

Hadrian's Wall

Exploring its Past to Protect its Future

Edited By

Marta Alberti and Katie Mountain



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-274-0
ISBN 978-1-80327-275-7 (e-Pdf)

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Hadrian's Wall was first inscribed in the World Heritage Site UNESCO list in 1987. In 2005, the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage property was created as the Wall was joined by the Upper German Raetian Limes. In 2008, the trans-national Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage property expanded again with the inclusion of the Antonine Wall. Tireless work continues in multiple countries to unite all Frontiers of the Roman Empire under the UNESCO banner. Photo courtesy of Savin Photographs

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Preface

Marta Alberti and Katie Mountain

This volume originated from the desire, shared by archaeologists, curators and heritage managers, to mark the 1900th anniversary of Hadrian's visit to his visionary project: Hadrian's Wall.

Much ink has been committed to the page regarding this incredible World Heritage Site and what it means to the many people who have an interest in it. You, the curious reader, are spoilt for choice: there are innumerable academic papers focusing on a particular aspect of the Wall's archaeology, comprehensive volumes on its management, excavation reports, and even fiction set on the Wall.

So why choose this book? In the following pages, you will find a candid discussion of the present of Hadrian's Wall, warts and all: a mirror held to what the Wall is now, rather than what it should be. There will be archaeology, and the ways new challenges, methods and technologies such as 3D scanning and modelling interact with it. There will be objects and collections: they have not yet been formally recognised as part of the World Heritage Site, but fascinate thousands every year. There will be talk of the digital world and how it merges with the physical – from gaming to online learning. Difficult and yet ever more relevant topics like sustainability and inclusivity will be discussed, as well as the place that this beloved national landmark holds in the international context. Contributors to this book operate daily on Hadrian's Wall: it is likely that you, our reader, already know them, or would meet them on a visit to one of the sites. If, by the end of this volume, you feel included in the world of Hadrian's Wall, and entitled to form an opinion on the way it is cared for, interpreted, displayed and experienced, then we have succeeded.



MARC FITCH FUND



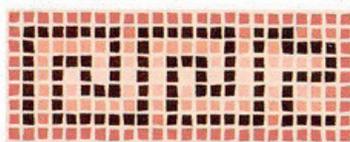
It is only by looking at the present (and in the case of the Wall, the past) directly in the face that we can form an opinion and plan our actions for the future. Archaeology and the Wall transcend today: just like this book, they will be here when we are gone. But how the next 1900 years will look for the World Heritage Site is, at least in part, down to all of us.

The editors would like to thank Professor David Breeze, archaeologist, Wall luminary and impressively productive author, as well as Dr. Andrew Birley, CEO and director of excavations of the Vindolanda Trust. This book was first born in their minds, and they offered it to us to raise and shape as a living creature. We would like to thank them for their trust.

With them, we thank our advisory board: Dr. Rob Collins, Professor Rebecca Jones and Dr. Matt Symonds. Together they formed an excellent advisory board, which is a term used to define a cheerleading team equipped with outstanding academic expertise.

Thanks are due to our copyeditor, Amy Baker, and to Kathryn Murphy, who crafted our opening maps. Our gratitude goes also to all the contributors, who summarised years of work in 5000 words or less.

Finally, thanks are due to the following funding bodies: the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, the Roman Research Trust and the Marc Fitch Fund.



ROMAN RESEARCH TRUST



Foreword

Jane, Lady Gibson

'Having completely transformed the soldiers, in royal fashion, he made for Britain, where he set many things right and - he was the first to do so - erected a Wall along a length of eighty miles, which was to separate the barbarians and Romans.'

Historia Augusta

Little did the anonymous writers of the *Historia Augusta* know that, 1900 years from Hadrian's visit to his monumental masterpiece, the communities who live along the Wall would be celebrating this anniversary with a year-long festival of music and food, plays and dance pieces, art in the landscape, the knitting of bunting and beards and the baking of Wall-shaped cakes. Such is the magnetic attraction of Hadrian's Wall and the power and significance of World Heritage values in this, the most sparsely populated region of England and the Scottish Borders.

We know so much about Hadrian and his 'insatiable curiosity' and I turn always to Anthony R. Birley's biography *'Hadrian - the Restless Emperor'* to find out snippets of information which fuel my imagination to fill in the gaps about what we don't know. We know Hadrian arrived in northern Britain in June or July, a very good time of the year to visit our Borderlands region, and that he supervised the building of his Wall, which one imagines he had envisioned whilst he was on the move, visiting his armies and his provinces. Noted as having a passion for architecture, I like to believe he had strong views about both the construction and the purpose of the frontier.

Had he, at this point, documented *exactly* what he had in mind, and had such documents survived, I muse on whether the Wall would hold the fascination it does today.

The purpose of this book, made special by its publication in this commemorative year, is to offer contributions to archaeological heritage management of the Wall, and to celebrate the people and the organisations who are still asking questions and presenting knowledge with undimmed passion.

Hadrian's Wall and the wider World Heritage Site offer an extraordinary range of experiences to a seemingly unlimited number of people worldwide. The Wall is a centre of excellence for the latest scientific research, it provides proof of the diversity of people living here two millennia ago, it is a living for countless visitor economy businesses, it inspires people to create music and art, digital experiences and even manga comics. It is a place to look at truly dark skies and it keeps us fit and sets us walking and cycling challenges. It provides endless volunteering opportunities and teaches the painstaking skills of archaeology, geology and visitor guiding. It fuels regeneration programmes and gives a boost to community transport schemes. It delights us with its power in the rural landscape and intrigues us with our quest for knowledge of where it lies beneath our urban streets. It places us on the continuum of human existence; indeed it gives us a starring role, and that pride is felt by all who serve on the Partnership Board.

