

As I write these words, the new Roman emperor, Hadrian, has ordered high walls to be built between the forts along the line of the road that the Romans built under the direction of Pentheus. The Romans say this wall is to protect us from attacks by the Caledonian tribes to the north, but I am not so sure that that is its only purpose. The Romans are digging defensive ditches along both sides of the wall, 40 feet wide and 20 feet deep. These ditches they call the vallum. If they are building this wall to defend against the Caledonians in the north, why are they also digging these huge wide and deep ditches on the south side of the wall? It can only be to protect the wall from us, the Brigantes, because they distrust us and expect us to attack it. It is good to know the Romans still have fear of us in this way; it means my pledge to my mother has been kept. And, perhaps, my children will see the day when the Romans finally leave Britain.

Historical note

Although this book is a work of fiction, it is based on historical fact.

When the Romans invaded Britain under Emperor Claudius, in AD 43, Britain was divided into different tribal areas. The tribes who lived in the region of what was to become the border between England and Scotland, along the line of Hadrian's Wall, were, to the south, the Brigante tribe (which included the sub-tribe of the Carvetii in the Carlisle area), and to the north, the Novantae and Selgovae tribes. Further north were the Caledonian tribes.

Hadrian's Wall was not created as one single building work, but developed over years, using as its base the military road built by the Roman army across Britain from Carlisle (Roman name: Lugvalium) in the west to Corbridge (Roman name: Coriosopitum) in the east, a distance of about 40 miles. This road was called the Stanegate and was begun on the orders of the governor of Britain, Agricola, in AD 84. This road was built after the Roman army in Scotland had engaged the Caledonian tribes in a major battle in the Highlands, and had been forced to withdraw to the narrow

stretch of land between the Solway Firth and the River Tyne. Forts were built along the line of this road. At first these forts were thirteen miles apart; then, over the years, more were built along this road at shorter intervals. Smaller forts were also built along this road, as both watchtowers and temporary shelter for the troops.

In AD 122, nearly 40 years after Agricola began building the Stanegate road as a line of defence, the emperor Hadrian ordered a new line of fortifications a short distance north of the Stanegate. He also ordered the two ends of this defensive line to be extended to Bowness on Solway (Roman name: Maia) on the coast in the west, and to the coast in the east at Wallsend (Roman name: Segudunum). This whole structure was known as Hadrian's Wall, and it was completed in AD 138. When it was finished it was 130 km long.

The Romans continued to rule in Britain until the beginning of the fifth century. At this time Rome came under attack from barbarian tribes in Europe. For many years there had also been bitter disagreements among the people and rulers of Rome about who the true emperor was, and how the empire should be run. The result was that Rome began to fall apart as a military and political power. In about AD 435 the Roman troops in Britain stopped being paid; and after a while many of them just left the army and drifted away. Most became part of the local communities. In most of southern Britain the people were now as much Roman as they were

British. In Wales, Cornwall, Devon, Ireland and Scotland (places where the Romans had not had any major impact) the people were still basically of the Celtic tribes. Along the line of Hadrian's Wall the people were a mixture of British Celts, Romans and Romano-British.

And so the Roman Empire, which had been powerful and had dominated Britain for so many hundreds of years, died out.

The Roman army

The Roman army was divided into **legions**. In the early years (about 300 BC) a legion was made up of about 4,200 men, known as **legionaries**. By the first century BC a legion consisted of around 5,000 men, and was made up of ten **cohorts**, as follows:

- The First Cohort (the *Prima Cohors*). This cohort was larger than the other cohorts. It contained ten centuries (i.e. 800 men).
- Cohorts 2–10 had six centuries each (i.e. $6 \times 80 = 480$ men).
- Each cohort was subdivided into **centuries**, with each century containing 80 men.
- Each century was sub-divided further into ten **contubernia**.

A *contubernium* was made up of eight men who shared the same tent, and ate and did everything together.

- The whole legion was led by a senior officer called a **legatus**.
- Each cohort was led by a junior officer known as a **tribunus militum**.
- The soldier in charge of each century of 80 men was known as a **centurion**.

Every legion had its own ornamental eagle, which was made of silver. It was known as an **aquila** and was carried into battle by a soldier known as an **aquilifer**. The legion's eagle was their most important symbol, and if it was captured in battle by the enemy, then the legion was disbanded.

Each century had its own emblem, known as a standard, and the soldier who carried it was known as the **signifer**. The signifer also organized the money for the century's burial club, which the soldiers paid into so that if they died they would be able to have a good funeral.

Each legion also had a back-up force known as an **auxilia**. The men who served in this were known as **auxiliaries**, and were non-Roman citizens, usually from the provinces. The cohorts in an **auxilia** consisted of between 500 and 1,000 men. The soldiers in an **auxilia** were paid less than Roman legionaries and served in the army for a longer term. However, at the end of their term of military service they became Roman citizens.

When a man signed on as a soldier it was originally for a term of 20 years. By AD 5 the minimum term of service had become 25 years.

The Roman army on the march building a road:

A legion on the march was well organized. If cavalry were being used, they were at the front of the column. If not, the infantry were at the front, followed by the engineers and

surveyors. Behind them came the men who would build the road. Then came the carts and wagons with supplies. Next came the commander with his bodyguard, then the legion carrying their standards, with their centurions behind them. Depending on the purpose of the march, they might also have a mule train following behind carrying baggage, and finally a strong contingent of infantry and possibly cavalry to protect the rear of the column.

