The last battle

The dull blast of a horn signalled the end of the fourth watch. The smouldering embers of a thousand camp fires, fanned by the cool morning breeze, glowed in the half-light. The night sentries relaxed at their posts waiting to be relieved. Soon soldiers were emerging from their tents yawning and shivering as they kicked over the embers and added wood to cook their breakfast.

The soldiers had been late to bed the previous night as they relived the fears and excitement of the day, glorifying their exploits and mourning the death of their comrades – for they had won a great victory.

The Roman governor, Agricola, had finally brought the Caledonians to bay and defeated them decisively at Mons Graupius in the summer of AD 83. Victory had come only after months of fruitless campaigning. Four regiments of Batavian soldiers and two regiments of Tungrians had led the charge. These soldiers were not Romans; they were auxiliaries, tribesmen from the frontier of the Roman empire who served with the Roman army. Wooden forts, manned by these auxiliary regiments, were built at strategic points after the battle to keep the newly conquered peoples under control.

This book is about one of these regiments, the First Tungrian Cohort (Cohors I Tungrorum), an eight hundred strong infantry unit, and the forts it occupied. The First Tungrian Cohort was larger than standard size and may have garrisoned the large fort at Fendoch near Perth covering the entrance to Glen Almond. Later the regiment occupied the fort at Vindolanda and finally Housteads on Hadrian's Wall.
The north-west frontier

The Romans invaded Britain in AD 43. Only the south-eastern part of the country was occupied at first but the new province was gradually extended to include Wales and the north. The governor Agricola tried to complete the conquest of the island between AD 78 and 83, advancing up towards the Moray Firth where he won the battle of Mons Graupius.

While Agricola was conquering northern Britain the Romans had crossed the Rhine into southern Germany occupying the Taunus mountains and the Black forest. But in AD 85 the Dacians, living in the area now called Romania, crossed the Danube and defeated the Roman army there. Troops had to be withdrawn from Britain and Germany to meet the emergency and the advance in both countries was stopped. A chain of forts was established in the newly conquered German territory and the legions were pulled back beyond the Rhine.

A similar withdrawal was ordered in Scotland. Legion XX, which had probably been building a new base at Inchtuthil, north of Perth, moved back to Chester and Legion IX returned to York. Legion II Augusta occupied Caerleon in Wales while Legion II Adiutrix was withdrawn and posted to the Danube.

A new frontier zone, controlled by auxiliary regiments, was established in the Southern Uplands of Scotland centred on a large fort at Newstead with supporting units further south along the Roman road, known as the Stanegate, running between Carlisle and Corbridge. The First Tungrian Cohort withdrew to Vindolanda (Chesterholm) on the Stanegate. But it soon moved again.

Trajan, on becoming emperor in AD 98, began preparing for the conquest of the Dacians. More troops were withdrawn from Britain and the forts in the southern uplands of Scotland had to be abandoned. The First Tungrian Cohort returned to Vindolanda where a larger fort had to be built as a cohort of Batavians was already there.
Below: the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire (red line) in the second century AD. The frontier in Britain alternated between Hadrian's Wall (H-H) and the Antonine Wall (A-A). The frontier in southern Germany (below right) was just a chain of forts and watch towers. Hadrian moved the southern part of the line forward and erected a fence to control the Germans.

1. ditch
2. rampart
3. headquarters
4. barracks
5. commanding officer
6. granary
7. workshops etc.
8. gate

Frontier forts
The Roman word for a fort, castellum, means a fortified site where a small unit of soldiers were posted. Such forts were defended by a turf rampart or wall fronted by one or more ditches. During the great conquest period (210 BC-AD 107) forts varied greatly in both shape and size. After this forts were generally rectangular with rounded corners like a playing card and held between 200 and 800 men.

Inside the fort
The layout was almost always the same with two main streets dividing up the camp. The via praetoria led from the front gate to the headquarters (principia) and the via principalis joined the two side gates passing in front of the principia. The principia faced the junction of the two roads. The commanding officer's house (praetorium) was next to it. The soldiers' barracks were at the front (praetentura) and at the back (reventura) of the fort.
The Batavians and Tungrians at Vindolanda

The Batavians and Tungrians were Germanic tribes living near the mouth of the Rhine. Both supplied the Roman army with auxiliary troops. They had revolted against Rome in AD 69 and, when the revolt was put down, several Batavian and Tungrian cohorts appear to have been sent to Britain to get them out of the way. Later Agricola used these troops to spear-head his invasion of the north. Four Batavians and two Tungrian cohorts fought in the front line at the battle of Mons Graupius but the Roman historian Tacitus does not say which cohorts these were. The earliest evidence for the First Tungrian Cohort in Britain comes from a document found at Vindolanda which lists the number of men in the unit. This strength report, written on a wooden tablet, can be dated to about AD 90.

