

Historic Environment Report for November Forum

What must be a record 31 members filled the room at Enterprise House for our November meeting where Tim Meacham gave a talk on Hadrian's Wall, then and now. This featured photos taken over the last fifty or so years giving a taste of what today's visitor can expect. We started with a look at the situation of the Roman Empire in the first century AD and the events which led to the building of the wall. This was a turbulent time illustrated by the fact that the first nine Emperors all met gory ends, either at the hands of their friends, soldiers, step-sons, wives or, in one case, themselves!

In 122 AD following yet another uprising in Britain, the 15th Emperor, Hadrian paid a quick visit, left instructions for a 73 mile wall to be built from east to west, then left Britain never to return. He never saw the wall despite it bearing his name to this day. It is interesting that this mammoth task was completed and in full use within six years (although with shades of our recent HS2, not without economies along the way). Hadrian's successor Antoninus Pius decommissioned the wall after a mere 14 years, preferring to build his own (the Antonine Wall) between the Forth and Clyde estuaries in 142. This however lasted only 20 years (trouble with Scots) after which Hadrian's Wall was reinstated and generally remained in use until the Romans left Britain in the early 400s AD.



We then looked at the structure of the wall. The Romans were very organised and placed a Mile Castle holding 20-40 men every mile along the wall. Between these were situated two equidistant turrets each manned by about 8 soldiers; lastly full forts were provided every 14 miles or so between Wallsend in the east and Bowness-on-Solway west of Carlisle. These forts each held some 5,600 soldiers, the whole system meaning that any unexpected incursions could be dealt with immediately.

Finally we took a tour along the wall. Those wishing to visit a fort today should probably choose Housesteads, while Chesters has the best museum of inscriptions. South Shields, although not technically served by the wall has the best reconstructions and should not be missed. Several members present recognised themselves on a photo of our 2018 visit, 'worshipping' in the Temple of Mithras which sits just outside Carrawburgh fort. We hope to visit other sites with a group trip during Summer 2025. There will be no December meeting

but our regular 'bring a memory' meeting will be the next one to be held at Enterprise House in January.

Tim Meacham