



## The Romans in Britain

A midweek symposium in York

**6–8 November 2024 (MK 556)**

From £970 per person

Eleven 40-minute talks, followed by Q&As, plus a plenary discussion, spanning Wednesday afternoon to Friday morning.

Esteemed archaeologists discuss the latest research and thinking on the Imperial outpost of Britannia.

Based at the comfortable Grand Hotel in York for two nights, with dinner both evenings.

Britain was part of the Roman empire for 367 years yet aside from what is known from Caesar's account of the initial invasion in his Commentaries on the Gallic War, Roman historians rarely mention Britannia in detail. Most of our knowledge of Roman Britain, whether from a native or colonial perspective, is derived from physical monuments and the fruits of archaeological investigations over many decades. Roman archaeology in Britain is blossoming at present, in part as a result of increases in developer-funded archaeology, while some significant coin hoards and objects unearthed by metal detectorists in recent years have also presented fresh insight and inquiry.

The latest in our highly successful series of residential symposia brings together leading archaeologists and classicists for a series of 40-minute talks. They will evaluate traditional narratives and myths and share new discoveries and fresh interpretation of the Imperial conquest of Britain and its two-way impact.

We return to the beautiful and historic city of York for this symposium. Our venue is the wood-panelled Grand Boardroom of the former offices of the North Eastern Railway, now a five-star hotel – The Grand, York, where participants also stay and where we will dine on both evenings.

The speakers are Dr Andrew Birley (Vindolanda), Professor Will Bowden (Nottingham), Professor Maureen Carroll (York) Professor Richard Hingley (Durham); Professor Martin Millett (Cambridge); Dr Sam Moorhead (British Museum); Dr Matthew Symonds (Current World Archaeology) and Dr Jane Webster (Newcastle).

*Image:  
The Crosby Garrett Helmet, photo ©Christies.*



### Programme

#### Session 1: Wednesday 6 November, afternoon

2.30pm–5.00pm including refreshment break.

**Talk 1:** Dr Matthew Symonds  
*Roman Britain – life under the Caesars*

**Talk 2:** Professor Richard Hingley  
*Roman elite attitudes to Britain  
& the Ocean*

Refreshment break

**Talk 3:** Professor Will Bowden  
*Boudica – fact, fiction and archaeology*

Drinks reception and dinner.

#### Session 2: Thursday 7 November, morning

9.30am–12.45pm including refreshment break.

**Talk 4:** Professor Martin Millett  
*Landscapes of Roman Britain: new perspectives*

**Talk 5:** Dr Matthew Symonds  
*The Hadrian's Wall Paradox*

Refreshment break

**Talk 6:** Dr Andrew Birley  
*In their own words, the power and the context of the Vindolanda tablets*

Plenary chaired by Dr Matthew Symonds

The Romans in Britain  
continued

**Session 3:**

Thursday 7 November, afternoon

Time to be confirmed.

**Talk 7:** Dr Jane Webster  
*Slavery in Roman Britain*

**Talk 8:** Dr Sam Moorhead  
*Carausius, Allectus and the First Brexit*

Dinner.