Having decided to regroup his forces along the Stanegate road the governor ordered the legions to build the necessary forts. Building was the job of the legions which possessed all kinds of craftsmen. The area was cleared and levelled, surveyors carefully marking out the two main roads and the various buildings – the headquarters, the commander’s house, the barrack blocks, and the storehouses, workshops, stables etc.

Some legionaries dug the fortification ditches and stripped turf from the whole area to build the rampart. Others collected timber for the towers, gates, palisades and the interior buildings of the fort. They cut down the birch trees that grew plentifully in the area dragging them back to the fort where the carpenters set up their trestles and began cutting the timber to shape.

The defences complete, the legionaries began work on the interior buildings, constructing a skeleton of thick wooden posts filled in with wattle and daub. Finally each building was covered with thick plaster and painted to look like a stone building.
Exciting discoveries
The excavation of the wooden fort at Vindolanda has brought to light a mass of everyday things used in a Roman fort. The waterlogged site has preserved hundreds of leather and wooden items. Dozens of shoes for men, women and children have been discovered as well as pieces of tents, horse equipment and woollen garments. But the most exciting finds are over eight hundred wooden writing tablets giving invaluable information about life in the fort. These documents have given us the names of the units at the fort and their officers.
Hadrian's Wall

Trajan greatly extended the Roman empire, conquering Dacia (Romania), Armenia and Mesopotamia. The great conqueror died in AD 117 leaving the empire to Hadrian. Hadrian wanted to consolidate the empire. He stopped all further conquest and withdrew from Armenia and Mesopotamia. Now, for the first time, the Romans established fixed frontiers.

Hadrian visited many of the frontier provinces. In Britain he ordered the building of the great wall that bears his name. Built just north of the Stanegate, it stretched for 120km from the Solway Firth to the Tyne estuary.

The legions moved in dividing the area between them. The Second took the Vindolanda area. Traces of its work camps can be seen along the Stanegate, some being visible west of Vindolanda (see p.10).

The centurions appear to have moved into the fort itself where they could sleep in comfort while their men lived in tents. The wall was planned to be three metres wide and about five metres high. a fortlet was built every 1,500 metres with two turrets or watch towers in between. These fortlets, usually called mile castles, formed defended gateways through the wall.

Some legionaries dug the ditch, eight metres wide and three metres deep, in front of the wall whilst others quarried stone for the wall. The foundations of the whole wall were laid first. The fortlets and intervening turrets were completed next with a few metres of wall on either side of them. At this point there was a change of plan; the width was reduced to two and a half metres.

The cohorts manning the forts along the Stanegate took no part in building the wall but they might have helped dig the so called vallum. This was a ditch six metres wide and three metres deep excavated along the south side of the wall to define the military zone. The vallum is usually only a short distance back from the wall leaving just enough space for the marching road which joined all the fortlets and turrets.
**Building technique**

Hadrian's Wall has outer facings of rough cut stone with a core of rubble and mortar. The stone courses generally run parallel to the ground but the stones had to be laid in horizontal courses when the wall climbed a very steep incline. Only the gateways in the forts and milecastles are made of carefully cut masonry.

**Was the wall plastered?**

The Romans plastered everything, leaving only the finely cut masonry uncovered. The wall was probably plastered and painted with red lines to look like square cut masonry. Such painted plaster has been discovered in Germany. The plaster would only have covered the rough cut stone leaving the gateways clear.

**Milecastles**

The milecastles, built at regular intervals of one Roman mile (1500 metres), served as fortified crossing points. Some milecastles have gateways that are considerably thicker than their adjoining walls (see opposite), implying that they supported a tower above the gate. Others, such as milecastle 37 just west of Housesteads, have much slimmer gates which could only have supported a very narrow tower. The choice seems to have depended on which legion built it; the Second Legion seems to have preferred the narrow type.
The auxiliaries move up

At some point after the foundations of the wall had been laid there was another change of plan. Probably a new governor had decided to 'do it his way'. The governor decided the forts along the Stanegate were too far away to service the wall and he ordered new forts to be built along the wall. One of these new forts was at Housesteads, three kilometres north-east of Vindolanda. We know that this move was a change of plan because a turret and a short stretch of wall had to be demolished to make room for the new fort. The foundations of the wall turret are clearly visible within the northern part of the fort.

We do not know which cohort garrisoned the fort at Housesteads first but the fort was built to house a 800-strong unit. The First Tungrian cohort was such a unit and it certainly garrisoned Housesteads in the third century. For the purposes of this book it will be assumed that the unit moved straight from Vindolanda to Housesteads.

The fort at Housesteads was built on a steep, windswept slope. The main source of water for the fort was a small stream, the Knag Burn, running down a valley a hundred metres east of the fort. One of the fatigue of the soldiers must have been carrying innumerable buckets of water up the steep slope to replenish the cisterns in the fort. The barrack blocks, arranged lengthways along the slope, were built on stone foundations possibly with the upper part made of timber, wattle and daub. The forts like the wall were built by the legionaries. One of the internal buildings at Housesteads, the commander's house (praetorium), was erected on a very steep slope and took considerable engineering skill to build.

