

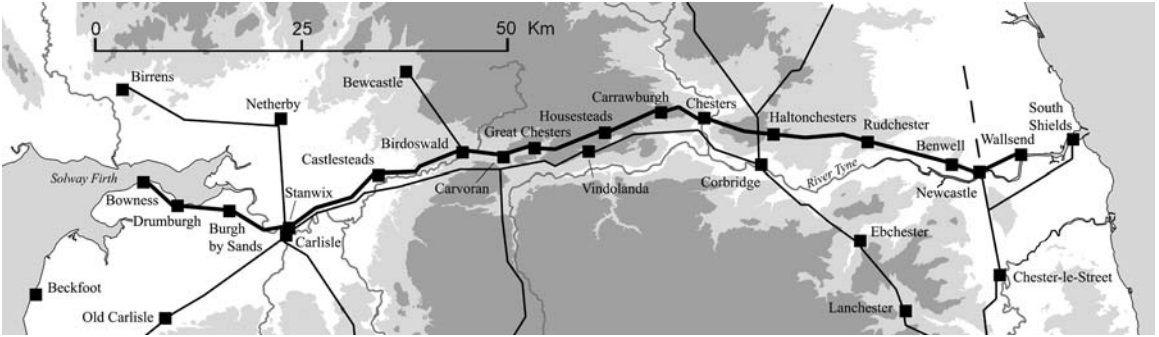
**BREAKING DOWN BOUNDARIES:
HADRIAN'S WALL IN
THE 21st CENTURY**

edited by
Rob Collins and Matthew Symonds

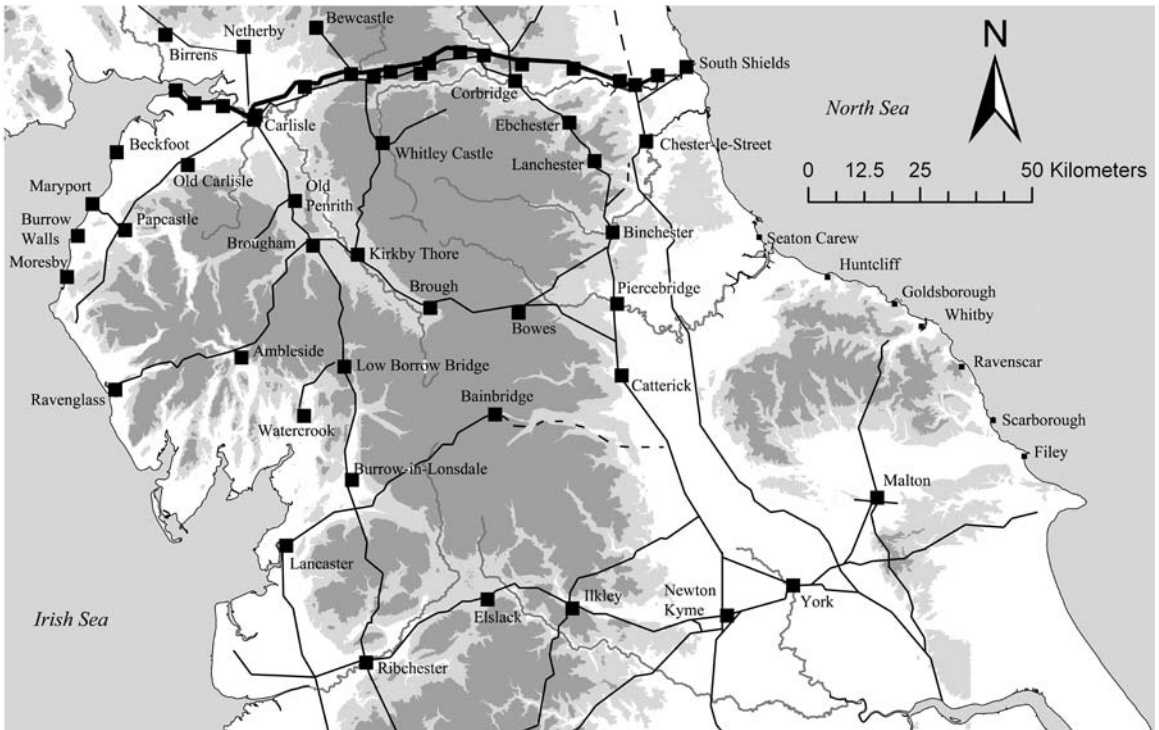
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	7
<i>D. J. Breeze</i>	
1. Challenging preconceptions about Hadrian's Wall	9
<i>R. Collins and M. F. A. Symonds</i>	
2. Before Hadrian's Wall: early communities at Vindolanda and on the northern frontier	17
<i>E. M. Greene</i>	
3. 'The world is a bundle of hay': investigating land management for animal fodder around Vindolanda, based on plant remains	33
<i>J. Huntley</i>	
4. Gateways or garrisons? Designing, building, and manning the milecastles	53
<i>M. F. A. Symonds, with an Appendix by P. R. Hill</i>	
5. The <i>vicus</i> at Housesteads: a case study in material culture and Roman life	71
<i>L. Allason-Jones</i>	
6. The fort wall: a great divide?	85
<i>Andrew Birley</i>	
7. From the Severans to Constantius: the lost century	105
<i>L. Roach</i>	
8. Pleading the fifth (century): patterns of coin use at the end of empire	123
<i>R. Collins</i>	
Index	139



Map 1. Hadrian's Wall.



