

ALL ALONG THE EDGE



CONTEMPORARY VOICES
EXPLORE THE ROMAN FRONTIER

Edited by Zoë Strachan

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Contemporary Voices

Explore the Roman Frontier

Edited by Zoë Strachan

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Some pieces included in this anthology contain themes more appropriate for adult readers, including reference to violence and sexual violence.

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For Leela Soma

Poet and Friend

REDISCOVERING THE ANTONINE WALL

In AD 142, the Emperor Antonius Pius ordered his governor, Quintus Lollius Urbicus, to re-invade the area we now know as Scotland. This invasion resulted in the construction of the Antonine Wall. The wall stretched 37 miles across Scotland from west to east and, unlike the stone-built Hadrian's Wall, was constructed mostly out of layers of turf and reached a height of 3m. It was built by members of the three Roman legions who were stationed in Scotland — the Second, Sixth and Twentieth Legions. Antoninus Pius died in AD 161 and the Antonine Wall was abandoned around AD 165. The troops retreated south to reoccupy Hadrian's Wall. The Romans finally left Britain in AD 410, when the army was needed elsewhere.

Today, the Antonine Wall runs through five local authority areas covering the Central Belt of Scotland: West Dunbartonshire, Glasgow City, East Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire and Falkirk.

The Rediscovering the Antonine Wall project was launched in 2018 with the aim of raising awareness of the Antonine Wall, primarily amongst local communities but also with visitors. The project, which ends in March 2023, has received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Kelvin Valley & Falkirk LEADER Programme.

The project was created to increase engagement with the Antonine Wall through the creation of new and interesting attractions all along the wall, as well as the development of new community engagement initiatives and social media pages. In addition to creating this anthology with the University of Glasgow, the project has also installed two Roman head sculptures, five replica distance stones, five Roman-inspired play parks, a number of community sculptures and a Roman Granary Garden. The project has also created a number of educational resources including new information booklets, replica object handling boxes and Antonine Wall comics and murals in collaboration with young people.

FOREWORD

Zoë Strachan

Rediscovering the Antonine Wall has been a revelation for me. It is an enduring line of connection, reaching from Old Kilpatrick to Bo'ness and then onwards, over to Germany and through Europe, looping down through Syria and Algeria — the old frontier of the Roman Empire. Seven thousand people came (voluntarily and less so) from across that Empire to Scotland to build the Wall. They lived here with their comrades and commanders, their friends and lovers, their children. We've found their shoes and cooking pots, the games they played and the weapons they carried, their altars and distance slabs, and — very occasionally — their grave markers. We have fragments of a few of their stories, but the passing of time has rendered most of them opaque. And therefore, as many of the pieces in this anthology prove, open to imagination.

From our current vantage point of the 21st century, most of the Antonine Wall's history is post-Roman. Although the Second, Sixth and Twentieth Legions built it, they didn't inhabit it for very long. After the Romans withdrew from Scotland in AD 158 the Wall meandered on. We think it was absorbed or reabsorbed into Iron Age settlements, and we know it was reimagined as Grymisdyke in the 14th century and Graham's Dyke after that. In the later medieval period, it was embroiled in struggles for power and embraced by sites of worship. At points, it seems to have been forgotten entirely. Bumps in the landscape and folktales prompted 18th century antiquarians to explore it, and the Industrial Revolution saw it disrupted by the Forth and Clyde canal. Almost nineteen centuries later, it is still part of many of our daily lives: glimpsed across the landscape, walked on, worked on, lived on. It inspires writers and artists today, just as, we can assume, it always did.

Heritage feels important, as if it belongs to us, when we can invest it with our own thoughts and ideas. At school in Ayrshire, my class learned that the pesky Romans tried to invade and the ferocious Scots (painted blue) chased them away. The Romans were so scared that they built the Antonine Wall to protect themselves. A more entertaining (if still not entirely accurate) version of events was revealed to me by *Asterix and the Picts*, and a more technical one when as a student of Archaeology, I spent a few Saturday mornings taking part in a geophysical survey of Croy Hill Roman fort. Our reward of a cooked breakfast in the glamorous Little Chef on the A80 was more memorable than

most of our measuring and mapping. (Not to mention the enduring pantomime of finding somewhere to pee outwith the scopes of classmates' theodolites.) Since becoming involved in the Rediscovering the Antonine Wall project, I have many more voices, tales and questions to carry with me when I visit sites along the Wall or its artefacts in the Hunterian Museum. Many more ideas and images swirl in my mind; a reminder, perhaps, that the biggest part of history is story. The new narratives of *All Along the Edge* offer an immersive pleasure for readers and enliven the Wall with original and compelling voices and characters.

Writing about somewhere is a way of bringing it into being. Places are formed as much by their stories as by their geological facts and observable environmental features. They are given meaning by individual and communal experience. They take life in our imagination. Each one of the stories, poems and non-fiction pieces included here offers a unique engagement with the geography, temporality and meaning of the Wall, showing how complex and fascinating it is, and what a resonant and relevant part of our shared history. The voices of these contemporary writers have made a new topology of the Roman frontier in Scotland, honouring and challenging the past and contributing to a rich and lasting future.