Jane, Lady Gibson

Chair, Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site Partnership Board

Foreword

Alessandro Balsamo

The cultural and natural heritage is among the priceless and irreplaceable assets, not only of each nation, but of humanity as a whole. The loss, through deterioration or disappearance, of any of these most prized assets constitutes an impoverishment of the heritage of all the peoples of the world. Parts of this heritage, because of their exceptional qualities, can be considered to be of “Outstanding Universal Value” and as such worthy of special protection against the dangers which increasingly threaten them.

If we substitute the words ‘cultural and natural heritage’ with ‘Hadrian’s Wall’, it is clear how the underpinning notion of World Heritage in the 1972 Convention fits well for this site. The World Heritage Convention is not intended to ensure the protection of all sites of great interest, importance or value, but only a select list of the most outstanding of these from an international viewpoint. Hadrian’s Wall is certainly one of these.

The Frontiers of the Roman Empire form one of the largest individual monuments ever conceived in the history of humanity and Hadrian’s Wall is probably the most iconic segment of this gigantic undertaking. This says a lot about the importance of this site, which was planned and partially erected according to a uniform project of construction. Beyond its exceptional role as an engineering feat, over the centuries, the Roman imperial frontiers acquired a powerful symbolic character as a demarcation line, marking the cultural difference between the “classical” and “barbarian” worlds of antiquity, a cultural divide, which lingered on throughout the Middle Ages.

Indeed, the nature of this peculiar cultural asset, its significance in terms of cultural value and the approachability of its archaeological evidence by different typologies of users make the necessity of its sustainable management and protection crucial.

Our precious cultural and natural heritage is continuously under pressure because of its intrinsic fragility, therefore the need to handle different risk factors, having both environmental and anthropic causes, translates into the necessity of adequate management and protection. In addition, the great significance of cultural heritage in terms of social, cultural, and economic value further amplifies this necessity.

Ever since it was adopted in 1972, the World Heritage Convention has continued evolving and the World Heritage List has become a leading reference worldwide of the most extraordinary sites on the planet. As the reach of the Convention has expanded, so has the need for high quality standards for the protection and management of World Heritage sites.

The Convention highlights the “importance, for all the peoples of the world, of safeguarding this unique and irreplaceable property, to whatever people it may belong.” An inscription on the World Heritage List therefore must provide the protection of heritage of “outstanding universal value” against the dangers which increasingly threaten while facilitating its passing on to future generations.

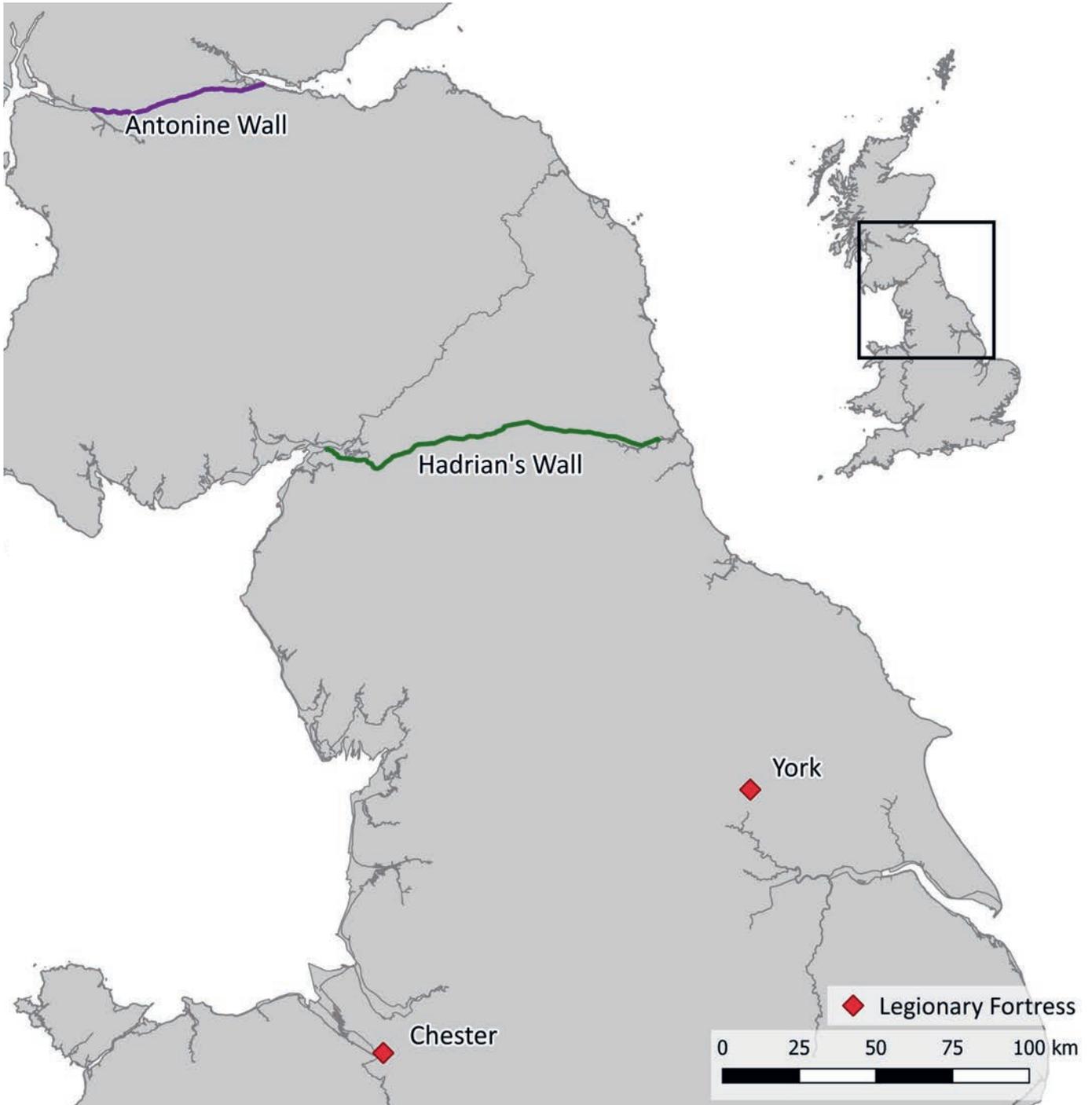
But the same reasons for which sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List are also the reasons that naturally attract masses of tourists to visit them, year after year. The notion on which the World Heritage Convention is based, notably that sites belong to everyone and should be preserved for future generations, is quite challenging in itself, thus, the only way to ensure the safekeeping of our world’s natural and cultural heritage is to set up a framework of provisions that may ensure that the site is preserved over time. The necessity is to establish a plan which, drawing from the