Map 2. The frontier zone of the northern part of provincial/diocesan *Britannia* with many of the forts in the region.

Preface

David J. Breeze

Hadrian's Wall is a complex monument. There is the linear barrier itself — a wall of stone or turf — with milecastles and turrets regularly spaced along it, and to which forts were subsequently added. To the north lay a ditch, with the material tipped out on the far side to form a mound, the shape of which varied in relation to the topography. On the berm between the curtain and ditch a series of pits that held additional timber obstacles have been found in places. To the south lay a road and the monumental linear earthwork known as the Vallum. Further south ran another road: the Stanegate. Additional forts, some of which preceded construction of the Wall, were positioned along it. The economic opportunities this massive military presence created led to the growth of civil settlements outside forts and possibly outside milecastles too. Farming and in fact all aspects of life in the Wall corridor were disrupted by this great building project, while the considerable logistical requirements generated by so many soldiers changed the rhythm of life in the region for centuries.

The complexity of Hadrian's Wall is compounded by the considerable amount of archaeological investigation that has taken place over several centuries. Serious antiquarian accounts survive from the 16th c. and detailed study (including survey) from the 18th, before scientific excavation commenced in the 19th. Although less than 5% of the Wall has been excavated, this work has amassed a considerable body of material. The effort required to master this material means that many fundamental statements about Hadrian's Wall were made many years ago and have still not been reviewed and challenged. A single excavation can disrupt long-held interpretations.

The evidence upon which archaeologists base their interpretations consists of the physical remains of the monument in all its facets, the scant literary sources, the inscriptions, the artifacts (including eco-facts) revealed by excavation, the reports of previous excavations, and past interpretations of the evidence — a formidable list. Indeed, in the face of so much earlier research and so many publications, the unwary might be forgiven for believing that all the problems of Hadrian's Wall are solved. They would be wrong.

In many cases important new insights are achieved simply by asking the right questions of the existing material. A few years ago, I asked J. Poulter a seemingly simple question: how was Hadrian's Wall surveyed? John not only answered it, but was also able to offer more wide-ranging conclusions on the basic survey plan and on the purpose of Hadrian's Wall.¹ But the most important point is that, even after all those centuries of study, no one had previously thought to ask the question. We would be foolish to believe that there are no other basic questions waiting to be asked and answered.

Indeed, the existing body of material not only needs to be quizzed and interrogated anew as ideas and concepts change, but it allows new questions to be formulated. Comparing the range of finds from forts, milecastles and towers has allowed L. Allason-Jones to suggest that soldiers were not permanently stationed at turrets/towers.² This observation helps us to understand how Hadrian's Wall worked. A similar question was asked by

1 Poulter 2009.

2 Allason-Jones 1988.

D. Woolliscroft: why were some milecastles and towers moved slightly out of position? To provide better communication between the soldiers on the Wall and those based behind it was his answer,³ an explanation which conjures up a picture of a 24-hour watch on the frontier. V. Swan recognized African-style pottery vessels on Hadrian's Wall, prompting an enquiry into relationships across the empire.⁴ The Vindolanda writing-tablets have challenged our views of local recruitment.⁵ These remarkable documents have two separate but intertwined aspects of importance. Firstly, they illustrate life on the northern frontier of Britain in the years immediately before the building of Hadrian's Wall. Secondly, the basic similarity between these documents and those from the Roman East allows us to infer that such exotic material is not exceptional, as was once thought. Thus we can use information from the eastern documents with confidence to cast light on the activities of the Roman army in the European provinces.

The impact of the Romans on the local people, supply of the army and its implications, relationships between the soldiers of the powerful Roman army and their camp followers, ethnicity in the frontier zone — these are but some of the topics which remain open for study. The papers in this collection consider many different aspects of Hadrian's Wall, from the basic interpretations of the structure and the history of the Wall, through supply, the effect of the army on the indigenous population, and the relationship between soldier and civilian, to a consideration of theoretical approaches to the Wall. They challenge many of our cherished views, including a strict division between military and civilian in the fort and civil settlement complex. In their discussions they draw upon the wide range of available evidence, and each paper is a valuable contribution to Wall studies in its own right. Together they form an invaluable assessment of different aspects of Hadrian's Wall, a challenge to all students of Roman frontiers from a new generation of Wall students, and a reminder that we are far from knowing all there is to know about Rome's NW frontier.

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3 Woolliscroft 1989.

4 Swan 2009.

5 E.g., Bowman and Thomas 1994.