

# Public Archaeologies of Frontiers and Borderlands

edited by

Kieran Gleave, Howard Williams and Pauline Clarke

**Access Archaeology**





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## Acknowledgements

At the start of a new decade, frontiers and borderlands are constantly pushed into the limelight of contemporary politics and the public imagination. As landscape monuments which have been globally present from prehistory, there are many different dimensions to them and they manifest in varied socio-political contexts. They are tangible and enduring structures with both ephemeral and intangible dimensions. As well as dividing and controlling the movement of people and things, from regulating trade to defence, they can be powerful notions too, deployed as political tools and as pivotal axes around which concepts of peoples and nations are created, perpetuated and imagined. By design or through appropriation, they might come to define whom is seen as belonging, and whom should be excluded.

The pervasive if complex and varied nature of borders and their material components has resulted in an ever-increasing misappropriation of their past, both ancient and recent, in contemporary society. These range across the spectrum of political discourse and popular culture, from whimsical filmic inaccuracies to potent political weapons with dangerous consequences for people today. These can all filter into the public psyche as well as heritage conservation, management and interpretation strategies. Meanwhile, avenues of archaeological research can often find themselves implicated in wider discourses on walls and borders, frontiers and borderlands. Hence, linear monuments and frontier zones, whether artificial or natural (such as coastlines, rivers and mountain ranges) have never been more relevant in archaeological dialogues with the public. It is, therefore, crucial that archaeologists today come forward and substantiate their expertise to ensure that public understanding of, and engagement with, frontiers and borderlands is rich, engaging and informative. Archaeologists must also combat their appropriation for nefarious purposes.

Yet despite this pressing need, frontiers and borderlands have not received a sustained examination within the multi-strand subdiscipline of 'public archaeology'. Consequently, examining this as a topic was a deliberate and strategic step when preparing the 4th University of Chester Archaeology Student Conference in late 2018. This public event was organised, promoted and ran by final-year Archaeology students from the Department of History and Archaeology and was open to all, free of charge. Titled 'The Public Archaeology of Frontiers and Borderlands', it comprised of three keynote speakers and 19 student contributions. Exploring a diverse range of frontiers and borderlands from public archaeology perspectives, the event took place at Cheshire West and Cheshire's Grosvenor Museum on 20 March 2019.

The editors wish to express gratitude to colleagues in the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Chester, especially the anonymous referees who evaluated the draft manuscripts, as well as Dr Caroline Pudney, Dr Kara Critchell and to Dr Rob Collins (Newcastle University) who served as 'critical friends' for the student contributions. The conference was only possible because of its hosts, and we extend heartfelt thanks to all the staff of Cheshire West and Cheshire's Grosvenor Museum for accommodating the conference for the fourth consecutive year. Thanks also to University of Chester doctoral researcher Reanna Phillips for guiding the students in preparing for the event. We also thank the guest speakers, John Swogger, Professor Keith Ray and Dr Penelope Foreman, who drew from their expertise to enhance the conference by exploring the key issues that underpin how we engage the public with this topic. Thanks to all the authors and interviewees for their patience and determination to stick with this project throughout a global pandemic. We are especially grateful to Dr Rebecca Jones for agreeing to compose the Foreword and to Dr Laura McAttackney for a broad-ranging interview which ably serves as a discussion piece to close the collection. Finally, we appreciate the sustained support of our publishers, Archaeopress, for sticking with us through these challenging times.

# Foreword

Rebecca H. Jones

Frontiers and borders have become more topical in recent years, their importance raised through different aspects of politics in the 21st century. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic dominating 2020 has changed so many aspects of our lives, with borders becoming even more relevant. People are now having to consider where they can travel, quarantine rules in countries around the world, and what the various rules are in different parts of the UK. It has also led to more attention being paid to decision making in the devolved nations of the UK, as rules and restrictions are brought into force.

This volume serves as a call to arms to consider the public archaeologies of frontiers and borderlands. Those of us who work as researchers in these fields know their importance, more so when their key themes are so topical and relevant today.

My very first introduction to the concept of a frontier, as part of an undergraduate course on Roman Frontiers (at Newcastle University) was the published Oxford Romanes lectures by Lord Curzon, shortly after his term as Viceroy of India (Curzon 1907). Many of the concepts he discussed around the definition of frontiers are topical today: definition (natural and artificial), migration, separation, hinterlands, spheres of influence; and he referred to many of the frontiers under discussion in this volume: Offa's Dyke, Roman Frontiers and the Great Wall of China. Also, given his role and status in the British Empire, it is interesting to see how he viewed the world over a hundred years ago, before the world wars of the 20th century and the collapse of the British Empire.