Most of the camp followers would have moved up to the wall with the cohort and set up their village (vicus) outside the walls but some appear to have stayed behind in the more pleasant climate at Vindolanda which continued to be used periodically by different units.
The Housesteads/Vindolanda area.
1. Housesteads fort.
2. Housesteads parade ground.
5. Knag Burn.
6, 7, 8 Milecastles.
13. Vindolanda parade ground.
14, 15, 16. Large Roman camps.
17, 18. Small practice camps.
19. Marching camp.
20. Stanegate.
21. Signal station, probably used to relay messages from the mile castles and turrets to Housesteads and Vindolanda.
The soldiers

The Roman army was made up of two types of soldier, legionaries and auxiliaries. Legionaries were Roman citizens. Auxiliaries were frontier people, non-Romans, who served with the Roman army. Originally the First Tungrian Cohort had been composed of Tungrian tribesmen whose native fighting skills were useful to the Romans. In time they adopted a more regular method of fighting and new recruits could be drawn from the local British population.

A man wishing to join a cohort needed a reference from someone with influence. A reference, written on a wooden tablet, was found at Vindolanda. It reads: ‘He is my dear friend and a capable person. He has requested me to recommend him to you . . .’

The new recruit had to be a free man, medically fit and, before being accepted, he had to undergo rigorous basic training. He was then assigned to a century and began his 25 years service.

The new soldier had to do all the dirty jobs but in a few years he could become an immunitis with a special job such as a medical orderly, clerk, trumpeter, etc. He received no more pay but his name was removed from the fatigues list. Further promotion gained extra money and the rank of principalis. The century’s guard commander and standard bearer were on pay and a half. The second in command of a century was on double pay.

Auxiliaries received only one third the pay of a legionary but they seem to have been reasonably well off. They had to pay for their clothing and equipment. They generally wore a tunic and calf length trousers. A letter found at Vindolanda mentions also underpants and socks which would have been essential winter clothing on the northwest frontier.

Soldiers were forbidden to marry but many had common law wives and children living in the village. On retirement an auxiliary soldier was normally given Roman citizenship. This included any children he had or would have in the future.
**Barracks**

We know very little about barrack blocks as only the floors and lowest levels of walls are ever found. Everything above ground level is a matter of opinion.

Barrack blocks are normally long narrow buildings widened at one end. This wider part forms the centurion’s quarters. The narrow part of the block is divided into ten or more pairs of rooms, each housing eight men. The men kept their equipment in the front room, which was normally smaller, and slept in the back room. There was a fireplace in the rear room where the soldiers cooked their meals.

**Sleeping**

The sleeping arrangements are unknown. The soldiers may have slept on the floor as they did in their tents, or on mattresses, beds or bunks. Bunks seems the most likely option as they save space.

**Eight man units**

The eight man unit which occupied a room or tent was called a contubernium. Each contubernium had a senior man appointed by the centurion. The unit was called after him i.e. the contubernium of Severus, Bassus etc. Each contubernium probably formed a file when the century was formed up on the parade ground or battle field with the senior men forming the front rank.
The commanding officer

We know the names of several of the commanders at Vindolanda. One, Flavius Cerialis, was in command of the First Tungrian Cohort about AD 105.

Cerialis came from a wealthy family living in some Romanised part of the empire such as the Roman colony at Arles in the south of France. He must have been a senior magistrate (duumvir) of his town as a first step in his career. He then had to find an influential patron who could recommend him to the governor of a province.

Accepted by the governor, he was probably made commander (prefect) of a 500 strong auxiliary infantry cohort. Although about 30 years old, he was unlikely to have seen military service before and had to rely heavily on the advice of his centurions and any friends with military experience he might have brought with him. Cerialis obviously coped well for after about three years he was promoted to commander of the larger 800 strong unit, the First Tungrian Cohort.

A cohort commander usually brought his wife and family with him. They lived in lavish quarters occupying nearly 10% of the built up area of the fort. Their house was the commander's official residence (praetorium) and had all the amenities befitting his status, heated rooms, bathing suite and plenty of servants' accommodation. But it was a lonely life; they could not mix socially even with centurions in the fort for they were members of the upper class (equites). Their only social life was with the commanders of the other forts in the area. This is dramatically brought to life by a letter written to Cerialus' wife, Sulpicia Lepidina, by her friend, Claudia Severa, the wife of another fort commandant. Severa begs Lepidina to come to her birthday party on the 12th September. The letter ends with greetings to Cerialis from Severa's husband, Aelius, and their little son.
The headquarters (principia)
The prefect rose early so that he could be at headquarters by sunrise for his daily meeting with his centurions. Here he was assisted by his adjutant (cornicularius) with his staff of junior officers (beneficiarii) and clerks (librarii). He was really only required to give overall directions, hear and grant or refuse the requests of his men and give judgement on matters of discipline. The ten centurions and the adjutant ran the fort.

