

Hadrian's Wall

A study in archaeological exploration
and interpretation

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Cover image: Hadrian's Wall at Castle Nick looking east towards Crag Lough and Hotbank Crag. Photograph by Peter Savin

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For Beryl Elliott amicae fidelissimae



Cawfields milecastle

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Preface

This book stems from the invitation of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland to deliver the Rhind lectures in 2019, sponsored by AOC Archaeology Group. The lectures were endowed by Alexander Henry Rhind, the first being held in 1874, and with rare exceptions they have been held every year since. His legacy stipulates that six lectures have to be delivered. Until 1986 these were held over the course of one week from Wednesday to Wednesday, but in 1987 the pattern was changed and the lectures are now held over a weekend from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. The first lecture of the series sets the scene and, as it is followed by a reception, is something of an occasion. The last lecture tends to be shorter than normal as it may be followed by questions. The subject of the lectures should relate to ‘some branch of archaeology, ethnology, ethnography, or allied topic, in order to assist in the general advancement of knowledge’. I was asked to speak on an aspect of my research on Hadrian’s Wall, the Roman *Limes* and army, and ‘its wider international, practical and theoretical implications’.

The first two lectures – chapters in this book – provide the historiographical background to our present understanding of Hadrian’s Wall. They start with John Collingwood Bruce, the leading authority on the Wall, from 1848 until his death in 1892, who gave the Rhind lectures in 1883 and whose influence continues to this day. Research on the Wall in the field and in the study from 1892 to the present day are covered in the second lecture. The third and fourth lectures consider the purpose(s) and operation of Hadrian’s Wall from the first plan drawn up soon after Hadrian became emperor in 117 through to the final days of its existence as a frontier shortly after 400. Five distinct ‘plans’ for the Wall are promulgated. The fifth lecture examines

the impact of the frontier on the people living in its shadow and beyond. The last lecture reviews the processes which have brought us to an understanding of Hadrian's Wall and considers the value of research strategies, with some suggestions for the way forward. The chapters in this book reflect closely the lectures themselves with the main change being the addition of references. I am grateful to the Society for its agreement to publish this book to coincide with the lectures and for its support in its preparation.

In order to try to retain a relationship with the lectures I have restricted the number of references in the text. Quotations are always referenced. Detailed references to structures on the Wall may be found in the *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (Breeze 2006) while work during the last decade is reported in the handbook prepared for the 2019 Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall (Collins and Symonds 2019).

Hadrian's Wall has acquired its own terminology. At every mile there was a small enclosure called a milecastle (MC), similar to a fortlet (a small fort), which contained a small barrack-block and protected a gate through the Wall. In between each pair of milecastles there were two towers known as turrets (T) after the Latin for a tower, *turris*. On the Cumbrian coast, the equivalent terminology is milefortlet (MF) and tower (T). These structures on the Wall are numbered westwards from Wallsend and on the Cumbria coast westwards from Bowness-on-Solway. Behind the Wall is an earthwork known as the Vallum. It consists of a central ditch with a mound set back equidistant on each side. As the essential feature is the ditch, it should be termed the *Fossa*, but it was named the Vallum over a thousand years ago and it is too late to change the name. One issue is to differentiate easily between the Wall, meaning the whole of the frontier complex, and the linear barrier, here called the curtain wall.