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978-0-521-09315-6 - The Frontier People of Roman Britain

Peter Salway

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ROMAN BRITAIN

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THE FRONTIER PEOPLE OF ROMAN BRITAIN

BY
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*Fellow of All Souls College,
Oxford*



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To

GILLIAN, ANNE *and* JANE

*. . . we drank a bottle of wine, to the memory of
the founders; then poured some of the red juice
into the fountainhead, to the Nymph of the place.*

STUKELEY

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(Photograph: J. K. S. St Joseph. Crown Copyright reserved)

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PREFACE

To evoke the spirit of the past is as much the function of the archaeologist as of the historian: indeed it is not so much that the functions of the two are complementary as that they cannot be separated. The material background is the essential framework without which an age cannot be understood. In this study of the frontier region of Roman Britain the frame and canvas are inevitably more complete than the picture itself. Yet the broken utterances of epigraphy, the mould of the law and the dim traces of religion are touches of the brush that build up an impressionistic if faded and cracked picture which, if viewed too closely, will seem out of focus and incomplete in detail, but which conveys at least an atmosphere. Moreover, a knowledge of the Roman style allows us to understand much of the design. Nor is this metaphor from art inapposite, for we are dealing with the work of men with the power, knowledge and will to shape a state according to a definite pattern.

For the most part we can only guess at the thoughts and feelings of the people who are my subject, but every now and then, in the wording of a tombstone perhaps, we catch a glimpse of personal and individual humanity. I shall have cause to go into detail, to enumerate statistics and to analyse the material remains in the archaeological manner, yet I hope that it will be clear throughout that human beings are the essential subject of the inquiry. Indeed it would be pointless were it otherwise.

That is the ultimate justification for studying any society in the past. Yet there are other reasons also for investigating this particular field. Admittedly the civilians of the frontier region can hardly be considered the highest products of their age. Their art was largely lamentable, their architecture undistinguished, their culture measured by the standards of their time fairly low, their output of anything above the needs of daily life mostly lost if indeed much ever existed. Yet it was behind the screen formed by the Roman army and its dependent civilians that the mighty culture of the Roman world existed. The perpetuation of the Roman imperial ideal, the

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creation of Roman imperial architecture, the development of Roman law into an oecumenical force, the survival of classical art and literature and the spread of the Christian faith could not have happened but for the existence of these people on the perimeter of the empire. Moreover, in themselves they represent for Britain something new: nearly four centuries of a cosmopolitan society with the basic elements of true civilization—an altogether greater magnitude of security, personal freedom, justice, literacy and prosperity than at any previous time or for many centuries to come.

Nor were they people without character. Here were the homes and families of that tough, proud and sometimes turbulent army of Britain that from time to time erupted on to the stage of world politics. In contemplating the relative poverty of their culture and their relative obscurity in the literary picture of the ancient world, we must not underestimate the importance of these formidable people.

Every author with a spark of conscience must make the usual acknowledgements to his mentors and colleagues at this point. I propose to take the rather unusual course of acknowledging first my debt of gratitude to the antiquaries of the past. So much of what they saw and recorded has now disappeared that it is not an exaggeration to say that their observations are a primary source for this book. But their work has more than an informative value. It has been a considerable personal pleasure to visit sites for the same object as these men who so obviously enjoyed what they were doing. Stukeley and Gale who ‘laboured hard at the inscriptions [at Housesteads], and made out what we could of them under all disadvantages’, or Horsley who interrogated his landlord at Greta Bridge (or, more likely, dutifully listened to the favourite local theory on the ruins) are sympathetic characters to the modern field-archaeologist. I am left in wonder at the prodigious amount these men managed to see before the days of car and aircraft or even of railway. It is easy to dismiss their books as of no importance in the light of modern archaeological advances or to treat them merely as matters of antiquarian interest. Yet not only their observation but

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also their interpretation is worth serious attention, and on the civil settlements much of their work is exceedingly sound.

Remarkably little has been done in Britain to investigate the civilian population of the frontier. One short but important paper written a quarter of a century ago,¹ notes in a recent paper² and an unpublished undergraduate thesis on a fraction of the sites,³ that is substantially the total. I have, of course, to acknowledge my debt to numerous foreign scholars for their patient work on the frontiers, notably Mommsen, Bohn and Mócsy. Their detailed work was on the continental material, and it has been a considerable part of my task to examine their discussions and to apply the results to the problems of Britain. In the process, it has become clear that this province has much to offer the continental student in return, especially in material securely dated by reliable excavation and from aerial photography. Much is derived from the published reports which here, as in any archaeological study, must be treated as primary sources. Sometimes it has been necessary to re-interpret these in the light of more recent knowledge, a technique which can have useful results if the original work was well done and well reported, though no substitute for re-excavation. In certain instances I have used unpublished reports, notes and verbal information and I am especially grateful to the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey and to Professor Birley for assistance in gaining access to these sources.

