

Wall Stories

These nine leaflets are packed with facts, stories, and images to inspire your explorations of Hadrian's Wall Country. Find them at venues along the Wall or download the pdf files from the Tales of the Frontier website: www.talesofthefrontier.org

1. Maryport

Western Defences: Symbols, saints and very big snakes

2. The Solway Estuary

The Northern Shore: Borrowed stones and troubled times

3. Carlisle

Crossing the Eden: Fish sauce and football

4. Lanercost, Birdoswald, and Bewcastle

The Irthing Valley: Kings, crosses and a magical dwarf

5. Sewingshields

Central Crag: Sleeping knights and sunken treasure

6. Chollerford

Moors and marshes: Northern spirits and heavenly battles

7. Hexham & Corbridge

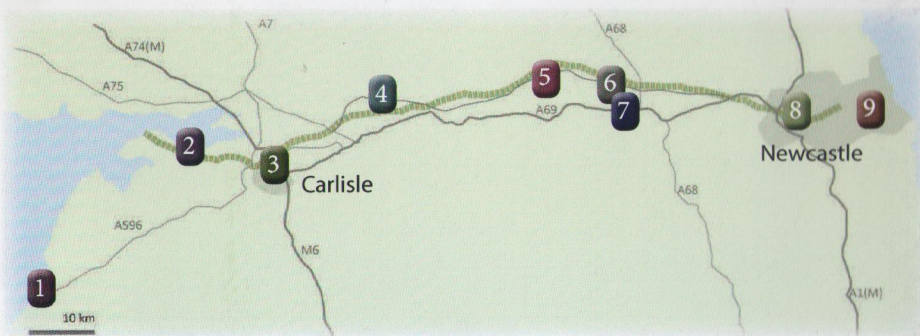
The Tyne Valley: Old stones and new faith

8. Newcastle

Guarding the Tyne: Crossing places

9. The Tyne Estuary

Eastern Ports: Reconstructing Rome



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Tales of the Frontier

People, places, past and present of

Hadrian's Wall Country



"Hadrian's Wall is a living wall..."



The distinctive form of Hadrian's Wall snakes across England from coast to coast. The stone masons and soldiers of Rome left a permanent mark on this wild northern landscape, but could not have imagined the impact their wall was to have on future generations. This unique monument would become entwined into the life and history of the border folk: a spine of stone onto which the threads of time would weave a rich tapestry.

Over the last two millennia the Wall has changed the course of history in the frontier lands: its presence has inspired, influenced, and motivated those who encountered it, those who lived in its long shadow, and those who found new uses for its recognisable squared blocks. This 73 mile long icon has divided, united, protected, and connected communities along its length. You too are part of the life of the Wall: by visiting, thinking, photographing, and talking about it, you ensure that this remarkable monument continues to shape ideas and create new stories almost 2000 years after the stones were first set in place.

This booklet and the nine leaflets that accompany it include some of the less well known stories in the life of Hadrian's Wall, revealing some surprising connections, and inviting you to reconsider these familiar old stones in a new light as they extend their influence down the centuries. We will travel from the Irish Sea to the North Sea, through remote landscapes and busy ports. We will meet fascinating characters: soldiers, saints, monks and kings, poets, goddesses, cattle rustlers, and even a magical dwarf!

This booklet provides a thematic overview, highlighting some of the ways in which Hadrian's Wall has impacted on people and places across the northern frontier. The nine leaflets each focus on specific locations, recounting stories, poems, and images, many of which reflect the themes presented in the booklet.

We hope you enjoy your explorations, wherever they lead.

"Hadrian's Wall has many different meanings for many different people; it can inspire people to think about those different meanings, and inform not only their understanding of the past, but also their understanding of the modern world, and how that world has come to be."

Nigel Mills, Hadrian's Wall Trust

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Tombstone from Areia commemorating Regina from southern England: a freedwoman and wife of Barates from Syria. ©TOTF Archive.

Cosmopolitan Wall: People of the Empire

Hadrian's Wall was not garrisoned by 'Romans' from Italy, but by soldiers recruited from all corners of the Roman Empire. The communities living along the wall included people from many different ethnic groups who lived together alongside the native Britons to create what must have been a vibrant, diverse, and colourful population. Inscriptions show that, at various times they included Germans, Gauls, Arabians, and Romanians. A Spanish cavalry unit was based in Maryport; a North African unit was stationed at Burgh-by-Sands; Syrian archers were posted at Carvoran, and South Shields was home to a group of Mesopotamian boatmen.

At Arbeia (South Shields), two tombstones provide a more personal insight into the multi-cultural society of the northern frontier. The first was set up by Barates for his wife Regina, who died at the age of 30. The inscription tells how Regina was a slave, but was then freed and married by Barates. Regina was member of the Catuvellauni tribe who lived in south east England, whilst Barates hailed from Palmyra in Syria. The inscriptions are written in both Latin and Palmyrene. How the couple met is unknown.

