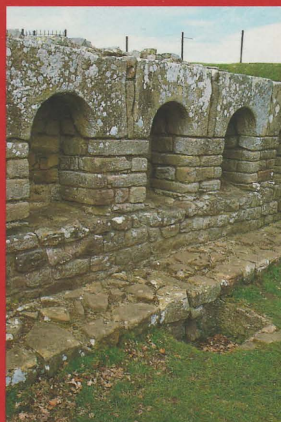
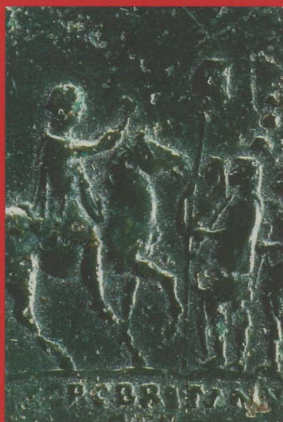
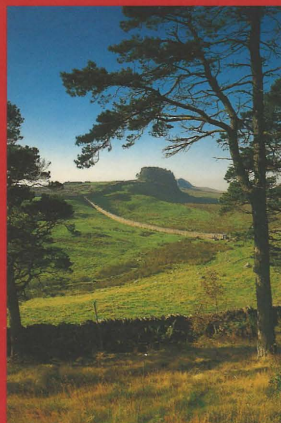
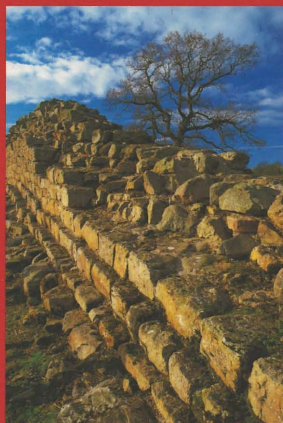
Built to defend a strategic crossing of the River Tyne in 1100, this castle has been continuously occupied for nine centuries. Succeeding improvements by the powerful Percy family transformed it into a formidable fortress. It did not see its last military action against the Scots until 1640.



#### Tynemouth Priory and Castle, Tyne & Wear

Impressively situated on a headland overlooking the North Sea, the Benedictine priory was built on the site of a 7th-century Anglian monastery. Lavishly fortified by Edward I against the Scots, it went on to play a vital role in coastal defence against Napoleon and during both world wars.





Stretching for 73 miles across northern England, Hadrian's Wall is the most important monument of Roman Britain, and the best-known frontier of the entire Roman empire. It was built on the orders of the emperor Hadrian after he visited Britain in AD 122 and took ten years to complete. This new guidebook provides maps, plans and tours of the important sites, as well as a history of the Wall and its associated forts. It is illustrated throughout with colour reconstructions and photographs.

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