



# *The Archaeological Journal*

## **Book Reviews**



**THE ANTIQUARIAN REDISCOVERY OF THE ANTONINE WALL.** By Lawrence Keppie. Pp. ix and 169, Illus 100. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2012. Price: £30.00. ISBN 978 190833 200 4.

The new millennium has seen a revival of interest in the contribution and value of antiquarian research. In this comprehensive and meticulously researched monograph, Lawrence Keppie evaluates the debt owed to the first investigators of the Antonine Wall and demonstrates just how rewarding and informative a reassessment of early work can be.

Occupied for less than one generation in the second century AD, the Forth-Clyde frontier has often been seen, in popular perception, as the poor relation of Hadrian's Wall and of attracting less attention in post-Roman years. The publication firmly challenges this notion, as layer upon layer, the chequered history of the study and exploration of the Wall — piled high with heroes and villains — is reconstructed.

Drawing on recent fieldwork and analysis, Chapter 1 provides an up-to-date account of the Wall's construction, attendant structures and environs, augmented with clear and well-executed maps. The topography of the Wall's corridor and the etymology of place names are also considered and help to set the Wall within its prehistoric, historic and landscape context. The remaining chapters chart the interest in the Antonine Wall from after the Roman withdrawal up until the early twentieth century. We are taken on a chronological journey and introduced to many colourful characters on the way. As an awareness of the historic nature of the Antonine Wall gains momentum, we pass Bede, in early written sources, the first to identify a turf barrier between the Forth and Clyde (p. 19). We then spend some time in the company of sixteenth-century Scottish historians, such as George Buchanan (p. 29), and meet many famous antiquaries including William Camden, Edward Lhwyd and William Stukeley. Their contribution to the study of the Wall is duly noted, but it is the lesser-known characters that stand out from the pages. Two such examples are Timothy Pont, the cartographer, whose pioneering fieldwork formed the foundation for later surveys and treatises on the Antonine Wall (Chapter 3), and Alexander Gordon, the singer, whose able negotiating skills helped him hoodwink competitors in order to acquire many inscribed stones for his patron, John Clerk (Chapter 5).

In local tradition, the Antonine Wall is known as Graham's Dyke and linked with mythical figures of the past, and it has its fair share of legends (pp. 23–24). With reference to the physical remains of the Wall, together with place-name evidence, possible origins for such tales are mooted. We are treated to delightful and ingenious

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legends, one of which suggests a hollow Wall to enable trumpet calls to be transmitted from one end to the other. Hypocaust tiles found in the area added credence to this erroneous story (p. 24).

Robbed out for stone, dismantled for private collections, and at the mercy of industrial and agricultural development, the Antonine Wall and its course has been eroded over the years. Much of this destruction has taken place in the last five hundred years. By returning to the primary antiquarian sources — journals, letters, maps — this publication illustrates the extent to which we owe our present knowledge of the Wall to antiquarian efforts. Pushing the chronological boundaries of this study a little further into the twentieth century would have allowed a mention of Anne Strachan Robertson: the first female to study the Wall extensively. However, by this period, we have moved into the area of modern scholarship and outside this volume's focus. *The Antiquarian Rediscovery of the Antonine Wall* is a real treasure house of information, offering tantalizing opportunities for further research into individual characters and collections.

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