definition of the Outstanding Universal Value of the site, protects it by applying legal, administrative, financial and professional conservation methods and tools and prescribing strategies and specific actions. In this domain, the English long-established tradition for conservation of heritage and their ability to produce effective management plans is recognised worldwide. The renewed provisions concerning the management of Hadrian's Wall are a good testimony to this ability.

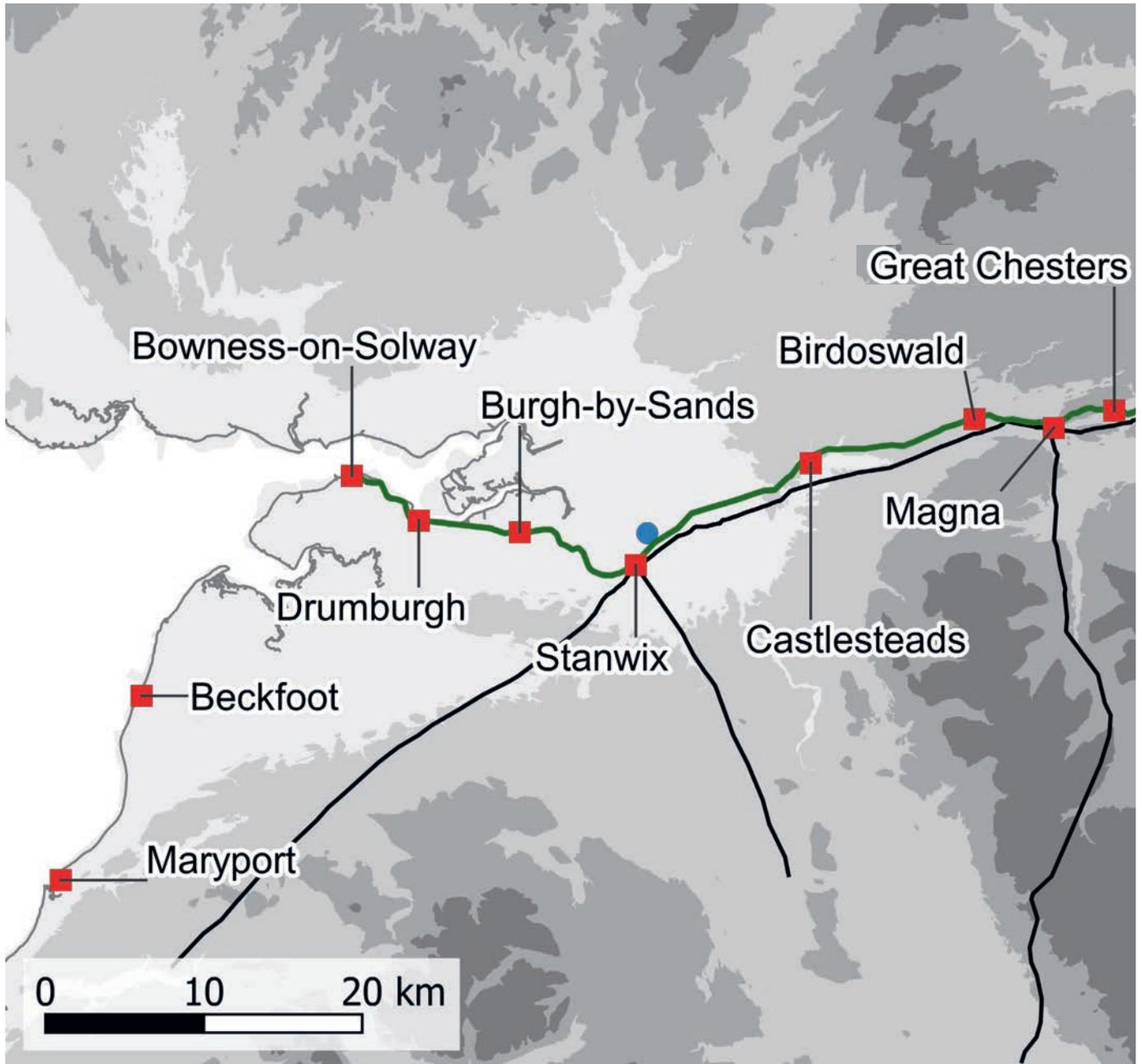
1900 years after Emperor Hadrian's decision to erect a wall barring the Britannic peninsula along a distance of 118 kilometers, we welcome the improvements in the management of this outstanding site that this new text is introducing. And, as genuine supporters of heritage conservation, we all wish a successful management for this outstanding site, which may conserve it, as Hadrian would have said it, *in saecula saeculorum*.