**Session 4:**

Friday 8 November, morning

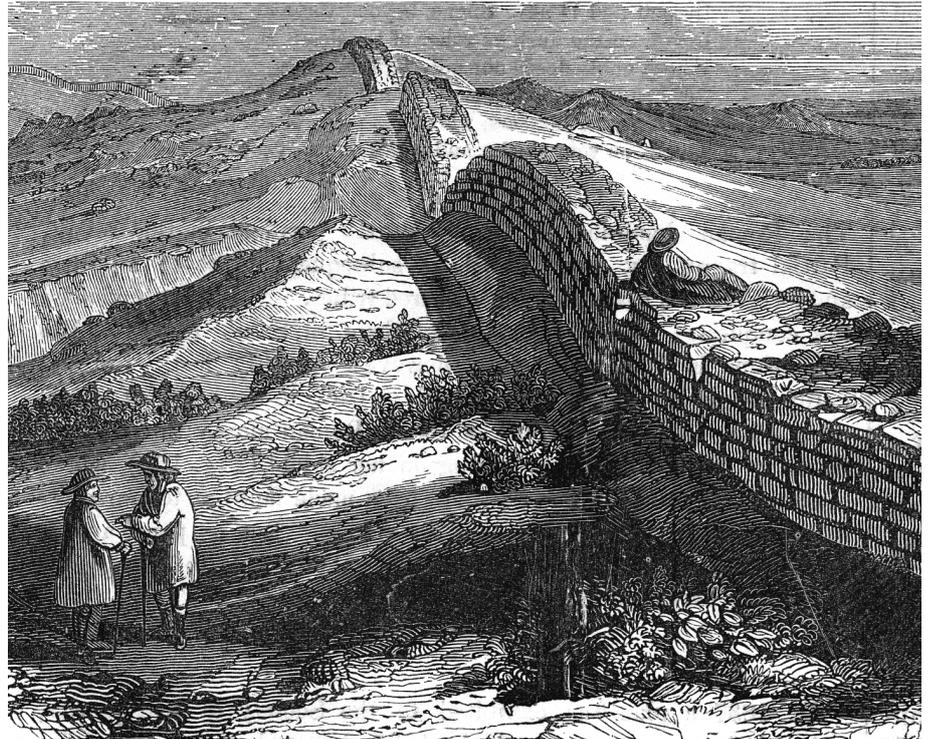
9.45am–12.30pm.

**Talk 9:** Professor Maureen Carroll  
*Roman Death, Burial and  
Commemoration*

**Talk 10:** Dr Sam Moorhead  
*Roman Britain – breadbasket of the  
Roman Rhineland*

Refreshment break

**Talk 11:** Professor Will Bowden  
*The “End” of Roman Britain*



**Speakers**

**Dr Andrew Birley.** CEO & Director of Excavations, The Vindolanda Trust. Andrew is the third generation of Birley's to work as the Director of Excavations for the Vindolanda Trust. He started excavating at the site as a teenager and then got his undergraduate degree and PhD from the University of Leicester. He has worked at the site in a full-time capacity since 1996, becoming Director of Excavations in 2005 and CEO in 2015. A former Chair of the Archaeology Committee for the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies he is widely published on Vindolanda and the Roman frontier in Britain.

**Professor Will Bowden.** Professor of Roman Archaeology at the University of Nottingham. He has worked on excavations in the UK, Albania, Italy and Jordan and has published widely on these areas. He is particularly interested in the end of the Roman Empire and since 2005 he has run a major community archaeology project at Caistor St Edmund in Norfolk, investigating the Roman town of Venta Icenorum. He is keen to promote public understanding of archaeology and has appeared on programmes such as *Time Team* and *The Great British Dig*.

**Professor Maureen Carroll.** Professor of Roman Archaeology at York University. She has directed excavations in Germany, Italy, Tunisia and Britain. Maureen worked for the state archaeological services in Germany and taught at the University of Cologne, before she became Professor of Roman Archaeology at the University of Sheffield. She took the Chair at York university in 2020. Her key research interests are Roman burial practices, funerary commemoration and Roman childhood and family studies. A further area of interest is Roman garden archaeology.

**Professor Richard Hingley.** Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at the University of Durham. He is the author of eight books, including studies of Boudica, Hadrian's Wall and the Roman conquest of Britain. His current focus of scholarship includes writing a guide for visitors to the Roman towns of Britain and researching Iron Age roundhouse reconstructions and open-air museums. His latest book, *Conquering the Ocean*, was published in 2022, a paperback edition is published in spring 2024.

*Illustration: Hadrian's Wall near Housesteads, wood engraving 1888.*

**Professor Martin Millett.** Emeritus Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Cambridge and President of the Society of Antiquaries of London. His work focuses both on the impact of Roman imperialism on indigenous societies and on the application of survey methods in archaeology. He has led fieldwork and excavation projects in Spain, Portugal and Italy as well as in Britain, where much of his work has concerned the landscapes of Yorkshire. He is currently working on a new synthesis of Roman Britain for Princeton University Press.