The headquarters building (principia) was divided into three main parts. The front half was an open courtyard surrounded by a verandah. Beyond this was a high roofed hall, usually called the cross hall, with a raised dais (tribunal) from which the commander would address his assembled troops.

At the far side of the cross hall was a range of five rooms. The central room was the chapel (aedes) where the standards and a statue of the emperor were kept. The regimental savings were also kept here, usually in a strong box under the floor or in an underground chamber beneath the chapel. The chapel was the most sacred room in the fort and was permanently guarded.

The two adjoining rooms to the right of the chapel were probably used by the adjutant and his clerks and the room to the left by the standard bearers (signiferi). They acted as bankers for their centuries. The other room may have been the armoury. The three central rooms, including the chapel, were separated from the hall by a low stone screen topped by a metal grille which allowed a free view into the chapel and permitted the adjutant and standard bearers to carry on their duties without letting the soldiers into their rooms. The remains of these stone screens from Vindolanda are worn deep between the bars where the soldiers had rubbed the stone when receiving or handing in money and documents through the grille.

The cross-hall
The cross-hall (basilica), was a high draughty building open to the weather on the courtyard side. The soldiers gathered here to be addressed by the prefect. The raised platform (tribunal) from which the commander spoke was at the north end of the hall. It was mounted by a flight of steps on the right.
The chapel
The chapel (aedes or sacellum) was the most important room in the fort. It stood directly opposite the entrance to the cross-hall so that any soldier passing the entrance of the principia could see it. The standards and the bust of the emperor were kept there. It was kept permanently guarded by a centurion and six soldiers, two soldiers probably standing guard for two hours in every six.

Administration
The adjutant (cornicularis) probably occupied the pair of rooms to the right of the chapel. All the fort documents were kept in the adjutant’s office. The adjoining room was probably used as a store room. The Roman army, like most armies, kept written records of absolutely everything. Thousands of these documents, written on papyrus, have been found buried in the sands of Syria and Egypt. Hoards of similar documents, but written on wooden tablets, have been discovered at Vindolanda.

Banking
The standard bearers were the fort bankers. They were responsible not only for the military chest but also the individual soldier’s savings. All soldiers were compelled to save part of their money for which they received a receipt. The standard bearers also kept an account book listing individual soldiers and how much pay they had received after deductions for clothing etc. The money was kept in an iron bound wooden chest beneath the floor of the chapel. Some forts, such as Chesters, nine kilometres east of Housesteads, had an underground strong room.
The daily report
Each morning the centurions reported the state of their centuries to the prefect in writing. Several of these reports have been found in Syria. They record the state of the Twentieth Palmyran Cohort stationed at Dura Europos in the third century AD. They list the numbers available for duty and why others are not available: i.e. 'sent to collect whear', 'collecting wood for the bath house' and so on. They also give the password for the day, the work allocation and the names of the men who will stand guard at the chapel of the standards.

The hospital
There is a large courtyard building behind the principia which is generally thought to be a hospital. The reason for this identification is mainly the discovery of the tombstone of Anicius Ingenuus, a medical officer stationed at Housesteads in the third century AD. The building could equally well have been a workshop.

Below: the centurions meeting the prefect to deliver their daily status report. In Britain these reports were written with a stylus on wooden tablets covered with wax.
The granary
Housesteads had a large double granary on the crest of the hill north of the principia. Roman stone granaries had massive buttressed walls which suggest that they had very heavy roofs. They also had floors raised on small pillars like bath house floors. This allowed air, coming in through vents at the bottom of the wall, to circulate under the floor keeping it dry.

These granaries were not just for grain but also for storing vegetables and meat. Carcasses were probably suspended from the rafters which would put an added strain on the walls. Grain could have been kept in sacks, barrels or large bins. Sacks, which are shown on a painting of a grain ship from Ostia near Rome, would be convenient for transportation.

LEFT: the tombstone of Anicius Ingenuus, a medical officer in Cohors I Turnorum who died at Housesteads at the age of 25. This tombstone has added interest as it identifies the unit stationed at Housesteads in the third century AD.

ABOVE: the granary as it was in the second century with the roof supported on columns down the centre.
A. Section of the granary as it was rebuilt in the third century with a double wall down the centre.
B. Section of the granary as it was reconstructed. Every precaution was taken to keep the building dry. The grain would quickly deteriorate if damp got into it.
All in a day's work

The centurions called out those available for general duties. Relief parties were selected to take over at the six mile castles and their turrets along the wall and guards were chosen for the four gates of the fort. One century was ordered down to the parade ground for weapons training. Another two centuries were sent out on their thrice monthly route march. They would entrench a small camp for the night and march back the following day.

An escort was selected for the prefect who was going away for a few days. A working party with three wagons under the command of an optio was dispatched to the supply base at South Shields to bring up supplies. Four men were ordered to report to the hospital as stretcher bearers and fatigue parties were selected for the dirty jobs: twelve men to sweep out the headquarters, fifteen to clean the bath house and three to clear a blockage at the latrines.