Alessandro Balsamo

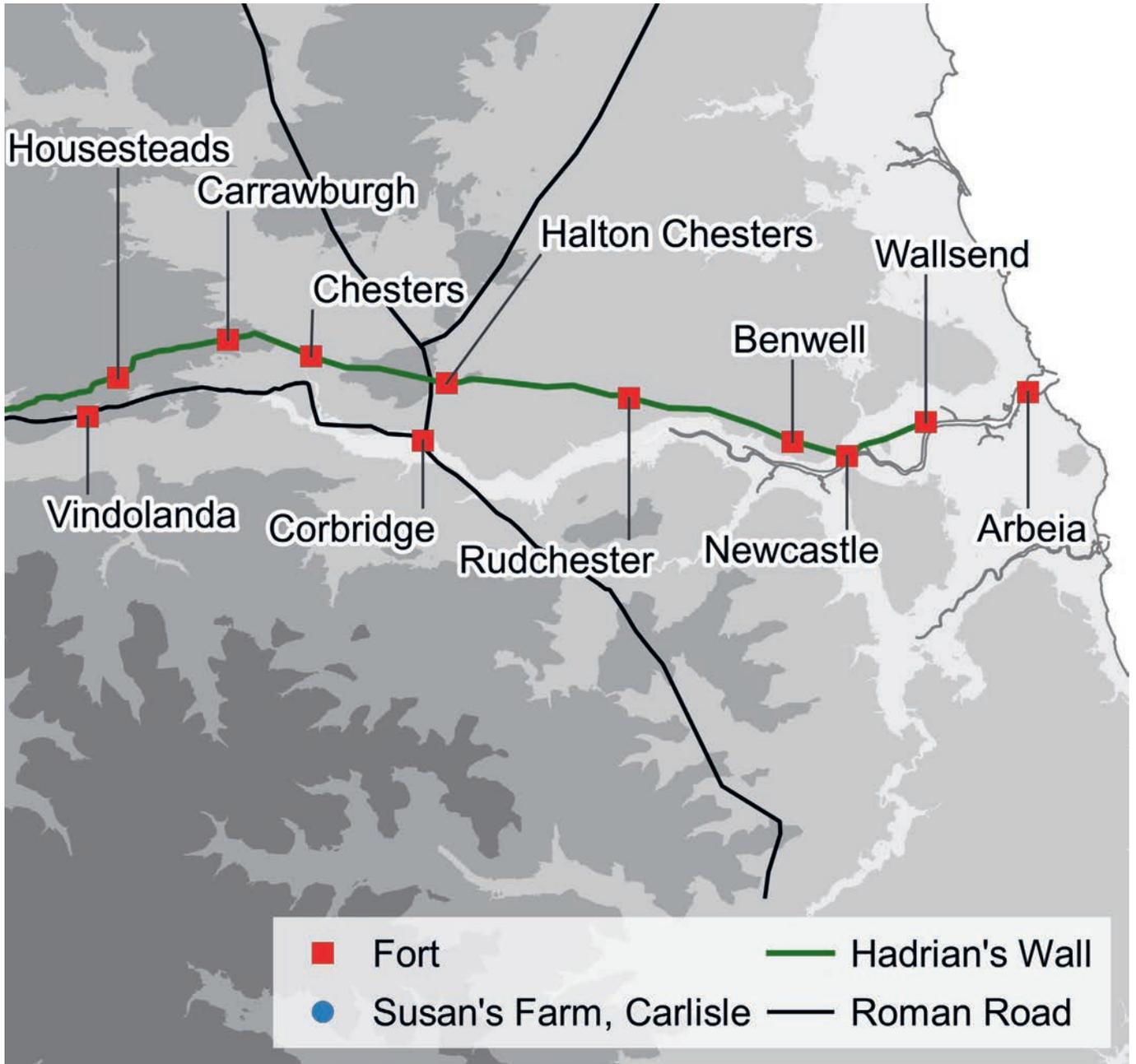
Head of the Nominations Unit
World Heritage Centre
UNESCO