**Dr Sam Moorhead.** National Finds Adviser for Iron Age and Roman Coins in the Portable Antiquities Scheme at the British Museum from 2006 to 2023. He specialises in the world of late antiquity across the Roman world, including the neighbouring cultures to the east. He is writing a major new edition of the Roman Imperial Coinage series for the British emperors Carausius and Allectus, and is cataloguing the 52,500 coins in the Frome Hoard. He is an Honorary Lecturer at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL, a Fellow of Goodenough College, London, and was awarded the Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society in 2019.

The Romans in Britain  
continued

**Dr Matthew Symonds.** Editor of *Current World Archaeology* magazine and one of the leading scholars on Roman frontiers in Britain. He has co-edited three volumes on the subject of frontiers and is the author of *Hadrian's Wall: creating division*. He is a visiting fellow at Newcastle University and lectures for the Institute of Continuing Education, Cambridge University. He has excavated in Bulgaria, Sicily, Italy and Britain, but is most at home on Hadrian's Wall.

**Dr Jane Webster.** Senior Lecturer in Historical Archaeology at the University of Newcastle. Her research crosses traditional frontiers (both temporal and disciplinary) but focuses on colonial material culture, from the early Roman Empire to the 18th century. A renowned expert in the field, she has published widely on slavery in Roman Britain.

## Practicalities

**Prices.** Two sharing, standard double/twin: £970 per person. **Double room for single occupancy:** £1,090.

**Included:** hotel accommodation for two nights; breakfasts; two dinners with wine; admission to the talks; drinks reception; refreshments during breaks; gratuities for hotel staff.

**Accommodation.** **The Grand Hotel**, York Station Rise, North Yorkshire, YO1 6GD. Tel: 01904 890731

An award-winning five-star hotel, out of earshot but just five minutes (0.4 miles) walk from York station. Originally built in 1906 as a 'Palace Of Business' for the North Eastern Railway Company, the hotel retains many of its Edwardian features. The symposium and dinners take place in the former Grand Boardroom. Bedrooms are well furnished, spacious and comfortable – bathrooms are sizeable; most have showers over baths. There is a spa and indoor pool. Some car parking is available. Please contact us should you require extra nights either side of the symposium.

**Group size:** up to 110 resident participants.

## The Talks

**Andrew Birley**

*In their own words, the power and the context of the Vindolanda Writing tablets*

If a picture can tell us a thousand words, a picture of a letter which is thousands of years old has almost incalculable value to our understanding of the past. The site of Roman Vindolanda has now produced almost 2,000 Roman documents. This is the greatest single archive of written material to have come from the British Isles in the Roman period and it includes famous letters between commanding officers' wives, slaves, and references to the lack of beer and the poor state of the Roman roads. The words and characters speak to the humanity of the authors. The documents offer a rare privilege, the chance to get to know something about people who would have otherwise been lost to history and time.

**Will Bowden**

*Boudica – fact, fiction and archaeology*

The story of Boudica, the queen who took on the might of Rome, has long been popular, with each new generation reinventing a Boudica for their own times. The written evidence for Boudica comprises often contradictory ancient sources whose authors use Boudica to express a range of ideas about gender, Roman rule, and the barbarism of the British. However, we also have compelling archaeological evidence of the destruction wrought by the revolt. This talk brings together the literary and the archaeological Boudica to reveal the facts behind the myth.

**Will Bowden**

*The "End" of Roman Britain*

Why (and when) did Roman Britain end? Our textual sources paint a picture of increasing instability in the late 4th and early 5th centuries, with Roman rule in Britain facing both external and internal threats. The last parts of the Roman garrison were withdrawn to fight elsewhere and the island slipped from imperial control. The archaeological evidence also suggests dramatic changes, with the disappearance of recognisable "Roman" things like towns, villas, coins and mass-produced pottery. However, interpretations of the "end" differ. How did people experience it and was it all bad?