Barates may himself have been buried at Coria (Corbridge). A tombstone to a man of that name shows that he was 68 when he died. He is described as a 'vexillarius'. The term is disputed: it usually refers to a 'standard bearer', yet there is no evidence for a Palmyran military unit serving in Britain. As a retired soldier he should be called 'ex vexillario', leading some to think he was in fact a merchant, trading in vexilla – standards and flags. His tombstone was much less ornate than that of Regina, and written only in Latin. Perhaps Barates family and friends were not familiar with the Palmyrene language and traditions.

A second tombstone at South Shields was raised by a soldier called Numerianus to Victor, his 20 year old former slave, described as 'by nation a Moor'. In the Roman period, the Moors originated from Mauretania (an ancient country of North Africa), and were generally dark-skinned. The figure carved on the tombstone clearly shows African racial characteristics. Numerianus may himself have been African, like his former master.

Spiritual Wall: Gods and Goddesses of Northern Britain

Local Iron Age communities worshipped their deities at natural features in the landscape, leaving little trace of their beliefs. The people who came to Hadrian's Wall from around the Roman Empire adopted and adapted these local gods and gave them a lasting legacy by creating shrines with inscriptions and sculpture. Some sites, such as the Temple of Mithras at Carrawburgh, still attract offerings from visitors today.

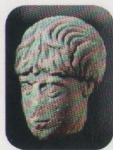
Antenociticus. Three altars to this Romano-British god were found in the small temple of Condercum in Benwell, Newcastle. The sandstone head of the statue of the god was discovered in 1862. He has a torc around the neck, and his hair curls forward resembling two horns. He can now be seen at the Great North Museum in Newcastle. [See Leaflet No. 8]

Cocidius. Known as 'The Red One', Cocidius was adopted by the Romans who equated him with Mars, god of war and hunting, and also with Silvanus, god of forests, groves and wild fields. He is closely associated with the Roman fort at Bewcastle which was known as Fanum Cocidii, or Shrine of Cocidius. A silver plaque from Bewcastle depicting the god can be seen at Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. [See Leaflet No. 3]

Belatucadros. There are 28 inscriptions to this Celtic deity along Hadrian's Wall. In the Roman period he was equated with Mars, and was worshipped by lower-ranked soldiers as well as by Britons. A stern-looking sandstone head from Netherby may represent this warrior-god. It is now at Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. [See Leaflet No. 1]

Northern Goddess? A small stone portrait was found during excavations at Arbeia in South Shields in 2014. The striking headwear – a 'mural crown' resembles a city wall. The sculpture may depict the goddess of the Brigantes, the tribe that inhabited northern Britain during Roman times. The head will go on display at Arbeia Roman Fort & Museum in 2015. [See Leaflet No. 9]

Coventina. Dedications and votive deposits to this Romano-British goddess of wells and springs were found near a spring now called "Coventina's Well". The site at Carrawburgh was once a Roman fort (Brocolitia). The well contained 13,487 coins, a relief of three water nymphs, dedication slabs, ten altars, and many votive objects. The finds are displayed at Chesters Museum. [See Leaflet No. 6]



Head of Roman-British god Antenociticus, found in a temple at Benwell, West Newcastle. Image © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums.



St Peter's Church, Monkwearmouth. Roman architecture and Roman stone in the land of Bede. Image © Phil Brown.

Christian Wall: Rebuilding Rome in the North

There is evidence of early Christian activities at a number of Roman sites along the Wall. Following the Roman withdrawal, cemeteries and churches were built within the forts at Maryport, Newcastle, and Vindolanda.

Christianity slowly spread across Britain. Edwin, King of Northumbria, was baptised in around AD 627. On his death the kingdom was divided in two but both new kings were killed by the pagan ruler Cadwallon of Gwynedd. Oswald then claimed the crown and raised an army. In around AD 634, a decisive victory at the Battle of Heavenfield, close to Hadrian's Wall, restored Christianity to a reunited Northumbria. In the historian Bede's account of the event, Oswald had a vision of Saint Columba who foretold the victory. He raised a cross, and prayed alongside his troops.