These tasks were entered on the duty roster by the clerks of the centuries. The soldiers' names were listed in a column down the left side and their duties filled in day by day across the sheet.

The chief centurion (ordo princeps), who took command in the absence of the prefect, checked the men had reported for their various duties and were doing them properly. He visited the hospital and the latrines and then strolled out through the south gate, inspecting the sentries as he went. He walked down the hill, through the civil settlement to the parade ground where the soldiers were training with wooden swords and spears against the stakes. He mounted the tribunal, flanked on either side by altars, stood there watching for a while and then returned to the fort.

The centurions were promoted from the ranks. Every soldier dreamed of becoming a centurion. They were well paid and lived in comparative luxury in a suite of rooms at the end of their barracks.
The parade ground
Every Roman fort had a parade ground, a large flat area where soldiers could train and parade for the inspection of the prefect.

On one side was a raised platform (tribunal) from which the prefect reviewed his troops. Altars and shrines dedicated to Jupiter, Mars and Victory flanked the tribunal.

Parade grounds were usually surfaced with shingle and might have had permanent training stakes set up on it. These were sturdy timbers, the height of a man, against which the soldiers practiced with their weapons.

Housesteads parade ground
The site of the parade ground at Housesteads has never been identified. This is rather strange as there is really only one possibility, a large flat area at the southern foot of the hill on which the fort stands. There is a stony, flat-topped mound about five metres square and two metres high at the bottom of the slope. This could well be the remains of the tribunal. The hill on the south side appears to have been cut away to square off the site. The whole area is marshy today but it would certainly have been drained in Roman times.
Water and waste

Housesteads fort was built on the crest of a ridge and seems to have had no natural water supply. About 3,000 litres of water were required every day for drinking, cooking and watering the animals. There may once have been a small spring in the north west of the fort for water still seeps through the rock but most of the water had to be obtained from wells or dragged up the steep slope from the Knag Burn 100 metres east of the fort. Rain water, dripping off the eaves, was also collected by channelling it into cisterns.

Waste and surplus rain water flowed away down the hillside through drains under the roads. One of these ran under the hospital and alongside the commander’s house where it was used to wash out the toilets. The drains finally converged at the south-east corner of the fort, where they flushed out the public toilets.

The toilets were the normal Roman type, a large room with a deep sloping stone-lined trench about a metre wide running along the inside of three of the walls. The water flowed into the trench at the north-east corner of the building, ran along the north side, round the western end, along the south side before passing out through a hole in the fort wall.

The toilet seats, which rested on stone supports set into the wall above the trench, were like long benches made of stone or wood and boxed in at the front. The benches were pierced with a series of key-hole shaped openings which extended down the front panel. This front opening was used for cleaning oneself with a sponge on a stick – the Romans did not use toilet paper. In front of the seats was a shallow trough, permanently filled with running water in which the sponge sticks were washed.

The Housesteads’ toilet could seat about thirty people at once. There were no partitions separating the soldiers. Such buildings were normally open to the sky with a narrow sloping roof over the benches to protect the users from the rain.
Roman toilet seats
Roman public toilets have been excavated all over the Roman world. They all work on the same basic principles as the Housesteads example. The seating from the Housesteads latrine is unfortunately missing but there seems to have been a standard allowance of two Roman feet (60cm) per person. The three public latrines at the Roman town of Vaison-la-Romaine in southern France allow exactly two Roman feet. The fragmentary stone seat from South Shields in northern Britain also allows this amount. The public toilets at Ostia, the port of Rome, allow space for large and small people; the space between the holes varying from 49 to 70cm.

Roofing
Roman public latrines were probably open to the sky with a narrow roof above the seats. The upper part of these buildings is always missing and only when the roof was supported on columns, as it was in Athens and Rome, can one be sure of the existence of a roof. A narrow sloping roof over the seats did not require columns to support it and it is reasonable to assume that most if not all toilets had such roofs. This would be especially necessary in a rainy climate such as Britain’s.

Flushing out
Surplus rain water dripping from the eaves of the buildings at the east end of the fort at Housesteads was channelled into two large cisterns just outside the latrine. This was used to keep a permanent flow of water in the shallow channel used for washing the sponge sticks. This was operated by gravity. The water flowed in at the east end, ran along the south side, round the west end and back along the north side where it was channelled under the bench into the main trench. Here it flowed back along the north side, around the west end and along the south side before passing out through a hole in the fort wall.

Surplus and waste water from the rest of the fort was collected in a tank just west of the latrine. This water was used to flush out the main trench at regular intervals. There would have been no shortage of water for flushing out in the winter but in the summer most of the water would have to be carried up from the Knag Burn.

Below: a reconstruction of the latrine at Housesteads as it was in the third century AD. It has been cut away to show the trench underneath.
Another emperor: another policy

Hadrian died in AD 138 leaving the empire to Antoninus Pius who decided to reoccupy southern Scotland and construct a new wall across the narrow 50km wide isthmus between the Clyde and the Forth.