Maureen Carroll

*Roman Death, Burial and Commemoration*

First exploring aspects in the Mediterranean, this talk will examine death, burial and commemoration in the Roman world, relating various sites and monuments on the frontier in Britain to practices and rituals at the Imperial centre. The speaker has researched gypsum burials discovered in the Yorkshire region that will also be explored in context.

**Richard Hingley**

*Roman elite attitudes to Britain and the Ocean*

Britain became the target for invasion from the time of Julius Caesar to Hadrian and beyond. This talk explores the attitude and Oceanic ideology of Roman emperors and senior commanders, as they contemplated the islands of Britain and the Atlantic. Ocean was considered the domain of the ancient Titan Oceanus, whose worship was inherited from the Greeks. The largest island known to the Romans, Britain became a target for conquest as the Empire extended further to the west and north beyond the Mediterranean. The fascination of conquering Britain fed upon the idea that seeking control over its peoples required mastery of the sea and the submission of Oceanus.

**Matthew Symonds**

*Roman Britain – life under the Caesars*

The story of Roman Britain can seem a familiar one. Here was a world of mosaics, power architecture, and togas, guarded by disciplined professional soldiers. But the emperors did not simply build Rome in England's green and pleasant land. The latest research is revealing a province that could be less predictable and rather stranger than many traditional views allow. This talk will introduce a fascinating outpost of the Roman world and look at how our knowledge of it is being revolutionised.

**Matthew Symonds**

*The Hadrian's Wall Paradox*

Hadrian's Wall highlights the extraordinary capabilities and ingenuity of Rome's war machine. But the frontier also stands as a monument to the failure to achieve total conquest. What went wrong? Clues can be found in the design of the Wall, which was built in AD 122 at around the same time that Britain was convulsed by dire military upheaval. Installing this barrier, though, split apart thousands of people living in the region, setting dramatic change in motion. We examine what

The Romans in Britain  
continued

the Wall was intended to do, and what it really did.

**Martin Millet**

*Landscapes of Roman Britain: new perspectives*

The last 30 years have seen a radical change in the evidence for the landscape of Roman Britain. A combination of information derived from developer-funded archaeology and the more widespread application of remote sensing technologies have greatly enhanced knowledge. While it is clear that the landscape was not dominated simply by lavish villa estates, the new evidence raises big questions about how we are to understand it. This talk will explore new ideas with a particular focus on the region around York.

**Sam Moorhead**

*Carausius, Allectus and the First Brexit*

In AD 286, Carausius, a general serving under the emperor Maximian, rebelled and made himself emperor in Britannia, striking his own coins and building coastal defences. His navy defeated an invasion fleet before he was assassinated, in AD 293. He was succeeded by his 'henchman' Allectus who ruled Britain until his defeat by the emperor Constantius in AD 295/6. This talk will draw upon recent research for Moorhead's book (co-written with Graham Barker) *Rebel Emperors of Britannia: Carausius and Allectus* and a new volume of *Roman Imperial Coinage* for these rulers.

**Sam Moorhead**

*Roman Britain – breadbasket of the Roman Rhineland*

Since finding an anomaly in late Roman coin finds in Wiltshire, in 1983, the speaker has been building up an increasing amount of evidence to show the great extent of British agricultural exports to the Continent in the late Roman period. This should not surprise us given the evidence of panegyrics and other literary sources, but it is a phenomenon which is largely overlooked in standard accounts of Roman Britain. This talk will discuss how without Britannia's resources, Roman Germania could not function effectively.

**Jane Webster**

*Slavery in Roman Britain: the archaeological evidence*

Most of the evidence for Roman slavery tends to come from the Mediterranean provinces of the Roman empire but, in this interesting and thought-provoking lecture, Jane will explore the British evidence. Slavery was everywhere in the Roman world, but in Britain as elsewhere it is not always easy to 'see' it in the archaeological record. This talk reviews past and recent excavation findings. It also considers what the future might look like for the study of Romano-British slavery, as powerful online research tools expand the possibilities for investigating the subject.