Since a main purpose of the book is to assemble the reliable evidence for civilians, particular attention has been paid to eliminating doubtful instances. This has inevitably led to the omission of many sites and inscriptions where the presence of civilians may legitimately be suspected but where the evidence is insufficient for reasonable certainty. The criteria for accepting or rejecting material purporting to represent civilian activity will appear in the course of the inquiry.

Wherever possible I have inspected the site, monument, small

¹ Birley, *AA* (4), xii, 205 ff.

² Richmond, *Roman and Native in North Britain*, 112 ff.

³ Merrix, B.A. dissertation, Durham.

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find or written source myself and made my own records of it. The illustrations form an important part of the evidence. Two plans (Figs. 5, 8) devised from oblique aerial photographs by a method suggested by Dr J. K. S. St Joseph are included both for their direct relevance and as an indication of a technique which has possibilities outside the immediate subject. Aerial photographs are also reproduced in the plates, and are derived from the collections of the University of Cambridge and of King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne (now the University of Newcastle upon Tyne). Those from Cambridge were taken by Dr J. K. S. St Joseph, Director in Aerial Photography (to whom I am grateful for permission to use them) and are subject to Crown copyright; those from Newcastle were taken by myself, the negatives being the property of the University.

The comparative material from other provinces was largely collected during fieldwork and reading in 1955 and 1956 under the kindly auspices of the Römisch-Germanische Kommission, to whose lately retired Director Professor Gerhard Bersu and his staff I am much indebted. The full co-operation of the majority of the museums and other institutions visited is also much appreciated. It is probably inevitable that many ideas, suggestions and references should emerge in conversation, and wherever possible I have given credit where it is due (though it is often difficult to decide who was responsible for a particular point). To those I have forgotten, I would apologize and recognise my debt.

For detailed help and criticism I owe special thanks to Professors E. Birley, A. H. M. Jones, I. A. Richmond and J. M. C. Toynbee, to Dr J. K. S. St Joseph and Mr J. P. Gillam and, for making the index, to my wife.

The work for this book was carried out with the generous aid of fellowships, studentships and grants from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, the University of Cambridge (Sandys, Henry Arthur Thomas and Craven Funds) and King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne (Sir James Knott Fellowship).

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Note. From the necessity of restricting the geographical area dealt with in this book I have not taken into account the central Pennines south of the Stainmore Pass. There can be no doubt that, as with Wales, there is need for a separate study of the civil settlements of that area. A cursory examination suggests that conditions may be found to be rather different from those closer to the frontier line.

The typescript of this book was delivered to the publisher in October 1961. Such modification of the text as has been possible in the proof stages in 1964 and 1965 is signified by the use of square brackets. The proofs of the line drawings were corrected in the course of 1963 and the figures therefore do not take account of additions made to the text in the final stages.

NOTE TO THE SECOND IMPRESSION

Collingwood and Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, Vol. I, appeared after this book first went to press. Reprinting has permitted minor corrections to be made and I have taken the opportunity of modifying certain entries in the catalogue of inscriptions and sculptures (6, 8, 24, 25), but have not attempted a complete collation with *RIB*. For a correction to (112) I am grateful to the reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 17 February, 1966.

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For permission to reproduce illustrations I am grateful to the following: the Air Ministry and the Director in Aerial Photography for plates I, VI, VII, VIII; Alec Tiranti Ltd for plate II (from *Furniture in Roman Britain* by Joan Liversidge); the Editor of the *Journal of Roman Studies* for plate IV(a) and figure 11; the Editor of *Archaeologia Aeliana* for plates III, IV(b), V and figures 5, 8, 10.