The new wall was built of turf and fronted with a ditch twelve metres wide. Closely spaced timber forts, seldom more than three kilometres apart, were built along the short frontier making a break-through almost impossible. The legions were left far behind. The nearest, the Sixth at York, was more than 300km, about ten day’s march, away. Hadrian’s Wall was now obsolete; causeways were built across the vallum and the gates were removed from the mile castles allowing free travel.

Successive emperors continued to change their policy. Some twenty years later the Antonine Wall was abandoned and the troops reoccupied Hadrian’s Wall but within a few years they were back on the Antonine Wall again. By the beginning of the third century the army appears to have been back on Hadrian’s Wall but almost immediately moved north again as the emperor Septimius Severus made one last attempt to conquer Scotland. Severus died in AD 211 before his work was completed. The army retreated to Hadrian’s Wall never to invade Scotland again.

The First Tungrian Cohort marched south again and occupied the fort at Housesteads. For the first time we know for certain it was there as three inscriptions found at the fort mention the unit by name. The fort was rebuilt. Most of the remains now visible are third century. The verandas of the headquarters were blocked in completely enclosing the cross hall and forming a series of rooms along the north, west and south sides of the courtyard.

Vindolanda, which had seen many units come and go, was now occupied by the Fourth Gallic Cohort. Excavations outside the fort have revealed a whole village which tells us much about how the soldiers spent their spare time.
LEFT: reconstruction of the west gate, cut away to show the inside. There was a guard chamber on either side with a tower above. The west gate was probably the gate most used by heavy traffic as it leads to the granaries. Deep ruts in the threshold of the south gate show that it was used by wheeled traffic in spite of the very steep incline. The gates, which swung on pivots, were closed and barred from the inside.
In the village

The camp followers began to arrive in their carts a few days after the soldiers. These were the merchants, shop keepers, craftsmen, girlfriends, wives, children and all the others who depended on the army for their existence. They followed the cohort wherever it went, setting up their stalls and tents on either side of the roads outside the fort. In time the tents were replaced by permanent buildings and the vicus was born.

Soldiers spent most of their spare time in the vicus for here were the bars, restaurants, shops and places of entertainment that could not be found inside the fort.

For hundreds of years soldiers had been forbidden to marry but most had girlfriends living outside the walls. Many set up a home in the vicus, marrying their girlfriends by the local Celtic rites and raising families. These marriages were illegal but nobody tried to stop them. Auxiliary soldiers were normally given Roman citizenship on retirement. Being no longer soldiers, they were able to marry their common law wives and adopt their children giving them citizenship too.

But now all this changed. Early in the third century soldiers’ marriages were made legal and citizenship was granted to all free men within the empire. Most soldiers now had wives and families in the vicus and a soldier’s son was expected to follow him into the army.

The vicus at Housesteads appears to have been built around the south, east and west gates but only the southern area has been excavated. The buildings are mainly long narrow structures often with a shop front facing the road. Archaeologists excavating the vicus in 1932 found two bodies buried under the floor of one of these buildings. They had clearly been murdered. The buildings at Vindolanda are more interesting as they include an inn and a bath house besides the normal shops and houses.
The inn (mansio) at Vindolanda had heated bathrooms, dining room and a communal toilet.
The inn was used by travellers on the Stanegate, the main road across northern Britain.
1-6 Guest rooms.
7 Communal toilet. 8 Kitchen.
9 Dining room.
10-15 Bathing rooms.
10 Lobby. 11 Changing room.
12 Cold room. 13 Warm room.
14 Hot room. 15 Boiler room.
The stables and servants quarters are at the back.

Below: Vindolanda about AD 200. The fort is in the background.
1 The inn. 2 The bath house.
3 The Stanegate.
Somewhere to relax: the baths

Most forts had a bath house outside the walls. There is one, which has never been excavated, on the far bank of the Knag Burn at Housesteads.

The baths at Vindolanda were built by a working party from the Sixth Legion about AD 150. The auxiliaries had gained some building skills by this date but the engineering problems of a bath house with its underfloor heating and flues up the walls was beyond their capabilities.

Bath houses consisted of cold, warm and hot rooms. The hot and warm rooms had raised floors supported on small columns about a metre high. The furnace was situated next to the hot room, the heat being drawn through a hole in the wall into the area beneath the floor of the hot room. It then passed through another hole in the far wall into the space under the floor of the warm room. The heat was drawn up the walls through pipes, the hot air escaping through chimneys in the roof. The same furnace heated water for the hot and warm plunge baths.

A bather entering the changing room (apodyterium), stripped off, leaving his clothes in a cubbyhole in the wall. He then entered the cold room (frigidarium) where he could take a cold bath. He went on either to the very hot dry room (laconicum) or into the warm steam room (tepidarium). This adjoined the hot steam room (caldarium) where he could take a hot bath.