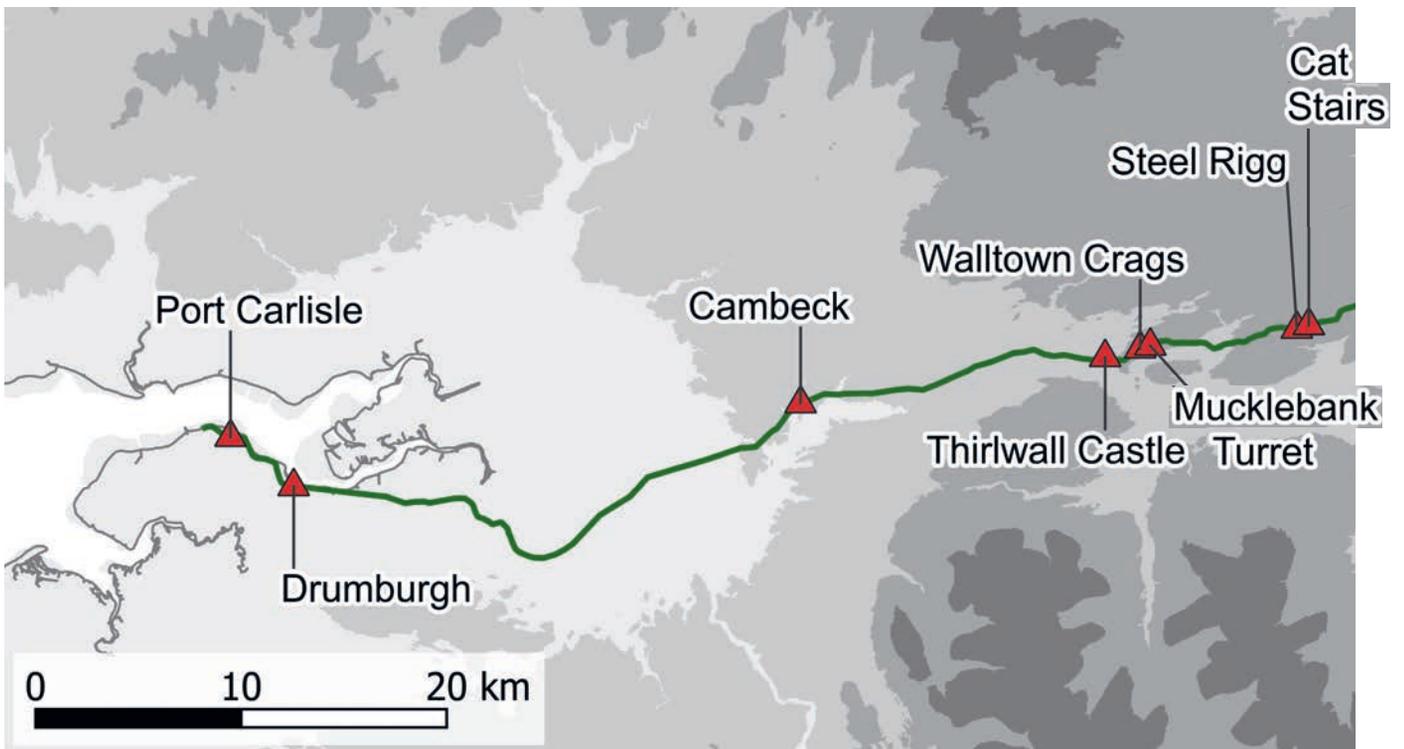


Map 1: A map showing the position of Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall, and the legionary fortresses of York and Chester. Map by Kathryn Murphy.

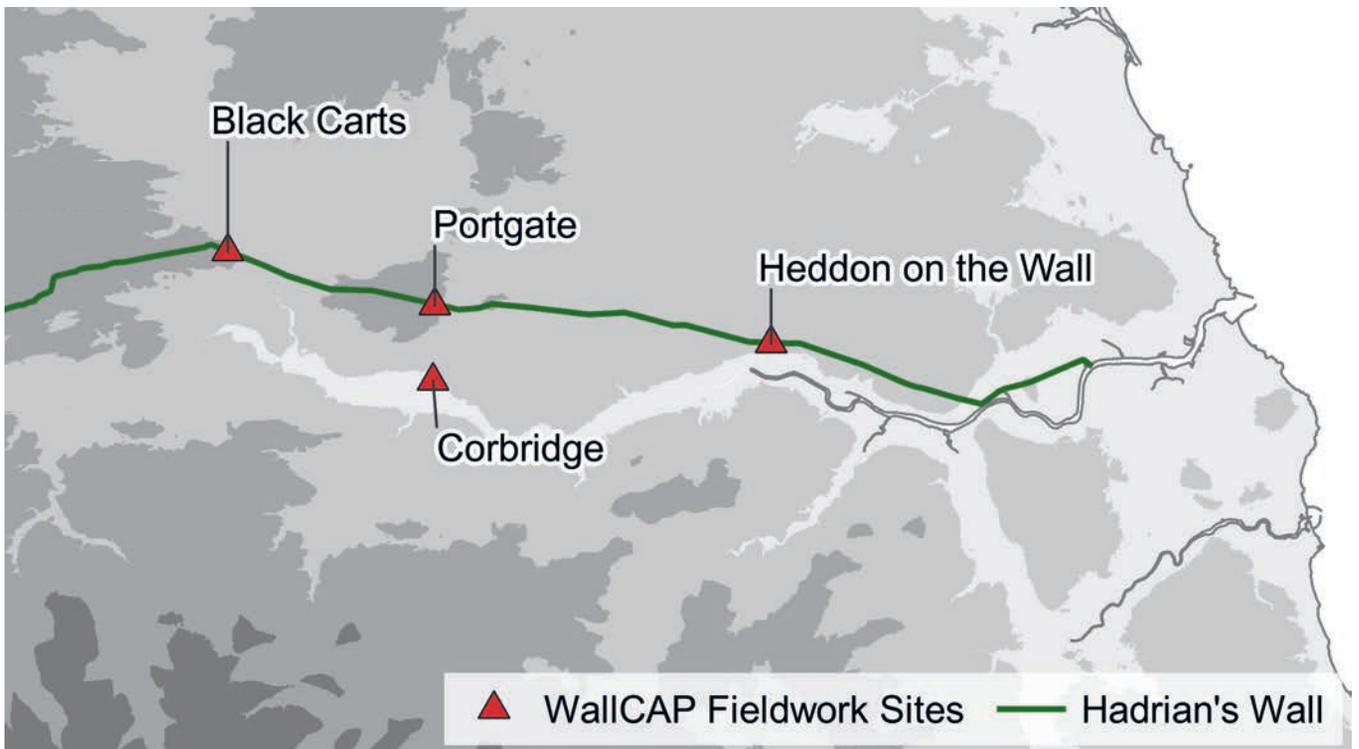


Map 2: A map showing the position of all Hadrian's Wall forts and sites mentioned in this volume. Map by Kathryn Murphy





Map 3: A map showing all WallCAP fieldwork sites. Map by Kathryn Murphy



Hadrian's Wall: an archaeological resource

David J. Breeze

Hadrian's Wall is a complex monument. It is composed of many tangible archaeological remains; some are better understood, and known to the world, than others. It is also composed of intangible elements, such as the many meanings the Wall holds for the institutions who care for it, researchers who study it and people who live alongside it or visit it. But what is the Wall, really? How much do we know about it? Is what we know 'enough'? And is the Wall safe? This chapter explores some of the key questions at the foundation of ensuring the future of Hadrian's Wall.

What is Hadrian's Wall?

