

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK: From Conquest to Hadrian's Wall

Emperor Claudius led the successful invasion of Britain in AD 43 but it took another 30 years for the Romans to conquer Britain as far as the line between the River Tyne and Solway Firth. The whole process took three generations and wasn't completed until Emperor Hadrian ordered the Wall to be built in AD 122.

Conquest of the lands we now know as Scotland remained an ambition well into the 2nd Century AD but it was never achieved; the most northerly tribes in Britain beyond the line of Hadrian's Wall were never conquered.

VESPASIAN: ROMAN EMPEROR AD 69 TO AD 79

Vespasian was a gifted general who had seen fighting in Britain during the initial conquest by Claudius.

Nero had employed him to put down the Jewish revolt and he and his son Titus were responsible for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the subsequent dispersal of the Jewish people.

After the death of Emperor Nero in AD 68 the Empire experienced a year of chaos and civil war known as The Year of the Four Emperors. In AD 69 Vespasian emerged as victor and with his two sons, Titus and Domitian, offered the Roman Empire a period of political stability.

THE CONQUEST OF THE NORTH

Once his imperial position was secure Vespasian was free to turn his attention to Britain. He dispatched two of his most able generals, Gaius Agricola and Petillius Cerialis to complete the conquest of the north.

Unlike the southern tribes who had traded with Rome for many years, the initial experience of the Romans by the Northern tribes was as conquerors as the Army pushed its way north of England on its way to conquer Scotland. It advanced up the east and west coasts, establishing major bases at Carlisle and Corbridge.

The Brigantian Revolt

The Brigantes tribe occupied large swathes of northern Britain and were wary allies of Rome under their queen, Cartimandua. Domestic disputes between her and her husband Venutius had twice led to Roman intervention with the result that Venutius was now divorced from his wife and living, it is conjectured, in the lands of the Carvetii in the north-west of Britain.

When Cartimandua took up with his young armour bearer, Vellocatus, Venutius and the Brigantian people finally snapped and rose up against her. She was forced to flee to the protection of her Roman allies. With the legitimate ruler ejected from her territory the Roman Army led by Cerialis marched in, forcibly put down the revolt and annexed the Brigantian lands.

The Push for Caledonia

The main source of our information about first century army campaigns into Scotland is the biography of Agricola written by his son in law the Roman historian Tacitus. However, in common with much of the source material for the history of Roman Britain, this is likely to be biased particularly as it was written to restore Agricola's honour which the Emperor Domitian, Vespasian's younger son, had done his best to tarnish.

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Under Agricola, the Army continued to advance further north in an organised column that stretched for many miles. Some 25,000 to 30,000 troops of the *Legio IX Hispana* and *Legio XX Augusta* were involved in the conquest of northern Britain. Accompanied by a baggage train disciplined in military style so that vital support and supplies would not be lost, they advanced up the east and west coasts of Britain, establishing major bases at Carlisle and Corbridge. Excavations in Carlisle have recovered a writing tablet with Agricola's name on it, testifying to his presence at the site and strengthening the supposition that this was the base from which the Army moved further north.

Every night the troops set up a temporary or marching camp surrounded by a rampart according to a strict plan. An instruction manual dating to this period called *De Munitionibus Castrorum* still survives. Each group of eight legionaries slept in a leather tent, made up of rectangular panels secured with oak tent pegs. We would call this 'living under canvas' to the Roman soldier this was living *sub pellibus*, literally living under skins.

The marching camps that were built during the advance into Scotland in first century AD had distinctive types of defence at the entrances. Each entrance type was in use for only a short period so archaeologists today can use these to show not only the route the Army took on the first march north but they can also distinguish between this advance and the later advances that followed. The camp plan set a pattern that continued as the Army established its presence and built at first wooden and then stone forts.

Despite the successful outcome of the Battle of Mons Graupius the Romans had to pull back, defeated by the Caledonian tribes.

A change in Imperial policy in favour of consolidation rather expansion of territory led to the formation of an army of occupation. Forts were built along The Stanegate, the road linking Carlisle and Corbridge, creating the first Northern Frontier. By AD 83 Britain had been conquered as far north as the Scottish Highlands.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Above the law?

... Sooner you will find a false witness against a civilian than one who will tell the truth against the interest and honour of a soldier.

Juvenal Satire 16, 2nd Century AD

Invaders or peacekeepers?

Uniforms worn by soldiers make them look very different from civilians, enhancing the sense of 'us and them'.

According to some writers, *Legio IX Hispana* stationed in Carlisle was defeated by the native Britons and subsequently disbanded during the conquest of northern Britain. This is untrue, the legion was withdrawn from Britain in the 2nd Century to assist in the suppression of the Jewish revolt in AD 132.