The hot clammy atmosphere of the caldarium made the bather perspire in the same way as a modern Turkish bath. A slave scraped the bather with a strigil to remove ingrained dirt from his skin. After being scraped clean the bather might have a massage and a cold bath. The soldiers spent much of their spare time at the baths for it was more than just a bathing establishment. It was more like a club where they could meet their friends and relax, away from the discipline of the fort.

The heated rooms

The floors of the heated rooms, which were made of flag stones resting on small stone pillars, were surfaced with a mixture of brick chips and cement. There were rectangular slots, about 35 cm wide and 12 cm deep, running up the walls of the heated rooms. These held the clay pipes which drew the hot air up to the chimneys in the roof. The same system was used at the inn and the commander's house at Housesteads. Heated rooms had vaulted ceilings. Those at Chesters were hollow which helped to insulate the rooms in the same way as double glazing.

The Vindolanda bath house had a stone tiled roof. Many pieces of these large grey sandstone tiles were found during excavation.

The soldiers of Legion VI Victrix built the main part of the building, the hot, warm and cold rooms. They probably left the rest, the changing room and the toilet, to be built by the auxiliaries in the fort. Certainly the two parts of the building were constructed separately.

Relaxation for men and women

The baths were not just for bathing but for general relaxation. Snacks and drinks were served there and the soldiers gambled with dice and knucklebones. Many hairpins, beads and combs were found during the excavations which suggest that women also used the baths, probably at special times when the men were busy in the fort.

LEFT: the cubby holes for clothes in the changing room of the baths at Chesters.

ABOVE: the hollow ceiling used to insulate the heated rooms at Chesters. A. One of the ceiling blocks.
ABOVE: two bathhouse shoes with thick wooden soles found at Vindolanda. Bathers were likely to burn their feet on the hot floors.

LEFT: 1. A ring with three strigils, a mixing dish and an ointment jar. 2. An ointment jar. 3. A strigil used to scrape off sweat and grime. These were all found in the baths at Pompeii in Italy.

BELOW: a reconstruction of the bathhouse at Vindolanda.
The final act

The third century was a period of disaster. The empire was torn apart by barbarian invasions and civil wars. The German frontiers suffered terribly but Britain, protected by the Channel, suffered less.

The barbarian invasions forced the Romans to change their strategy; frontier forces were reduced and a mobile army, composed mainly of cavalry, was developed. This army, which was held well back from the frontier, could be rushed to any trouble spot.

The reduction of the frontier forces is well illustrated by the conversion of the barracks at Housesteads into a series of small houses each probably containing one soldier and his family. The garrison, once 800 men, seems to have been reduced to about 100.

It was a period of change. The worship of the traditional Roman gods, often in Celtic guise, gradually waned as eastern religions began to take over. The bull cult of Mithras, in some ways very similar to Christianity, was very popular amongst army officers. Four temples to Mithras have been found on Hadrian's Wall including one at Housesteads. Christianity became the official religion of the empire in the fourth century but it appears to have made little headway in the army.

Peace was restored by the beginning of the fourth century but Britain faced a double threat from the Scottish tribes in the north and sea-borne Saxon raids in the east. In AD 367 the Scottish tribes joined forces with the sea raiders and invaders. Britain was plunged into chaos. The invaders were driven out but yet another civil war began and large numbers of troops were moved to the continent.

Britain was left to defend herself as the Goths and Huns burst upon the western empire. The Roman army never withdrew from Britain. For three hundred years the army had recruited Britons and had become British. Cut off from Rome, with no pay, the soldiers became civilians.

Religion

Roman soldiers worshipped many gods. There were the traditional Roman gods such as Jupiter and Minerva, who were worshipped on official festivals and a host of local gods. The Roman state was very tolerant. Any religion was acceptable as long as it did not have offensive practices, such as human sacrifice, and did not condemn the official religion.

Official gods

The importance of the official gods is illustrated by the large number of altars dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus (I.O.M.), Jupiter the Best and Greatest, which have been found. Altars of this type were set up annually at the edge of the parade ground. Several, dedicated by the First Tungrian Cohort, have been found at Housesteads.

Some units honoured particular gods. Hercules was worshipped by the Tungrians at Housesteads. Mars was worshipped at Vindolanda.

Native gods

Wherever the Roman army went and recruited locally, native gods entered the army along with the new recruits. Often the native god was combined with a Roman god with similar characteristics. The Germanic warrior god Thincus became Mars Thincus and was worshipped under this name at Housesteads. The British god Cociidius was also worshipped at Housesteads where he was associated with Silvanus, the Roman god of hunters.
Mithras

Mithraism was a very old eastern religion. It was brought to Europe by the Fifteenth Legion when it was transferred from the eastern frontier to the Danube.

Mithraic religion concentrated on the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil. Mithras, lord of light, killed the bull, releasing creative power for mankind. This scene is the centre piece of every Mithraic temple (Mithraeum). It was a mystery religion with severe initiation rites. The cult became very popular amongst officers in the third century AD.

The Housesteads Mithraeum

The Mithraeum at Housesteads lies in the valley south of the fort. It conforms to the normal plan for such a temple.