Bede often related the physical remains of Rome to the establishment of Christianity in Northern England. It is possible that Oswald was aware of early interpretations by Gildas of the decline and fall of Roman power in Britain, and that he did connect the Wall with the Christian communities of late Roman times. But whether he raised his cross close to the Wall for this reason or for purely strategic advantage is unclear. The siting of the 18th century church at Heavenfield with its Roman altar, the erection of the modern wooden cross, and the development of the pilgrimage trail all draw upon the memory of this symbolic place. [See Leaflet No. 6]

In the late 7th century the North East became the focus of intense ecclesiastical debate at the Synod of Whitby (AD 663) and there was a flurry of church-building in the Tyne Valley. Two influential figures, Wilfrid (later Bishop of York) and Benedict Biscop, who had both travelled extensively, introduced Christian worship on a grand scale. In what must have remained an impressive, if neglected, landscape of Roman monuments, temples, and fortifications, they set about re-creating the architecture they had witnessed in continental Europe. Wilfrid founded the abbey at Hexham and church at Corbridge, while Biscop built St Peter's at Wearmouth and St Paul's at Jarrow, later the home of Bede. [See Leaflet Nos. 7 and 9]

Italian and Gaulish architecture inspired the form of these early Anglo-Saxon churches, built close to old Roman sites which had both Imperial and Christian associations. Re-use of Roman stones in the fabric of the buildings reinforced these links. Altars and monumental stones with carvings and inscriptions were also appropriated, the lettering perhaps further legitimising the Latin texts of the new faith.

At the western end of the Wall, the 7th century cross shaft at Bewcastle may indicate the presence of a third significant religious establishment on the site of the Roman fort there, many centuries before the surviving 13th century church. [See Leaflet No. 3]

Mythical Wall: Kings, Queens, Goblins, and Outlaws

The Wall has an enduring physical and emotional presence and memories of it have inspired folklore, stories, poems, and movies. The power of the monument has been appropriated to reinforce particular ideologies by writers and storytellers from Bede through to Kipling. This tradition continues with modern cultural references in movies and novels up to the present day.

There are many places along the Wall associated with the legend of King Arthur and his knights, but a particular concentration occurs along the dramatic crags near Housesteads fort at Sewingshields. Here, Arthur and his queen lend their names to various rocks and hills, and are said to lie sleeping in an underground cave. Nearby, the dark waters of Broomlee Lough are rumoured to be the resting place of a hoard of treasure, protected by magic. [See Leaflet No. 5]

Might such stories of kings, knights, and treasure be traced to distant folk memories of the strange, colourful soldiers who built the frontier, bringing treasures of precious metals and exotic items? Could they also reflect ideas promoted by early historians like Gildas and Bede that the Wall was built by noble, civilised Romans to control the wild, northern savages, with Arthur's gallant knights playing a similar role?

Border Wall: Controlling the Debateable Land

During much of the late medieval period the border between England and Scotland was an ill-defined, fluid, and contentious frontier territory, disputed through fighting and cattle-raiding. The geographical location, monumental form, and genealogical ancestry of the Wall made it a powerful signifier of the division of the English and the Scots. Many of the medieval strongholds, including fortified churches, were made of stone from the Roman Wall and forts.

The Solway Estuary was a particularly treacherous zone with regular raids across the shifting sands. Here, little now remains of the Roman defences, but in their place stand sturdy churches and castles, protection from marauding northerners who stole cattle– and frequently the church bells! These heavy items clearly did not make for a fast get away and stories abound of bells lost in the tidal waters. [See Leaflet No. 2]

The city of Carlisle was a key site on the route north and a crossing of the River Eden. The Castle, on the site of the Roman fort, witnessed centuries of siege and rebellion. Further east, the Priory at Lanercost, founded in 1169 and built of stones from the nearby Wall, was favoured by Edward I during campaigns to subdue the Scots. It was frequently ransacked during the 14th century. [See Leaflet Nos. 3 and 4].



Sycamore Gap made famous in the 1991 film 'Robin Hood Prince of Thieves'. Image ©TOTF Archive.



'Vicar's Pele', St Andrew's Church, Corbridge; Roman stone used for protections against border raids. Image © TOTF Archive

The Tales of the Frontier Project

This booklet and related leaflets were designed to develop the social and policy impacts from **Tales of the Frontier** (2007-2013), a project undertaken at Durham University Archaeology Department. The present initiative was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and supported by Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums.

Tales of the Frontier revealed a richer range of historical and contemporary meanings for Hadrian's Wall than traditional ideas of it as the remains of the Roman military, built in the AD 120s and disused by the early 5th century. The project investigated the human aspects of the rich biography (or 'afterlife') of the Wall, and its role as a living and vital landscape, from Roman times to the present. A key aim of the work was to integrate research findings about the wider impact and values of this heritage landscape into public policy and interpretation.

Ideas about the content and presentation of the leaflets was shaped by workshops involving a wide range of participants including heritage professionals, educators, artists, story-tellers, archaeologists, volunteers, and local people. Their contribution significantly enhanced the final output.

A more detailed account of some of the ideas explored here can be found in the publication: Hingley, R. 2012. *Hadrian's Wall: A Life*. Oxford University Press.

Find out more or to download the leaflets, please visit the project website:

www.talesofthefrontier.org



The Wall at Peel Crag. © TOTF Archive

Research and text for booklet and leaflets by Dr Kate Sharpe.
See website for detailed acknowledgements.