Roman religion

The Romans based much of their religion on that of the Greeks, and gave the various Greek gods and goddesses Roman names to make them their own, as can be seen from the following:

Jupiter (Greek name: Zeus): king of the gods

Juno (Greek name: Hera): wife (and also sister) of Jupiter

Neptune (Greek name: Poseidon): god of the sea

Dis (Greek name: Pluto): god of the Underworld

Ceres (Greek name: Demeter): goddess of agriculture

Vesta (Greek name: Hestia): goddess of the home

Vulcan (Greek name: Hephaestus): god of blacksmiths and craftspeople

Mars (Greek Name: Ares): god of war

Diana (Greek name: Artemis): goddess of hunting and the moon

Minerva (Greek name: Athena): goddess of war and craft

Mercury (Greek name: Hermes): Jupiter's messenger

Bacchus (Greek name: Dionysus): god of feasting and wine

Among the Roman army, there was a separate religion that was a favourite of soldiers. This was Mithraism, the worship of the god Mithras, which had begun in Persia. Why this particular religion became so popular among the soldiers of the Roman army is not really clear. Perhaps it was the basic principle of the Mithraic religion: that all men were equal, whether they were slaves or senators. Lowly soldiers were fed up with always being reminded by their officers that they were at the bottom of the social order, being beaten and fined and their wages being taken to pay for their food. What we do know is that wherever excavations have revealed the remains of a Roman military fort or camp, they have also usually uncovered an altar dedicated to Mithras.

Celtic religion

The Celts celebrated four main religious festivals during the year, all of which were based on the seasons. The festival of Imbolc was celebrated on 1 February, the start of the lambing season. At the beginning of May came the festival of Beltane. This festival marked the time of year when cattle – which had been kept close to the farm over winter and fed on hay – could be sent out into the fields to graze. In August, when the crops began to ripen and be ready to be harvested, came the festival of Lughnasa. And on 1 November came the final festival, Samhain, which marked the end of the farming year when the harvest was in and the cattle were brought back from the fields.

The heart of Celtic religion was found in Ireland, and their gods and goddesses (many of which were also worshipped on northern mainland Britain) were the Dagda (the father of all gods and goddesses), Lug, Anu and Brigit. In many parts of pre-Roman Britain the Celtic gods of Wales were of prime importance, particularly the Children of the Don: Gwydion, Govannan, Nudd and Arianrod. The Celtic god Cernunnos was also an important deity.

Timeline

- 55 BC First invasion of Britain by Romans led by Julius Caesar.
- AD 43 Second invasion of Britain by Romans, this time led by Emperor Claudius.
- AD 60 Uprising led by Queen Boudica of the Iceni against Roman occupation. In the final battle at Mancetter, a Roman force of 10,000 men (led by Governor Suetonius Paulinus) defeated Boudica's 250,000-strong British army.
- AD 72 Romans arrive in kingdom of the Brigante tribe of what is now Carlisle (in Cumbria in the northwest of Britain) and build a fort.
- AD 79 Romans build a fort at Corbridge (in the northeast of Britain by the banks of the River Tyne in Northumbria). These forts at Carlisle and Corbridge are their bases for their continued northward advance into Caledonia (now Scotland).
- AD 83 The Romans, under the command of Governor Agricola, push northwards into the land of the Caledonians to establish their frontier along a line

between the Forth and the Clyde (now the line between Glasgow and Edinburgh). The Battle of Mons Graupius (AD 83) results in 10,000 Caledonians killed against 360 Romans. But continued guerrilla attacks by the Caledonians drive the Romans back to a line between Carlisle and Corbridge.

AD 84 Agricola builds a military road linking Carlisle in the west and Corbridge in the east, called the Stanegate, constructing two more forts along the line of the road at Nether Denton and Vindolanda. This becomes the northern frontier of the Roman Empire.

AD 98 Trajan becomes emperor. He orders the construction of more forts along the Stanegate to make the frontier more secure.

AD 100 Rebellion by Brigantes, led by Argiragus, High King of the Brigantes, against the Romans. Rebellion put down.

AD 117 Brigantes revolt again. Rebellion put down.

AD 122 Emperor Hadrian orders the construction of a high wall along the line of the Stanegate to secure the frontier, extending to the sea in the west at Bowness on Solway (Maia); and to Wallsend (Segudunum) on the east coast. This will be known as Hadrian's Wall.

AD 138 Hadrian's Wall completed.

AD 139 Emperor Antoninus Pius orders the Roman army to push northwards and conquer the territory of the Caledonians and construct a new northern frontier

between the Clyde and the Forth. This is the Antonine Wall. Hadrian's Wall is no longer the northern frontier of the empire.

AD 161 Brigantes rise up against the Romans again. Rebellion put down.

AD 163–180 Caledonian uprising leads to the Romans abandoning the Antonine Wall and returning south to the line of Hadrian's Wall. Hadrian's Wall is renovated to become the northern frontier of the Roman Empire once more. Further revolts in around **AD 185** and **AD 197**.

circa AD 435 End of Roman rule in Britain. Most Roman soldiers settle in Britain with their Romano-British families; some return to Rome and continental Europe. Hadrian's Wall is abandoned.

Picture acknowledgments

- P 137** Re-enactment: Roman soldiers – officers, Holmes Garden Photos, Alamy.
P 138 Re-enactment: Roman soldiers marching, Chedworth Villa, Glouce, Nick Turner, Alamy.
P 139 (top) Roman legionary, Caerleon, Wales, Richard Naude, Alamy.
P 139 (bottom) Corbridge, Hadrian's Wall, Roman soldiers using shields in defence, South West Images Scotland, Alamy.
P 140 Hadrian's Wall, towards Crag Lough, Adam Woolfit/Robert Harding Travel, Photlibrary Group.
P 141 Map and diagram by Jason Cox.
P 142 British boy by Jason Cox.



A photograph showing two members of a Roman re-enactment society dressed as Roman officers.