Events of 2020 have also led to a more critical reflection on how the Empire and its legacy, and the wealth and history of Britain, is understood and taught in schools. While not by intent, these circumstances converge with a flurry for academic interests in frontiers and borderlands. For example, this year's European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) annual meeting, scheduled in Budapest but then run on a virtual platform in August 2020, had as one of its six key themes 'From *Limes* to regions: archaeology of borders, connections and roads.' This was intended to connect recent work on Frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE) World Heritage properties with other frontier regions of other periods, emphasising separation, connection, and the permeable/impermeable nature of various boundaries<sup>1</sup>. This also recognised the significance of the geography of Budapest, sitting in the heart of the Carpathian Basin, connecting across Europe and beyond, and astride the second largest river in Europe, the Danube, once part of a Roman frontier. It will be interesting to see what themes are chosen when the EAA returns to Budapest, currently scheduled for 2022.

A further set of issues make this book's theme particularly pertinent in 2020. As I write this foreword in October 2020, it is Black History Month, which has taken on a new significance and enhanced energy following the Black Lives Matter events of this year. The news is dominated by one of the most significant and arguably divisive political elections of recent decades taking place in the United States. Simultaneously, the United Nations (UN) is celebrating its 75th anniversary and, in November, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is celebrating its 75th anniversary, with its mantra which seeks 'to build peace through international cooperation in Education,

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<sup>1</sup> This is the description of the theme originally placed on the Budapest EAA 2020 website

the Sciences and Culture'<sup>2</sup>. It is UNESCO who established the World Heritage convention in 1972, which governs World Heritage<sup>3</sup>, a topic raised through several articles in this volume.

A further theme which runs through several papers is the prominence in modern discourse of some structures, and their purposing and re-purposing. The misappropriation of Hadrian's Wall as the modern geopolitical border between Scotland and England is touched on, with similar issues involving Offa's Dyke between England and Wales (although at least the latter runs closer to the modern border). The importance of biographies of monuments is discussed, the challenges of presenting complex and difficult heritage, right through to the imaginative ways in which we can engage contemporary audiences.

Many of the book's themes resonate with those of us researching and working with frontiers and borderlands. Even in Roman frontier studies, Hadrian's Wall maintains a dominant position, reflected in its inscription on the World Heritage list in 1987. Even though it is now part of the expanded Frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE) World Heritage property (Breeze and Jilek 2008), its initial inscription highlighted that it was *the best* Roman frontier:

Hadrian's Wall is an outstanding example of a fortified limes. No other ensemble from the Roman Empire illustrates as ambitious and coherent a system of defensive constructions perfected by engineers over the course of several generations. Whether with respect to military architectural construction techniques, strategy design in the Imperial period or a policy for ground use and the organization of space in a frontier zone, this cultural property is an exceptional reference whose universal value leaves no doubt<sup>4</sup>.

Yet given that the mission of UNESCO is about building peace through international cooperation, it is worth noting that the expanded FRE World Heritage property, across multiple countries, is much better connected to UNESCO's goals than the initial inscription of Hadrian's Wall<sup>5</sup>.

In Scotland, the Antonine Wall serves as bridesmaid to its much better-known southern counterpart, perhaps with some similarities to the relationship between Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke. We are not helped by the fact that when the general public think of a Roman wall, they think of something built in stone, a linear monument resembling Hadrian's Wall, whereas we have a turf wall whose best surviving feature is the ditch to the north of it. Perhaps if it were to be called the Antonine Dyke it would aid with modern perceptions (Figure 1), although the only ancient historical reference to the Wall, in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, refers to it being a wall of turf.<sup>6</sup> While certainly an impressive feat of engineering, spanning across the width of Scotland, it does not appear to have majorly influenced landscape change since its abandonment (Jones 2018).

Yet, the visitor to Hadrian's Wall encounters a palimpsest of a frontier, and one that is potentially difficult to disentangle from the emperor whose name it bears, despite its complex biography in Roman times, never mind the 1600 years after its abandonment. By contrast, the Antonine Wall represents the most advanced frontier created by the Roman Empire, but was only occupied for a single generation in the mid-2nd century AD. This brief occupation, in archaeological terms, provides a rich resource to try and understand Roman frontiers at their zenith. Unique features include the spectacularly carved distance

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>

<sup>3</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000098>

<sup>5</sup> Although the current FRE is only the two walls in the UK and the Upper German-Raetian *Limes* in Germany, further FRE properties have been submitted to UNESCO for inscription and it is intended to manage these together as a cluster, see Ployer *et al.* 2017.