There is an aisle down the middle with a raised platform on either side on which the worshippers reclined to eat the ritual meal. On either side of the aisle were statues of two torch bearers, one with his torch pointed down and the other with his torch pointed up. These appear in the main bull killing scene and are common to all Mithraic temples.
Index

Agricola 2, 4, 6
Antonine Wall 5, 24
Antoninus Pius, Emperor 24
barracks 5, 55
Batavians, cohorts 4, 6, 7
baths 28, 29
Benwell, fort 5, 24
Caerleon, legionary base 4
camp followers 10, 26
Carlisle, fort 4, 5
Caralis, Flavius 14
chapel 16, 17
Chester, legionary base 4
Chesters, fort 5, 11
Clothall 28, 29
Corbridge, fort 4, 5
crusshall 16
Dacian threat to Rome 20, 21
Edzell, fort 5, 20, 21
Fendoch, fort 2, 5
forts 5
building 2-3, 6, 7
layout 5
see also Housesteads and Vindolanda
Hadrian, Emperor 8, 18, 24
Hadrian’s Wall 2, 5, 22, 24
building 7, 8-9
temple to Mithras 30
headquarters 5, 16
Housesteads, fort 22, 5, 9, 10
bathhouse 28
conversion of barracks 30
established 11
granary 18, 19
headquarters 17
parade ground 21
praetorium 10
re-occupation 24, 25
temple to Mithras 30, 31
toilets 22, 23,
village 10, 26, 27
water supply 22, 23
Inchtuthil, legionary base 4
Ingenuus, Amicius 18, 19
milecastles 8, 9, 11
Mithras cult 30, 31
Mons Graupius, battle 2, 4, 6
Newcastle, fort 4
North West Frontier 4-5
Ostia 22
parade ground 21
Pompeii 26, 29
praetorium (house of commanding officer) 10, 14, 15
religion 21, 30, 31
Roman army:
adjutant 16, 17, 18
auxiliaries 2, 6, 12, 26, 28
banking 16, 17
centuries 12
centurions 12, 18, 20, 21
clerk 16, 18
cohorts 8, 10, 12
commanding officer 12
14-15, 16, 18
contubernium (eight man unit) 13
legionaries 3, 6, 12
soldiers:
duties 10, 12, 18, 20
disciplinary 12, 13, 17, 26
standard bearers 16, 18
Roman Legions in Britain
4, 8, 9, 24, 28
Rome’s attempted conquest of
Britain 4, 30
Scotland 2, 4, 24, 30
Severus, Septimus, Emperor 24
South Shields, fort 5, 20, 22
'Sangeate', Roman road 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 27
Tacitus, Roman historian 6
tents, Roman design 22, 23, 29
Trajan, Emperor 4, 8
'tribunal' 10, 16, 21
Tungrians 6
First Tungrian Cohort 2, 12
18, 20
at Housesteads 10, 24
at Vindolanda 4, 6, 7, 14
Vaison-la-Romaine 22
Valkenburg, fort 7
'vallum' 8, 11
Vindolanda 2, 4, 5, 10, 24
baths 26, 27, 28, 29
discoveries 6, 7, 16, 17
Second Legion 8
village 26, 27
water supply—Roman forts 22, 23
York 4

Peter Connolly is an honorary research fellow of the Institute of Archaeology, University College, London, and a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He is the author and illustrator of The Roman Army, The Greek Armies, Hannibal and the Enemies of Rome, Pompeii, Greece and Rome at War, Living in the Time of Jesus of Nazareth, and The Legend of Odysseus for which he won The Times Educational Supplement Information Book Award.

The author wishes to thank Dr Brian Dobson of Durham University, and Mr Mark Hassall of the Institute of Archaeology, University College, London for their advice and help in checking the manuscript and illustrations.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Oxford, New York
Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto
Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press
© Peter Connolly, 1991
First published in paperback 1997
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press. Within the UK, exceptions are allowed in respect of any fair dealing for the purpose of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act, 1988, or in the case of
reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms and in other countries should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.
This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher’s prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without similar condition including this condition being imposed on any subsequent purchaser.
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
Typeset by Pentacor PLC, High Wycombe, Bucks.
Printed in China
Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

32
For more than 350 years the Roman army maintained forts on Hadrian’s Wall, as on all the other frontier zones of its huge empire. Excavations have now revealed to us what a typical fort looked like and how generations of soldiers lived, and died, to keep the Roman Peace intact.

In this stunning book, Peter Connolly recreates in his artwork and text every detail of life in one of these forts, from the sleeping quarters, shops and baths, to the sewers and latrines.

‘Well illustrated and clearly told . . .
The book recreates Roman life in meticulous detail.’
The Teacher

‘The Roman Fort has the makings of a classic . . .
The annotated illustrations convey their information in superb detail.’
The School Librarian

Titles in the series The Roman World
The Legionary (019 910425 5)
The Cavalryman (019 910424 7)
The Roman Fort (019 910426 3)
Pompeii (019 917158 0)