I am also grateful to the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office for permission to base figures 1 and 4 on the Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain (3rd ed.) and the Ordnance Survey 1,625,000 Physical Map of Great Britain respectively; and to Alec Tiranti Ltd and the Editors of the *Journal of Roman Studies* and *Archaeologia Aeliana* for generously loaning blocks. Kind assistance over illustrations was provided by Dr John Mann, Mr Wilfred Dodds, Dr David Smith, Dr Robert Hogg and Mr David R. Wilson, which I am glad to acknowledge.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AA** *Archaeologia Aeliana*, ser. 1–4, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Acta Arch. Acad. Scient. Hung.** *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Budapest.
- AE** *l'Année Epigraphique*, Paris.
- Ant. J.** *Antiquaries Journal*, London.
- Anz. öst. Akad. Wiss.** *Anzeiger d. österreich. Akad. d. Wissenschaft: phil.-hist. Klasse*, Vienna.
- Arch. Camb.** *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, Cardiff.
- Arch. Ért.** *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, Budapest.
- BGU** *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Museen zu Berlin. Griechische Urkunden*.
- Black Gate cat.** (see Bibliography to Part II, under Collingwood, R. G.)
- BM Cotton Iulius F. VI** (Camden papers, British Museum, published by F. Haverfield, *CW* (2) xi, 1911, 343 ff.)
- Bonn. Jhb.** *Bonner Jahrbücher*. Bonn.
- Caerleon cat.** (see Bibliography to Part I, under Nash-Williams, V. E. and A. H.)
- Chesters cat.** (see Bibliography to Part II, under Budge, E. A. W.)
- CIG** *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, Berlin, 1828–77.
- CIL** *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, 1863, in progress.
- Cod. Just.** *The Code of Justinian*.
- Cod. Theod.** *The Code of Theodosius*.
- CW** *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, ser. 1, 2, Kendal.
- Dig.** *The Digest of Justinian*.
- DN** *Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland*, Durham.
- Dumfr. & Gall.** *Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society: Transactions and Journal of Proceedings*, Dumfries.
- EE** *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, Berlin, 1872–1913.
- Gent. Mag.** *Gentleman's Magazine*, London, 1732–1922.
- Germania** *Germania: Anzeiger d. röm.-germ. Kommission d. deutsch. archäol. Inst.* (formerly *Korrespondenzblatt* . . .), Bamberg, Frankfurt a. M.
- ILS** Dessau, H. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, Berlin, 1892–1916.
- JBAA** *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, London.
- JRS** *Journal of Roman Studies*, London.

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- Lancs. & Ches. Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Liverpool.
- LS Bruce, J. C. *Lapidarium Septentrionale, or a Description of the Monuments of Roman Rule in the North of England*, London and Newcastle upon Tyne, 1875.
- Latomus* Collection Latomus—*Revue d'Études Latines*, Brussels.
- Mz. *Zeitschr. Mainzer Zeitschrift: Zeitschrift des Röm.-Germ. Zentralmuseums und des Vereins zur Erforschung der rheinischen Geschichte und Altertümer*, Mainz.
- Nat. Hist. Trans. *Natural History Transactions of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle-on-Tyne*, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- NCH *A History of Northumberland* (Northumberland County History), Newcastle upon Tyne, 1893–1940.
- Netherhall cat.* (see Bibliography to Part II, under Bailey, J. B. and Haverfield, F.)
- ORL *Der obergermanisch-rätische Limes des Römerreiches*, Heidelberg, Berlin and Leipzig, 1894–1936.
- Philos. Trans. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, London.
- Philos. Trans, Abridg'd* Lowthorp, J. (a series) *The Philosophical Transactions and Collections. . . Abridg'd . . .*, London.
- PSAL *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, London.
- PSAN *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne*, ser. 1–4, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- PSAS *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Edinburgh.
- Rav. *Ravenna Cosmography* (cf. Bibliography to Part I, under Richmond, I. A. and Crawford, O. G. S.).
- RCHM Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.
- RW (1–3) Bruce, J. C. *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, Newcastle upon Tyne, (1) 1863 (Wallet-book. . .); (2) 1884; (3) 1885.
- RW (6) Blair, R. (ed.) Bruce, *Handbook*, (6), Newcastle upon Tyne, 1909.
- RW (9) Collingwood, R. G. (ed.) Bruce, *Handbook*, (9), Newcastle upon Tyne, 1933.
- RW (11) Richmond, I. A. (ed.) Bruce, *Handbook*, (11), Newcastle upon Tyne, 1957.
- RWS (2) Macdonald, Sir George, *The Roman Wall in Scotland*, (2), Oxford, 1934.
- Saalb.-Jhb. Saalburg-Jahrbuch: Bericht des Saalburgmuseums*, Frankfurt a. M.
- Tullie House cat.* (see Bibliography to Part II, under Haverfield, F.)
- YC *Y Cymmrodor*, London.

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NOTE

The inscriptions and sculptured stones are collected in the Appendix. References to these throughout the book are in the form e.g. (15). Aerial photographs in the collection of the Cambridge Committee for Aerial Photography are referred to by their serial numbers with the prefix 'Cambridge'. The detailed site-descriptions (which the general reader will probably wish to skip) assume their reader to have access to the relevant Ordnance Survey six-inch maps.