Contributions appear alphabetically by surname, but readers might prefer to open at random and dive in. There are wonderful things in store — and there will be more stories to come.

Ghanima AbdulKarim

A VISIT TO THE HUNTERIAN MUSEUM AND THE ANTONINE WALL

Three things that caught my eye during the Hunterian Museum tour were: Gods, Sacrifices and Power. The Romans believed in many gods, they offered sacrifices and lastly they had so much power and used their power as a weapon.

The shield was an object that captured my imagination.

I asked myself: Why are shields different shapes? Why do they look different? There should be equality on the battlefield. What happens to the shield after the battle? Does the shield hold the same honour as the sword on the battlefield?

THE SHIELD

I hide your fear and give you strength and make you feel strong,
I protect and give you courage to fight on,
Why should our shield be different
when we both fight for the same cause?

We visited Bearsden Baptist Church to see the remains of the Antonine Wall and the bathhouse.

I was intrigued by the ditch.
I asked myself: What happens to the soldiers who are guarding and protecting the ditch
during sudden weather changes?
during the war and after the war?
During an epidemic?
Are they treated or left to die?

THE DITCH

I protect and guide you in your Fort

I am the Ditch

I act as an obstacle to slow down or break up an upcoming force

I am the Ditch

I give you assurance oh brave one of being protected around your wall

I am the Ditch

oh brave one how courageous and determined we both are

we endure the weather together from scorching summer

to terrible winter

I am the Ditch

I give you hope and faith oh brave one to be on guard and fight

till your last one is on the ground.

I am the Ditch

No matter who win or loses I will be a part of history

I am the Ditch.

David Bleiman

CAER AMOND

Here in the bathhouse of the Roman fort,
reburied under the weeds to preserve the hypocaust,
sits a Syrian legionary,
still taking his respite in the caldarium.

Why did I leave the land of dates,
to chill my days in this gods-forsaken place?
And what does it mean, this word — the *dreich* —
That the native girls hurl towards the skies?

ON A SLOW BUS TO CRAMOND

The XLI to Cramond
is coming any time,
you may think *you* have waited long
but look at yon Centurion,
he's nearly passed away.
He needs to get to A & E,
so — quick as I say I, II, III —
call help!
Phone IX, IX, IX!

NEW TIMES, NEW ROMAN

In times old Roman here, we feared,
in this far outpost, north, beyond the wall,
the exit of the Brits and Picts from Rome's domain,
for Roman might brought Roman *pax*
and all the benefits of the single market,
so here in Cramond, I might say:
Civis Romanus Sum.

Beware of what we wish for, Brits,
for walls come down and walls go up,
and *Ich bin ein Berliner*,
wherever walls go up;
in Times New Roman now, I say,
with breaking voice between my tears:
Je suis l'Europe!

Notes

Pax romana was the peace which existed between nationalities in the Roman empire/ *Civis Romanus Sum*, 'I am a citizen of Rome', expresses the rights of citizens across the empire/ *Ich bin ein Berliner*, 'I am a citizen of Berlin', was John F.Kennedy's expression of solidarity with the people of Berlin, divided by the wall/ *Je suis l'Europe!*, 'I am Europe!'

Anthony (Vahni) Capildeo

THE ANTONINE WALL

I. ROME'S NORTH-WESTERN FRONTIER: INVITATION
TO A CIVILISATION

Imp. Caesar's invitation to the ballista ball
by way of white lead acorn-shaped slingbolts arrives
via red-hot correspondence personally stamped,
launches like a no-shit eagle wreathing overhead;
promises ornate south-facing distance slabs, burnt wheat.
Come on. For ages some of you've aped our style, pleading
continuity in Ciceronian Latin
taught at your good school in Wales. You look Celtic and sound
dead. We were hardly dancing when, from the Forth to the Clyde,
thirty-seven miles, evenly, with our differing feet —
Roman contingents of Syrian archers, Roman bands
Of Tungrian horsemen — we paced off, or measured, squares.
Now from within the water-to-water wall patrolled
at sky height and from the adverse mouths of platformed fires,
we, between micaceous sandstone pillars, glittering,
ready with an ecumenical flamen,
you, wild, solitary, crafty, literate tribes
invite to a civilisation. You understand.
Stone flows from the hair of snakes where gorgons' heads adorn
both knees of Mars advancing. You're still good on the ground.

II. ROMANO-CELTIC CONTACT IN THE ANTONINE DISPLAY, HUNTERIAN MUSEUM, GLASGOW

I want you like I want a wall
I want you in bits
I take you
underground
your masonry in pieces
I remaster
round house from square fortlet
souterrain from tax gate
Farmers
find pillars
that
retreating
you threw down wells
covered
with small fittings
nails capitals building debris

If litter and landfill were the sum of your legacy
I'd not trouble myself to collect slabs that you cut
sometimes with my hands, so stone fledged warbling; nor myself,
another trophy in this Hunterian hall, flay time
where stone seems just setting from a recent fiery tear,
Roman bones like gaming counters coraled in a jar.

