



The Archaeological Journal

Book Reviews



HADRIAN'S WALL: A LIFE. By Richard Hingley. Pp. xv and 394, Illus 109. Oxford University Press, 2012. Price: £75.00. ISBN 978 019964 141 3.

It should be made clear at the outset that this book is not about Hadrian's Wall in the Roman period or its transition into the early medieval period. It does not seek to emulate the 'standard' text — Breeze and Dobson's *Hadrian's Wall* (first published in 1976) — rather it is a study of changing perceptions of, and research into, the frontier and its associated infrastructure of forts, *vallum*, etc., from Roman times up to the present day. The development of modern heritage management and tourism, with its associated 'Hadrian's Wall Country' marketing brand, is also addressed in this book.

The starting point is an assertion of the current vitality of the Roman frontier and its associated monuments ('A Living Wall', Chapter 1) followed by a succinct summary of our current knowledge of the Roman frontier system ('Hadrian's Wall', Chapter 2). The book then develops in three parts, each representing a significant phase of knowledge acquisition about the wall and interaction with historians, antiquarians, writers and, increasingly from the mid-nineteenth century, archaeologists and the general public. This development is symbolized in the titles of the three parts: successively 'Picts' Wall', 'Roman Wall' and 'Hadrian's Wall'. The first part reviews the evidence for the early phase of historical and antiquarian engagement with the remains, taking us from Gildas and Bede, to the seventeenth century and the beginnings of antiquarian study by Camden and others, including the start of the collection of portable antiquities from the wall, notably inscriptions. The second part takes us from the Act of Union of 1707, which led to the naming as Hadrian's Wall rather than Picts' Wall, to the mid-nineteenth century and the start of more scientific enquiry, with above- and below-ground archaeological investigation of the frontier system. It is this research which has taken us from Collingwood Bruce's study, *The Roman Wall*, first published in 1851, to the more familiar (to us) naming of the monument as 'Hadrian's Wall' by R. G. Collingwood from the 1920s to the present.

The book very much recalls the purpose and structure of Hingley's earlier *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586-1906* (2008) and, but for the fact of its later publication, it might be regarded as a case study for the former. However, its concerns and subject matter are more varied, embracing issues such as the conservation of the Wall, the development of private, public and charitable ownership of the remains, approaches to its artistic representation, the Wall as an economic driver with the development of modern tourism, and the vexed issues around reconstruction, as for example at Wallsend and South Shields. Now the modern visitor can not only just appreciate discrete forts and sections of the wall, but, through The Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail, what survive as visible

The final version of this review will appear in *The Archaeological Journal* 170 for 2013.

remains along its entire 80 mile length. Though the beauty of the landscape setting of the central section of the Wall still remains the major draw, visitors can do what any Roman garrison soldier almost certainly did not do: walk the entire length in either or both directions, safe, more or less, in the knowledge that, through regularly updated management plans, any problems of wear and erosion to path and monument will be addressed! This is a rich and fascinating book, essential as much to students of the Wall as to those interested in the history of our enquiry into the past.

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