This may seem an absurd question, but it is an important one. If we stand back from the line of the Wall, we can see that it sits in an extensive Roman military landscape. To the north, outpost forts reached into the land beyond the Cheviots. To the south, it can be argued that the military landscape's limits were the legionary bases at York and Chester. This was a military zone up to 200km deep, a unique frontier within the Roman Empire, of which Hadrian's Wall was but a part. Even if we reduce our horizons to the area of the Wall, we still have a complex monument. Its primary elements might be considered the linear barrier, consisting of a stone (and turf) wall and ditch, with miscellaneous military installations along its line (towers, milecastles and forts) linked by a road and possibly a track, as well as a great earthwork known from the time of the Venerable Bede as the Vallum to the south (Figure 1).

In addition, there are forts and towers situated close to the south of the Wall, but beyond the Vallum, also linked by a road, the Stanegate. Many of these forts and towers were built before the Wall itself and some continued to be occupied after its abandonment. To the east, there is at least the fort at South Shields, and to the west a series of forts, fortlets and towers continuing down the Cumbrian coast for about 40km.

When defining what Hadrian's Wall is, we also need to consider the ancillary elements such as the civilian settlements, which range in size from individual farmsteads to towns. All these features are embraced by the World Heritage Site (WHS), although, believe it or not, it does not include them all. Another factor we must remember is that beyond the WHS is a much broader buffer zone: an area designated to protect the setting of the archaeological remains. However, to most visitors, the 'Wall' is the linear barrier from Wallsend to Bowness-on-Solway, defined today by the National Trail. Even here we have a discrepancy, for the Trail does not run along the Wall for nearly 20km at its eastern end.

After this discussion, we must now make a choice: what parts of Hadrian's Wall will we be referring to in this volume? The focus, as discussed by the many contributors to this project, will be on Hadrian's Wall as an 'archaeological resource': a combination of tangible and intangible elements connected by the shared thread of archaeology and history. The various chapters in the volume discuss recent and future work on the Wall's linear barrier and the Vallum, and their immediately



Figure 1: Illustration of components of the Wall and defensive structures. © Mark Richards

associated features (towers, fortlets and forts), together with the Cumbrian coastal installations as far as Maryport to the south-west, with South Shields to the east and the 'Stanegate' sites to the south of the linear barrier. This definition of the Wall's extent does not exactly align with either the WHS boundaries or the National Trail. However, it is meaningful to the archaeologists, curators and researchers, as well as the many audiences who come in contact with the Wall every day: tourists, archaeology enthusiasts, walkers and others.

Before archaeological excavation: inscriptions and literary accounts

We are fortunate on Hadrian's Wall in that several inscriptions survive that record its construction under Hadrian, an occurrence not replicated on every frontier. These record the building of different elements, milecastles and forts on the Wall line and coastal forts to the west. In addition, the Vindolanda writing tablets provide an unparalleled view of life on the northern frontier in the immediate pre-Wall decades.

While stone-carved inscriptions continue to record life on the frontier, literary sources are largely silent on the history of the Wall. We might, for example, be informed of trouble in Britain, but we are not told where it occurred. We are told that a wall is crossed or that a certain enemy lived close to the wall, without it being specified which one. It is stated that Rome's neighbours to the north were belligerent, without any reference to a frontier. Two references stand out. In one, an anonymous commentator, writing about 250 years after the event, stated that in Britain Hadrian was the first to build a wall, eighty miles long, to separate the barbarians and the Romans. This is a succinct statement providing a date, length and purpose. Even so, this statement is not without difficulties: the writer may have been unconsciously offering a view relating to his times rather than those of Hadrian. Other late Roman writers record that the Emperor Septimius Severus ordered the construction of the Wall around AD 200-210, but give its length as 132 or 133 miles. The existence of these late references, six in number, confused later British antiquarians and led them to believe that what we now know to have been Hadrian's Wall was actually built nearly 100 years later.

This is not the place to offer a detailed account of knowledge and understanding of Hadrian's Wall through the Middle Ages and beyond. Suffice to say, it was not lost sight of and was mentioned in written sources and recorded on maps. A leap forward should have taken place as a result of the Renaissance, when study of the Roman and Greek texts was revitalised, and the invention of the printing press made them more readily available. Some perceptive commentators, Polydore Vergil in Italy, Hector Boece in Scotland and Humphrey Lhuyd in Wales, understood what they read and realised that Hadrian's Wall was indeed built by the emperor of that name. However, English xenophobia coupled with a too-heavy reliance on the many late Roman statements that the Wall was built by Severus ensured that the view that this emperor ordered its construction prevailed for another 300 years. As a result, the Vallum was seen as Hadrian's frontier and the Wall called Severus' Wall.

As a deeper understanding of the nature of the remains grew in the 17th century, the attempts to interpret them became more convoluted. It was John Hodgson, in 1840, who finally unravelled the mystery through a careful analysis of the literary references and the inscriptions, and concluded that it was indeed Hadrian who had ordered the construction of 'Severus' Wall'. He also stated that the whole barrier between Wallsend and Bowness, consisting of the Wall and the Vallum with all the forts and towers along its line 'were planned and executed by Hadrian'. It took until the end of the century to persuade the unbelievers, but Hodgson's view was to prevail.

The evidence of archaeology

John Hodgson's pioneering analysis and conclusions coincided with the first excavations on Hadrian's Wall. Anthony Hedley excavated at Vindolanda while Hodgson turned his attention to Housesteads. In 1832, John Clayton, town clerk at Newcastle upon Tyne and powerful political and cultural protagonist of his time, inherited the estate of Chesters on Hadrian's Wall. A decade later he started his archaeological investigations, which continued sporadically along the Wall over the next 50 years. Much was learnt during this early exploration phase, but there was no coherent planning. The main aim was to get down to the 'primary levels' and show the structures as they were under Hadrian. In effect they were creating their own view of Hadrian's Wall. Nowadays, we would leave all the remains *in situ* in spite of their complexity, not least for explaining them to visitors. Unfortunately, past actions resulted in much post-Hadrianic material being thrown away.