FORTUNA, WITH CORNUCOPIA, FOUND AT
CASTLECARY BY CANAL WORKERS IN 1769

It is a wall they raised
thrice the height
of rational houses
a wall or a wave is it

turf atop
stone coursework
tidal disastrous
atop tilled fields

Was it Fortuna to guard
stonily liquid
the soapy Romans
It was Fortuna they carved

She was their luck
to light on
to fall from
She was someone you once knew from home

These three poems were first published in the collection
Venus as a Bear (Carcenet, 2018) and re-appear here by the
very kind permission of the author and the publisher.

A C Clarke

SONG OF THE WALL-BUILDERS

Plan and survey dig and lift
shore up the wall and stamp it down
work our fingers to the bone — but

CELEBRATE THE MILES WE'VE COME

tramp tramp tramp tramp
march to the next stop set up camp
draughty shed and leaky hut
driving rain and chilly sun — but

CELEBRATE THE MILES WE'VE COME

bend and stretch and bend again
fighting the Brythons was more fun
legions have come and legions gone
and we're still plodding on and on — but

CELEBRATE THE MILES WE'VE COME

Halfway there the gaffer says —
break your back and strain your arms —
he's just as sick of it as we are
we're a crack unit trained for war — but

CELEBRATE THE MILES WE'VE COME

dig and lift and stretch and bend —
pick and shovel hammer chisel —
feels like the task will never end — but

CELEBRATE THE MILES WE'VE COME

The last turf's laid, the soldiers paid,
we're done, we're done, we're really done!
Light beacon fires tune up your lyres — and

CELEBRATE THE MILES WE'VE COME

EXPLORING THE RUINED GARDEN

*Take a walk up the ridge of the ghost garden
where two bay trees, Laurus nobilis,*

would have been proffering their shining leaves
to weave a scented victory crown.

*Head downhill to the avenue;
there in the gap between intent and outcome*

*damsons come to fruition in the spaces
of the unpruned imagination.*

*On the verge of the golf-course a red rose
unsheathes sharp thorns, that prickle in the mind*

though they are harmless as the long-dead legions
who manned the forts now vandalised by time.

*The one plant that remains, cow-parsley,
spreads its lace umbrels in white drifts as if*

nothing had changed since in brief northern summers
armed guards pacing the ramparts breathed its sweetness.

The italicised lines are taken from Alec Finlay's article 'Some Flowers Among The Ruins', which describes the project to create a memorial planting of trees and flowers in Callandar Park in Falkirk, inspired by the Antonine Wall, which runs along the northern edge of the grounds. The memorial was completely ruined by vandals within days.

<http://alecfinlayblog.blogspot.com/2015/06/some-flowers-among-ruins.html>

Ross Crawford

RED BURN

Whenever my mum visits
Stirling (from Ayrshire)
she says it's like
going on holiday.

Motorway rumbling
through viaduct arches,
portals to the ancients
but much too young.

At Castlecary, there are
memories of journeys
already taken, and work
long completed.

A fort was made here
strong in stone,
supporting a great wall
spanning an isthmus.

Forty-six seasons to build,
used for thirty six.
Forgotten a while,
yes, a good while.

Once demarcating
barbarity versus civility,
the frontier now exists
in liminality.

Shadow-seen in lumps,
bumps, ditches and furrows,
but not the edge of the world,
not even then.

'It's up on that ridge there!'
tapping at the window
when I should be
looking at the road.

Bisected by modernity,
still these places hold power.
We sense it when we pass
we hear if we listen.

ANOTHER VIEW

In classrooms we see
the land ('our' land?)
through the eyes of conquerors.

They are:
closer — objects, buildings, roads
knowable — writings, beliefs, timelines
familiar — characters, names, language
iconic — walls, weapons, eagles

All this culture left behind
by a people determined
on destruction
to remake
reshape
replace.

As for those vanquished:
distant
mysterious
alien
forgotten

Their words are not their own
'We are the last people on earth'

and the last to be free!
Calgacus the mouthpiece
harking back to nobler praxis.

We here now are neither
conquerors nor conquered
shame and glory
unclaimable,
but to know both better
would be victory.

R.A. Davis

INTERVALLUM

The sixth-century British monk Gildas (who may have been born in what is now Dumbarton) believed that the Antonine Wall was built before Hadrian's Wall, and not by Romans, but by Britons under the orders of a legion sent to defend them.

By the advice of their protectors, they now built a wall across the island from one sea to the other, which being manned with a proper force, might be a terror to the foes whom it was intended to repel, and a protection to their friends whom it covered. But this wall, being made of turf instead of stone, was of no use to that foolish people, who had no head to guide them.

—Gildas, *On The Ruin of Britain* (translation by J. A. Giles)

After the failure of this wall, Gildas believed the Roman legions returned one last time, putting Hadrian's Wall in place before finally abandoning the Britons to their fate.

We awoke in our lodging at Gwfan, well rested after the previous day's long journey. After fording the Cluta, we continued north, following a tributary called the Celfyn, which meanders among pleasant wooded groves. After an hour we approached a cluster of farmers' dwellings on an old road running east-west. Here, Gildas slowed his pace and began to look all about us, as if trying to come to an agreement with himself. At last he nodded and chose a path through a patch of scrubby woodland. Moments later we emerged in a clearing. He turned to me. 'Here. This is what we have come for.'