<sup>6</sup> SHA *Antoninus Pius* 5,4



Figure 1: Aerial view of the Antonine Wall and Roman fort at Rough Castle, taken in 2006 © Historic Environment Scotland (DP 014299)

stones (Keppie 1979), the most impressive of their kind in the Roman Empire, now known to have been more richly coloured than their sandstone facade today (Campbell 2020a, 2020b). Alongside other Roman frontiers, the sites and artefacts recovered from the Wall, together with environmental evidence, attest to the diversity of the military community, the presence of women and children, traders, and slaves, just in a tighter chronological framework. It enables us to have connections with other parts of the Roman Empire – we have an auxiliary regiment which was raised in Syria; pottery demonstrating a preference for cooking in a north African style; named individuals who travelled across the empire. For example, Vibia Pacata, the wife of a centurion, dedicated an altar stone to Silvanus and the *Quadriviae* (the goddess of the cross-roads). This and other documents suggest that she travelled from Pannonia, modern-day Austria and Hungary, possibly via North Africa (Wright 1968; Birley 1971; Foubert 2013).

Despite the military and divisive purpose of the Antonine Wall (and the purpose of Roman frontiers has been debated: see Breeze 2011; Breeze and Flügel in prep.), in the 21st century it provides us with a unique opportunity to celebrate the heritage of an international monument with its local communities in central Scotland, and use it to positively emphasise our international connections at a time when archaeology is being mis-used for nationalist purposes (Brophy 2018). We have a strategy for archaeology in Scotland which is about making it matter, telling Scotland's stories in their global context.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <http://archaeologystrategy.scot/>



Figure 2: The new Roman-themed playpark at Callendar Park in Falkirk in 2019 © Historic Environment Scotland

Recognising the issue of a lack of knowledge about the Antonine Wall, we started a programme of engagement to improve the awareness and relevance of the monument. It runs through some of the most deprived areas of Scotland, as recognised by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>8</sup>. This led to the co-design and co-creation of a project (which started in 2018 and has over £2m from various sources, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund), which is seeking to understand where our Roman heritage can have transformational economic and societal benefit. Capital projects include regenerating forgotten areas through sculpture – Roman inspired art and replica distance stones, and through the development and redevelopment of playparks, with five planned in total, one for each of the Local Authority areas along the Wall (Figure 2). These have been co-designed with local school children and feature stories about the diverse military community in the area almost 2,000 years ago (Weeks 2020; Jones in prep.). Echoing some of the other themes in this volume, we are also working on the creation of comics and have a graffiti project, where we are collaborating with a local graffiti company, who will engage international artists to work with local communities to create Roman inspired graffiti.

Other projects include gardens, community mosaics, arts, museum projects and creative writing. One is in collaboration with the Cycling Without Age scheme, where we are encouraging residents in local care homes and sheltered housing who may not otherwise be able to get out and about, to have the chance to socialise and visit local heritage sites in trishaws piloted by volunteers. These are intended to ease isolation, encourage socialising, and provide a boost to mental health by visiting sites which they may otherwise find difficult to visit.

<sup>8</sup> <https://simd.scot/>

Although paused due to the pandemic, we are re-starting projects as soon as it safe to do so. One is to work with asylum seekers and refugees who have relocated to Scotland and better understand their stories in relation to the Wall, weaving them into the wider story. This is a chance to explore stories and experiences from contemporary communities as well.

There is much more work to be done, and many fresh potential avenues for engaging today's public with the stories of ancient frontiers and borderlands. In his interview with Howard Williams in this volume, Rob Collins comments that they are privileged because Hadrian's Wall is well known by its local community, unlike the Antonine Wall, Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke. It is interesting to see the increasing interest in Hadrian's Wall from *Game of Thrones* fans, but it was not until I read Vernon's paper that I found out that this fictional wall was garrisoned by 19 forts. Interestingly, we have 17 currently known on the Antonine Wall, but two more are suspected. Perhaps we should be making more of our similarities with this fictional Wall!

Yet our efforts to connect frontier works past with communities in the present should never forget the nature of these divides on those who would seek to cross them. Migration features in various papers in this volume and many of us will remember the mass migration of refugees across Europe that took place in 2015. In September of that year, I was fortunate enough to be attending the International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies (*Limes Congress*) in Ingolstadt in Bavaria, where the contemporary relevance of our studies was really brought home. Colleagues from the south and east of Europe struggled to cross borders and were held up for several days, arriving significantly late to the congress; many of us saw large groups of refugees in key transit points, such as the bus station in Munich. Indeed, this is the 21st-century impact of frontiers and borders, which comes out strongly in the final piece on contemporary walls, through the interview with Laura McAtackney.

Two years ago I read, with my primary school daughter, an incredibly powerful children's novel which told the stories of three refugees from three different events (a Jewish boy in the 1930s, a Cuban girl in 1994, and a Syrian boy in 2015). The author cleverly wove the stories in such a manner that they were ultimately connected, however tangentially (Gratz 2017). It was a creative way to tell important stories to young people. There is a huge awareness in young people today of the key issues that we face – climate change, plastic pollution, political upheaval, migration and refugees, and now the pandemic. Their engagement makes me optimistic for the future, and I am delighted in this light to read this volume and see the productive results of this student-led conference in Chester which simultaneously tackles archaeology's potential to link past worlds to present-day realities and concerns.

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