This was to change in the 1890s. The new excavators planned their campaigns and did not casually dispose of the post-Hadrianic levels but recorded them and, as for example at Great Chesters, preserved them for later study. J.P. Gibson, later in partnership with F.G. Simpson, sought to understand the structures, while Francis Haverfield examined the earthworks, primarily the Vallum. This was the start of modern excavation. It led, over the next 40 years, to a basic understanding of the building sequence and the chronological history of Hadrian's Wall. Those then working on the Wall, and primarily Ian Richmond, declared that they had solved all of its problems, though of course what they meant was that they had solved the problems that interested them.

As so often is the case with archaeology, it was a new excavation that led to new thinking. In the case of Hadrian's Wall, the excavations of Michael Jarrett at Halton Chesters in the 1950s became the catalyst for change. Jarrett's discoveries did not accord neatly with the accepted history of Hadrian's Wall, which had held the field since the beginning of the century. Gradually, the evidence was re-examined and by the 1970s new interpretations were advanced.

Jarrett had been following a well-travelled path: the investigation of perceived problems in his predecessors' excavations. That approach was to change radically with the advent of rescue excavations – digging and exploration conducted ahead of building and development. In other words, rescue archaeology led to the excavation of many sites that were not on anyone's programme for research on Hadrian's Wall, but were instead excavated because they were threatened by new developments. Rescue excavations led to radical new discoveries, of which perhaps the most significant was the uncovering of pits on the berm of Hadrian's Wall. These were first recognised to the north of the civil settlement at Wallsend in 1991 and might be explained as relating to the defence of that site. However, further discoveries some kilometres to the west in 2000, and then 16km beyond them, forced a radical reappraisal, and a challenge to existing interpretations of the way Hadrian's Wall 'worked'. The argument now lay between those who believed that the existence of the pits (and their original contents, presumably stakes) reinforced the view that Hadrian's Wall was built for military defence, and bore a walkway along its top, and others who suggested that the discovery indicated that there was no wall-walk and therefore Hadrian's Wall was not defended as might be a Roman fort, or a medieval castle. More than any discussion of its implications, the discovery of the pits underlined the possibility that there might be other remains along the Wall which are as yet unknown, and that a potent challenge to our understanding of Hadrian's Wall is only one excavation away.

Rescue excavations, and the gaps in our archaeological forefathers' studies, are enough to show that there are many areas where our knowledge of the Wall and its functioning is woefully inadequate. Our understanding of the western sector of the Wall is very limited. Our appreciation of the later

history of most sites is quite simply inadequate. Archaeologists, curators, researchers, visitors, interested parties: we all still find it difficult to determine the function of the Vallum. We argue about how Hadrian's Wall operated and the significance of its various elements. In conclusion, we are still on a steep learning curve when it comes to understanding how Hadrian's Wall was intended to operate within the physical, military, civilian and religious landscapes in which it sat, both when it was originally constructed and in later times.

Is Hadrian's Wall 'safe'?

Today, the archaeology of Hadrian's Wall is well-protected. Its remains, where unencumbered by modern developments, are scheduled as ancient monuments. Many kilometres and many elements are in state care or in the care or ownership of local authorities or trusts. The remains below modern developments are protected under the planning legislations, although, unlike on the Antonine Wall in Scotland, these remains are not part of the WHS. Also not part of the WHS are the artefacts and collections recovered from excavations on Hadrian's Wall and its buffer zone – but despite this, they are well cared for by the many museum authorities operating along the Wall.

International recognition of the importance of the monument is a further element in its protection. However, there will always be what might be regarded as occasional threats to the Wall. These include roads and the traffic they bear. Pipelines can be thrust bored below the archaeological remains. Climate change is also likely to affect them, not least through changes to the hydrology of the area, as discussed in Chapter 2 by Birley and O'Meara. Other challenges include over-visiting, managing responsible tourism and the upkeep of the National Trail, as discussed in Chapter 11 by McGlade, Pickles and Richards, and the dangers posed by metal-detecting.

Most threats to the Wall's 'safety' are related to organised human activities. For example, metal-detectorists often seek 'treasure' in the ground, unaware or unconcerned of the damage thereby created for the surrounding archaeological remains. Tourism is a major factor in the British economy, important to ensuring the economic well-being of the people living in the Wall zone and even, in certain cases, the sustainability of continued research. How do we strike a balance between 'using' and 'exploring' an archaeological resource, and protecting it for future generations? The National Trail is an encouragement for more people to visit the Wall and walk along it but can also be seen as a challenge to the walker (or runner) rather than an exploration of one of the most important Roman frontiers in the world. Along many kilometres of its length, the Trail runs on top of archaeological remains. Erosion by footfall, especially during wetter times of the year, has led in places to the replacement of worn grass by a gravel path- this may seem like a positive intervention, ensuring the safety of the visitor, but it may also be seen as affecting the archaeological levels and/or the look of the monument. All these factors do not just relate to the management of the monument, but are important for the archaeologists, and for you, the reader of this book, as every action has an effect on the archaeological resource, through which we can learn more about life on Hadrian's Wall.

Finally, an important part of an archaeological excavation is its publication: putting archaeological knowledge in writing, in a form that can be understood and discussed at a later date. Without publication, the field work is not fully known, indeed sometimes not known at all, and certainly not available for reconsideration and adaptation to new research. Hadrian's Wall has not always been well served by its excavators: too often finds have remained lurking in museum stores, and its records in archives, as highlighted by McIntosh and Price in Chapter 6. However, over the last 40 to 50 years there has been a concerted and mostly successful drive to publish all available material. Many of the excavation reports and the discussion papers relating to Hadrian's Wall are published in the journals of the two local archaeological societies, the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne and the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society. These

societies, and others, have improved access to their published material through its digitisation and uploading online.