I confess I was not immediately impressed at what we found. At first sight it reminded me of a garden, like those of our own abbey, though hopelessly abandoned. After a moment I began to see an arrangement of low broken walls crossing in and out of the tall grass and foxgloves. The stone was very old. A building had stood here, this was all that remained. The air was awash with bees and butterflies.

'The ruin of Britain,' said Gildas, gesturing at the scene, smiling. He sighed. 'I'm afraid it is even more ruined than when I last was here. The farmers have been helping themselves to the stone.' He found a clear patch and sat down with a sigh. I asked him what this place once was. 'I do not know. It was not part of the wall itself, but something to do with it. It was a ruin when even my grandfather was a boy. My father brought us here to see the wall's remains,

to see the work of our people. He said we must remember. We drew the line, the line that marked the furthest edge of an Empire stretching from here to Jerusalem. I have never forgotten that.'

And so Gildas began his usual lament, which it has been my blessed privilege to hear almost every night of this journey. He tells of his forefathers and their repeated appeals to Rome for protection against the Scots and Picts. If only the wall had been built of stone. If only that famed legion had remained, or passed on the Roman skill in soldiery to the foolish Britons. Alas, that they ever invited the Saxon mercenaries.

I struggle to understand his feelings towards our forebears. I say ours, for though I was not born upon this island I am a Briton by blood. To Gildas the Britons are noble for having been Rome's subjects and blessed to have remained her subjects long enough to become Christians. But he calls them fools at every turn in their history. No wonder he left Britain.

We sat for a while, gave prayer of thanks for our safe arrival, and ate a little bread. Gildas began to venture through the overgrowth to look more closely at the stonework. Hacking away with his walking staff, he would reveal a patch of stone, stare at it for a while and shake his head. It reminded me of the time I watched our abbot appraising the workmanship of a new fence, as if he knew the first thing about building one.

While Gildas performed this inspection, I sat in quiet contemplation. My attention was drawn to the sound of horses from the direction of the road, slowing down. At once, three tall men on horseback entered the clearing. The first wore a helmet and was shouting something that could have been a greeting or a warning, I did not comprehend the tongue. He seemed to be calling in anger a name which almost sounded like 'Gildas'.

*

It has not been an easy journey these past months. Our peregrination had a two-fold purpose. Firstly, Gildas sought to verify the substance of his scholarship. These past years of plague have left us cloistered in our own land. Now it is once again safe to travel, Gildas longed for this summer and this journey, a chance to confer with our brothers in the British monasteries who might correct any errors in the history he has been writing. Second to that, Gildas wished to reacquaint himself with the leaders of the Britons, to preach to them and see that they had not strayed into heresy. Being the son of a king of Al Clud, and counting many of Britain's kings as his distant kin, he had a right to expect an invitation to their courts.

But when we first landed in Dumnonia, there was no welcome for a pair of foreign monks, though the missions from Hibernia are known to visit there. ‘We have priests of our own,’ said one of Constantine’s men, ‘we need not import them from Armorica.’ But Gildas insisted on an audience. What a night that was. We seemed to have arrived in the middle of some celebration and revelry, the men having just returned from a raid on neighbouring territory — on fellow Britons, not Saxons. Women there were at this feast and in great number. I believe we were fortunate to have escaped that lion’s den with our lives and indeed our mortal souls unblemished.

We fared better in Menevia, where we were guests of the bishop David, an old friend of Gildas. We spent some weeks there. Letters were sent onward to other petty kings of the region — Cuneglasus, Maglocunus, but we received no reply. Perhaps that was for the best. Gildas believes Maglocunus a liar and a murderer. I was relieved that I would not be forced to witness Gildas accusing the king in his own court.

Securing passage on a ship sailing up the western coast, we made our way to the estuary called Ituna, and the walled city of Luguvalium. Gildas had spoken often of the great stone wall which began on that coast and crossed the whole island. It was a construction superior to the turf wall we would see later when we approached Al Clud. He said this with something like covetousness, as though he wished the wall nearer to his birthplace had been better, that this later defence had not been necessary.

I was impressed by the stout stone wall and the fortified city of Caer Liguallid, as it is in the local tongue. We rested there long enough to plan our route north. The land between the walls is peaceful, we were informed, though the Saxons continue to settle on the eastern coast. Gildas listens to this news with great excitement. The prospect of pagan armies rising in the east to threaten native Christians, who must therefore rally under the banner of a great leader — this is what Gildas dreams of. But I detect something else at work. The Saxon leaders are moving their people west, yes. But rather than fleeing from the migration, the Britons remain in place, trading territory and making alliances. Marrying. There is conflict, certainly, but no longer the great battles, like those remembered by our fathers and grandfathers.

When I feel courageous enough to challenge him, I ask Gildas if he has any hope for the salvation of the Saxons, or for that matter, the Picts. Surely it is more gracious to seek the conversion of the pagan barbarian than forever petition the Christian apostate? The Saxons rule one side of Britain. Who will bring them to Christ, if not priests and monks such as us? Gildas smiles at

such questions and returns the answer: trust in God. The emperors of Rome once slaughtered Christians, he says, until an emperor became a Christian. God uses all His tools. I wonder if that is what Gildas sees in these ruins? The impression left by the hand of God when it last worked on the earth?

Now that I am here in Britain, this half-saved, half-damned island, I can see why the pagan Saxons might flourish. No living Briton remembers this island as it was under the empire. Gildas was raised on the memory, but it is not his to remember. Meanwhile, I begin to wonder quite how Christian these poor farmers ever were, who were only briefly Roman. A pagan Briton might well find more in common with the Saxons than with his own Christian kin.

I dare not share such speculation with Gildas, but that is what occupied my mind as we trekked slowly north on foot, tracing through the broad fertile valleys the rivers which braid together to form the Cluta. For four summer days and nights the gold-green hills rose and fell on either side of our path. We sheltered in farms and villages, found humble churches cared for by quiet priests.

On the second day we had met a great column of horsemen riding west. It did not seem as though they had been in battle, more likely they had been prepared for one and been disappointed. Their leader stopped where we stood and let the cavalry file past while he questioned us, in Latin at first. He was impressed to hear Gildas answer him in his own language, but did not introduce himself or boast of their purpose or allegiance. He spurred his horse and raced back to the head of the column.

Two monks travelling north, a hundred horsemen travelling west. Paths intersecting, quartering the land between two broken walls. I see it as though drawn on a map before me. The purpose of God working at right angles to the business of men, forever describing a cross.

*

The horsemen who found us at the ruins in the clearing were from Al Clud. Aware of our journey, they were our escort for the last part. Yet they brought no horses for us. We walked a little behind them, following what Gildas told me was the path of the wall, though I could hardly make out what there was to follow, until our sandalled feet trod on a hardened foundation, or the edge of the ditch beside us suddenly rose. I believe I was beginning to experience the same strange disappointment that Gildas felt for this ghostly shaping of the land. What did its builders, the great-grandfathers of our great-grandfathers,

believe they could keep out, with this mere cushion of earth? As we walk, I in the footsteps of Gildas, both of us in the tracks of the horses, I find myself stumbling towards an answer.

Gildas said it himself, the line was drawn here. But it was not the only line that was drawn. There was another wall, a superior barrier. But both now are broken, simple markers on a petty king's map, never again to be borders. In the end, stone and mortar will stand, earth will soften and subside by tree root and plough. One wall to be remembered and one to be forgotten. Between what is forgotten and what is remembered, there lies a fertile country, wandered by the wise and the foolish alike.

As the day wears on, the path reaches its end and the last vestiges of the wall meet the shining waters of the Cluta. In the distance to the north, I see the rock, Al Clud, for the first time. The horsemen stop. Gildas carries on, to the very water's edge. On the muddy pebbled beach he falls to his knees to pray. And I beside him. After a time we stand and with our next steps cross the invisible frontier.

Odile Mbias Gomes

A REFLECTION ON THE ROMAN HEATING SYSTEM
AND DRAINAGE

I was amazed to see that the system we are using today takes its roots in what the Romans set up long ago. At the Roman Fort at the Bearsden Baptist Church, I observed a series of ditches, all well-built, forming a small hill, a hiding hill, showing how Romans soldiers protected themselves from intruders.

You take the blame of conquering countries but —
You brought a new way of getting those in place to change their way of life
You built the Forts and walls around you for protection yet —
You show how to structure and strengthen a military system!
You take care of your well-being by building bathrooms and gardens full of
 all kind of plants and herbs and so —
You bring with you all new innovation by engineering heating
 systems, water supply and building architecture —
We owe you despite your rough way of showing us a new way to live
therefore we forgive you!

Linda Haggerstone

MOURNING SONG FOR VERECUNDA

Window panes
reflecting sun
on wet gray stone:
What could you see
looking through them —
pray, anything at all?

Glass beads strung
and sewn by hand
with tender care:
Did your lover
give them to you —
to wear to keep you safe?

Bright blue green
handle remains,
a bottle round:
With what liquid
was it filled — poured
before you went away?

Maryanne Hartness

VALLUM MEMORIAE

Bar Hill held
bucket hoops, of

treasure, Legionnaires
leather shod, marched,

as labourers cut
turf, laid on strong

foundations, altars to
their gods, while

architects studied
plans, fortifications

meticulously measured,
those engineers noted

distance, then recorded,
precisely, their signatures

on sandstone slabs,
Audere est Facere,

they took the day,
until night came.

Angi Holden

TILE WITH PAW PRINT, BOTHWELLHAUGH FORT

The legionnaire calls at the pottery to inspect the tiles before heading out across the moors. A group of locals have been causing trouble and he is taking a party of soldiers out to repel the insurgents. His dog is nosing around my bag, interested in tracking down my lunch, but lifts its head as his master whistles. It bounds across a tray of tiles I've lined up for firing. I curse the creature as it steps on the still-damp clay.

The legionnaire laughs and tells me to fire the damaged tile anyway. He'll have the impression made into a feature in his antechamber, close to the fire where he can see it as he writes his reports to Rome, and his letters home.

Later the survivors straggle home, carrying the wounded. A horse drags a bier, on which their dying commander lies prone. His dog stays close, sensing disaster, its ears low, its tail between its legs.

As I leave the pottery I slip the paw-print tile, still warm from the kiln, into the folds of my cloak. I won't have it discarded by another soldier. I will keep it, in honour of his memory.