As a result of these initiatives, the vast archaeological archive that is Hadrian's Wall has been made more accessible to students and researchers, as well as archaeologists, developers and visitors. This database is now more available for the testing of existing theories as well as for the exploration of new areas of research such as the effects of colonialism on our interpretation of the Wall.

How much information is enough?

The modern era of archaeological excavation on the Wall only began 130 years ago, and archaeologists had to learn how to obtain the most information from the ground. At first, excavations were primitive by modern standards and too often the small size of the area examined led archaeologists to reach the wrong conclusions. That said, some excavations, such as the investigation of MC 48 (Poltross Burn) in 1909 by J.P. Gibson and F.G. Simpson, were exemplary and, in many ways, not surpassed for 60 years. Charles Daniels' near complete excavation of the fort at Wallsend demonstrated how much more could be learnt through large-scale area excavation about the history of the fort and the life of the soldiers within it. That said, only at Vindolanda have archaeologists investigated a fort in its wider setting through the exploration of the civilian community in the shadow of its walls.

Paul Bidwell has emphasised how little excavation has actually taken place on Hadrian's Wall in relation to the whole monument: less than 5% of the whole frontier has been explored. Excavation, however, is expensive because it is labour intensive. This problem has been somewhat ameliorated through modern scientific techniques, including aerial photography and geophysics, the latter discussed in Chapter 3 by Wilmott. Although some work was undertaken before 1939, it was in the late 1940s that aerial photographing techniques took off. Geophysics, from a base set in about 1970, has been able to 'see' under the grass and plot ditches, roads and buildings, but it cannot date them; only excavation will do that. In the last decade or so a new technique is LiDAR, which is short for 'laser imaging, detection, and ranging'. This will allow examination of the landscape under trees and reveal minor changes in the ground surface, but again only excavation can date these discoveries.

Excavation can, and increasingly does, go hand in hand with geophysics and surveying. For example, a detailed survey of Maryport by TimeScape Surveys yielded a plan of the civil settlement outside the fort, far more detailed than that provided by aerial survey. The geophysical survey was extended well beyond the limits of the settlement in order to ensure that our assumptions about its size were correct. This led to the unexpected discovery of a farmstead beyond its boundaries, just a few metres from the Roman urban community. Excavation of a single house and its yard in the civil settlement followed, providing unique information about the life of the soldiers' dependants. We can also learn about communities on the Wall in new ways, such as with isotope analysis, which can provide evidence of where these people – and their animals – originated. Through new technologies, we can come closer than ever before to the people who lived on Hadrian's Wall.

It is sometimes easy to forget that archaeology is an iterative process – it thrives on being done again, and again. New ideas have to be tested against existing knowledge and the sheer size of the Hadrian's Wall database allows that process to be carried out effectively. Furthermore, ideas don't just change on Hadrian's Wall, but also elsewhere. New thoughts and ideas from other fields, and other geographical locations, have to be measured against our collective knowledge of the Wall. The relationships between soldiers and civilians and whether women might live within forts is an example of an issue being discussed across the whole Roman Empire, as is the question of when and why civil settlements outside forts came to an end. The effect of the Roman military presence on the British countryside and its inhabitants also resonates beyond the Channel. Understanding

the effectiveness of Hadrian's Wall as a frontier and how it operated in relation to other Roman frontiers relates to discussions about the nature of the Roman Empire. Such areas of discussion rise and fall in archaeological and historical debate and can be blown off course by new discoveries. In short, while the information we already have is certainly 'enough' to build theories and further our knowledge of life on the Wall, in concert with new theories and technologies, the decision to stop unearthing more information is more complex than it looks. What if, by not continuing to explore, we were missing crucial pieces of the puzzle?

The national and international importance of Hadrian's Wall

In 1987 Hadrian's Wall was the first Roman frontier to become a WHS. It was followed by the Upper German and Raetian frontier and the Antonine Wall in Scotland. Many other countries are actively preparing the nominations for their frontiers. The aim is to bring World Heritage status to all the frontiers of the Roman Empire. This would provide a tremendous boost to research across all Roman frontiers, including Hadrian's Wall, and therefore improved understanding of their history and operation. The long and detailed process of seeking to understand Hadrian's Wall, which has now been in progress for several centuries, ensures a key place for this 'first' WHS frontier in its wider context.

There are, of course, challenges in this international project. In some ways these mirror the challenges of working on Hadrian's Wall, not least the fragmentary nature of the management structure and its distance from the centres of power in the UK. Furthermore, World Heritage status is only awarded to monuments; museums are not yet embraced by the concept, despite containing the items which help us understand frontiers. These include the inscriptions which date the monument and inform us about actions performed on its various parts; the pottery and finds which help us understand life on the frontier, not least the relations between soldiers and civilians; and the closing days of frontier life. It would be good to have a more holistic approach to sites and museums, between installations in the field and artefacts in the museum. This is recognised by all archaeologists and cultural managers working on the Wall, and the great database which is Hadrian's Wall allows many of these aspirations to be achieved.

It is not enough, of course, to seek to understand Hadrian's Wall in our time. It has to be protected for future generations and interpreted for its visitors. At the same time, local communities and businesses whose lives and jobs rely on tourism deserve a more participatory and inclusive approach to managing the monument. The long history of protecting the Wall, ensuring the preservation of its archaeological remains and its setting, as well interpreting it from the middle of the 19th century onwards, means that modern cultural resource managers bring to any discussion not only their own considerable knowledge and experience, but also that of those who came before us. The importance of Hadrian's Wall today is indeed multifaceted and complex.