Nina Lewis

LAID TO REST

Behind the headstones, a rampart base
preserved in place, the ancient wall
crosses the cemetery. The longest part

of the remains, resting by ones
who have gone before us.
For years I taught the Romans,

made children draw diagrams of roads,
the layers set down in construction.
I think of the gravediggers,

how they dig further down than the wall,
how the cemetery was built on top
as new history, positioned. The cycle of life.

37 MILES FROM THE FORTH TO THE CLYDE

Along the final frontier. decorative place markers
carved in stone, fort outlines still mowed
into wild grass embankments,

remnants of bathhouses exist in the middle
of parks and housing developments,
our lives thousands of years later.

Moss covered boulders on woodland floor
tell a story of strong Roman hands,
of men who kept orders, kept order.

The wall, ever present in maps and markers
on steps leading to new buildings.
In Kirkintilloch town centre the pavement

is decorated like a soldier, with badges of brick.
Diagonal dual tracks of rectangular tile
mark the outline where the wall once was.

Castlehill undulates, north of the wall
where Romans dug a series of defences.
V shaped ditches and the lilia at Rough Castle,

a pattern of holes, defensive pits,
these regimented puddles of stone. I imagine
the labour, the hours of toil, the loss of trees.

A MESSAGE OF TRIUMPH

Distance Sculptures depict graphic scenes
of life on the frontier. Propaganda pictures,
a demonstration of strength and power
designed to strike fear.

The final frontier forged a route
through Scotland, a defence needed
against wild barbarians.

The new sculpted replica markers
are hand-crafted by apprentice masons,
who used tools which have remained
mostly unchanged since Roman times.

Peter McCarey

FROM *THE SYLLABARY*

Riveting. Paisley
On a wet Wednesday
Rivets of rain on
The water at Renfrew
Submarine surfaces
Signals pinged off of.
Rome pinned its hopes
On the Antonine Wall
As officers pigged out
On yo-ho-ho
Rational rum.

This poem is taken from Peter McCarey's work *The Syllabary*, which can be found online at www.thesyllabary.com

Joanna B McGarry

THE HUNTERS

Bakrus gazed in wonder at the glistening ice and snow before him. When he'd left the ship at the Port of Arbeia, on Hadrian's great wall, he'd thought there could be no colder, bleaker place in the world. That was before the trek north, where he'd experienced real cold!

He'd thanked the gods every day for the straight Roman roads and the warm clothing and boots the auxiliaries had been issued with. In Caledonia, he'd joined the First Cohort of Baetasians, garrisoned at the Roman fort at Clotagenium, at the western end of the other wall, the Valla Antoninus.

'Not like home, then?' Galerius Caelinus, his squad leader had joined him and was looking out on the snow-covered vicus, where civilian workers and local tribes-people had established a thriving settlement.

'I've never seen snow,' Bakrus admitted, drawing his cloak closer round himself. His Berber hometown, Thamugadi, had been hot and dry. The Romans had more or less taken over. They'd built impressive roads, a forum and public buildings, as well as villas, bathhouses and impressive monuments. He'd lived in the old town and he'd had little contact with the Romans, until he joined the Roman army, but that's a different story.

'It should keep the barbarians close to home,' Galerius pointed out. 'Tearlach will have rolled over in bed and gone back to sleep.'

Tearlach, under his Roman name Tearlachus Britannicus, had been the squad leader until he retired and moved into the settlement to live with his wife and family. His retirement meant Galerius became leader of the eight-man squad, known as a contubernium. Bakrus had been brought in to fill the place in the squad. Young and inexperienced, the others good-naturedly looked out for him.

The silence was shattered by a roar from the optio who was standing outside their barrack's room. 'You men! Get back here!'

The optio, Accius Probos, kicked the door shut behind them. 'Right! Now everyone's decided to join us, we'll get on with it, will we?' There was a moment's silence, broken by a bellow from the optio. 'Well?'

'Yes, Sir!'

'Work doesn't stop because of a little bit of bad weather.' He looked round the men who gazed back, expressionless and stoic; they hadn't been expecting a rest day.

‘Bakrus, you can stay inside. We wouldn’t want the snow and ice turning you white like the rest of us, would we?’

‘Sir?’ Bakrus stared in horror at the optio, who continued with considerable relish.

‘Well, it’ll happen soon enough in this land that rarely sees the sun. Your hair might even turn red, like the natives.’

Bakrus almost collapsed in horror. He was proud of his black skin and spent a considerable portion of his pay on oils and herbal potions from the local apothecaries, to keep it shiny and smooth. He let his hair grow as long as possible, within regulations, cultivating its curly texture and shine. He’d looked like every other boy in his hometown; here he was much admired by the local ladies, less used to the exotic than those in garrison towns in the south.

‘It’ll never happen,’ Galerius growled reassuringly.

‘Shut up, Galerius. I’ll tell you when to speak, and since our young friend has nothing to worry about, he’ll be deployed outside.’

Bakrus glanced thankfully at Galerius but wondered what he could now look forward to, out in the snow.

‘Galerius, Venedius and Bakrus, get yourselves out into the hills and don’t come back without something tasty for the commander’s table. He’s partial to a nice piece of elk.’

‘I’ve never hunted animals.’ Bakrus gulped. The snow was bad enough, but there could be any number of hostile tribesmen outside the perimeter. He didn’t even want to think about wild animals. Realising the optio was glaring at him, he added, ‘Sir!’

‘This is your chance to learn then...isn’t it?’

‘Yes, Sir! Thank you, Sir!’

‘Paulus and Vectimarus, stables need cleaning out.’

‘At least it’ll be warm,’ Paulus murmured. The remaining three waited to find out what their fate was to be. None looked hopeful.

‘Gallio, Sidonius, Publius, latrine duty!’ He smirked. ‘They’ll be blocked and frozen.’

‘Yes, Sir!’

The men waited in silence as the optio left and they heard him kicking over some equipment in their store room. ‘And get this equipment stowed away properly,’ he bellowed, before slamming the door.

Galerius, Venedius and Bakrus dressed in as many layers as they could, but Galerius stopped Venedius when he picked up his sword. ‘The gladius will get in the way on the hills, especially in the snow. Just take your pugio. It won’t get in the way.’

With their daggers on their belts, they covered everything with their heaviest cloaks, hoping the sheep oil in the wool would keep them dry. Taking their spears, they made their way outside where whirling snowflakes continued to add to the thick blanket covering every surface.

‘We’ll have a word with Nestore,’ Galerius said, as they made their way along the Via Praetoria towards the gate. ‘He’s the best hunter I know and he’ll be in. He’s excused duties since he injured his leg in training.’

Galerius hammered on the door of Nestore’s squad room, then pushed his way in. Nestore listened as Galerius explained that they’d been ordered to bring in some game.

‘He’s got my lads on latrine duty,’ Nestore grumbled. ‘Someone’s got to do it, I know, but it’s always the same ones he picks for the dirty jobs.’

Galerius nodded. ‘Aye, he’s got three of mine cleaning them.’

‘Anyway,’ Nestore continued, ‘Diana might look on you favourably, but I doubt it. Your best hope is to find some birds. There’s a few that nest on the ground, but they stay well hidden.’ He considered their options. ‘There’s hare, elk, deer and boar, but you lot are no match for them.’ He led them out to the store room and handed each a rolled-up net with weights attached.

They pushed their spears inside the rolled-up nets. ‘Thanks, Nestore. We’ll share our catch with you, unless the optio gets to us first,’ Galerius promised.

Nestore roared with laughter. ‘If you lot catch anything, I’ll cook it for you, myself.’ He let them out, slamming the door behind them, to keep out the driving snow. The reluctant hunters headed towards the gate and the commiserations of the guards, huddled round their brazier.

‘Accius Probos just wants you busy and miserable.’ One of the guards told them from his position near the brazier. ‘I know for a fact, the commander at Cibra sent over an elk, butchered and ready to roast, and a basket of dried fruit for our esteemed commander. He’s not about to go hungry.’

Grumbling but resigned, the men pulled their hoods close around their faces and trudged up the hill behind the fort. ‘Stay alert,’ Venedius warned, as they battled the wind and driving snow. ‘There’s an ancient fort up here. We drove the tribesmen out when we built the wall, but the tribes still use it sometimes.’

When they’d struggled to the top of the hill, panting but warmed by the climb, they brushed snow off a fallen log and sat down to eat biscuits known as *buccellāta* and drink the rough wine or *posca* they had brought. Huddled together against the wind, they gazed down on the fort, and the wall, stretching to the west, dark and massive against the snow.

‘What’s happened to the river?’ Bakrus asked. ‘None of the boats are moving, and it looks like people are walking on the water.’

‘Aye, the Abhainn Chluaidh’s frozen solid,’ Galerius nodded. ‘Happens every winter.’

‘That’s the local name for the river,’ Venedius explained. ‘We call it the Clota; easier to say.’

‘I’m almost a local,’ Galerius laughed. ‘I’ve lived here longer than anywhere else. I expect I’ll retire to the vicus when I’ve served my 25 years.’ He stood and shook the snow off his cloak. ‘For now, though, we’d best find some birds.’

They gathered up their equipment and made their way over the hill and down the other side. They slid and tumbled into snow drifts, alternately laughing at each other and cursing, but seeing no other living creatures apart from a few birds, black shapes against the grey sky.

Suddenly Galerius stopped and listened. In a lull in the wind, they all heard it; an animal’s squeal of rage followed by low grunts.

‘Boar!’ hissed Venedius.

‘It sounds angry,’ Bakrus whispered.

‘It’ll get angrier when it sees us,’ Venedius hissed back, ‘so keep quiet and stay alert.’

Galerius led them towards the sound, and as they made their way round a huge boulder, they came upon an old oak tree. Its bare branches bent and swayed in the wind and sitting against the knotted trunk was a woman. Her head had sunk down on her chest and the wind whipped her long red hair across her face. A thin layer of bloodied snow covered her legs. In her wool wrapped hands, she gripped a spear.

‘Is she dead?’ Bakrus had raised his voice over the sound of the wind, and, as Galerius hushed him, two things happened. A massive boar emerged from the bracken, and the woman answered.

‘No! I’m not dead. I’m bleeding and I’m freezing.’

‘Stay still,’ Venedius whispered, keeping his gaze fixed on the beast.

She raised her head and looked at them. She was young, just a girl, really. ‘I can see you’re going to be a great help.’ With a disgusted look, she turned back to the boar. She gripped her spear, ready to defend herself.

The animal slowly swung its massive head from side to side as it alternated between watching the girl, and eyeing the new threat. It would decide what to do soon.

Without looking away from the beast, Galerius began slowly unrolling his net. Venedius and Bakrus did the same. Galerius signalled Bakrus to move up

beside him. 'We throw the nets over it. Venedius, leave your net. Go in fast and hard with your spear. The nets won't hold him for long.'

Bakrus gulped but was determined to prove himself. Still moving calmly and slowly, Galerius moved towards the boar, keeping between the animal and the girl, loosening the net as he went. He watched Bakrus doing the same, but made sure he stayed in front of the lad. He trusted Venedius to play his part and not to spear one of them accidentally.

The girl hefted her spear. If the newcomers bungled this, the enraged boar would charge her.

A bird, startled by movement in the distance, flew up screeching, and Galerius burst into action, throwing the net over the boar's head, as the second net tangled itself round the animal's hind quarters. Venedius rushed forward and stabbed his spear into its side and Galerius finished it off with his dagger. They watched as the great beast shuddered then lay still in a pool of blood.

They breathed long sighs of relief then grinned at each other. 'The optio won't be expecting this.' Venedius laughed and clapped Bakrus on his shoulder. 'You did well.'

'Don't suppose you could help me, now you've finished off my boar.' Her voice was weak, but her intention was clear. The animal was hers.

Galerius laughed in appreciation of her spirit. 'We could just leave you there and take the beast.'

'Aye, you could, but that bird was disturbed by my people coming this way. They'll track you down and kill you...slowly and painfully.'

Galerius was already moving with the others, to clear the snow away from her. Her woollen trousers were ripped, and a wound in her thigh showed where the blood had come from. The bleeding had stopped, but the skin round about was badly bruised. 'What happened?'

'The boar took me by surprise. His tooth must have caught me when he charged. I've been keeping him at bay since.'

A low growl caused them to turn, as a hunter came striding towards them. 'My father,' the girl explained, as he pushed past them and began talking to his daughter.

Galerius put his hand on Bakrus' arm to reassure him. 'They're Decantae. They come into the settlement to trade and they're generally friendly.' He watched the interaction between father and daughter. 'I'd say he's more annoyed with his daughter for getting so far ahead of the others, than he is at us.' They left the two arguing, and walked over and joined the band of hunters that had entered the clearing and were examining the boar.

‘You’ll be wanting to take your kill,’ the girl called over. The hunters stood aside, and the three men rolled the nets round their spears, then looked at the massive mound of flesh and bone lying in the snow.

‘How are we going to get that back to the fort?’ Venedius asked.

The girl came over, leaning on her father. She grinned. ‘We could trade.’

At a signal from her father, two hunters came forward and threw two dead hares and three birds onto the snow. The fur on the hares was almost white. The girl pointed at them. ‘For the boar.’

‘That’s not much of a trade,’ Bakrus complained, but Galerius laughed. ‘You want to drag that monster back to the fort?’ He turned to the girl. ‘We’ll trade...and thank you.’ He knew the hunters could easily have taken their own kill and the boar.

The hunters tied the boar up and slung it between sturdy poles. As they left, the girl called back. ‘Best hurry. It’ll be dark soon. Come and see me on market day. I sell honey-cakes and wine.’

The trek back to the fort with their spoils was hard going but at least it was downhill and the snow held off until they reached the road. Galerius stopped far enough away that the guards in the towers wouldn’t see what they were doing.

‘Venedius, hide a bird and a hare under your cloak and take them and the nets to Nestore.’ He smiled. ‘Remind him he’s to cook our supper tonight. I’ll take one of the birds to the optio.’ He turned to Bakrus. ‘You hide a hare, and a bird under your cloak and take them to our squad room...and don’t stop on the way. Get inside as quickly as you can. We don’t want the optio finding out what we’ve got.’

‘He won’t be happy with one bird,’ Bakrus warned, but Venedius shook his head.

‘He never expected us to catch anything, He just wanted us out in the snow all day, wasting our time. Even one bird will be a surprise.’

With thoughts of roast meat, and a warm squad room, they carried on to the fort. Bakrus was thinking of the next market day, and the Decantae girl with the long red hair. He was thinking that life on the Antonine Wall wasn’t so bad, despite the cold.

James McGonigal

DAYS ON THE WALL

And the day so blue — wide-eyed but
worried and brisk as a wing-flicker

And the day so grey — one indrawn breath
of the grass thinking somebody's there

And the day — half-blind feeling its way
through flakes that tweak the eye and ear

And the day bending forward to haul
out of the well this morning's peculiar sky

And the nights here the longest on earth watching
stars watching me watching out for them shooting

HOWKIN

Haw, wad ye look at them, galoots
howkin at durt and bingin it up,
squarin aff turf and streekin it up
ticht as a boar's bum.

Och, let them get oan wi it, eejits
axin and rivin stobs for tae tap it aa,
batter them intae the turf and then caa
thon booroch o muck a waa?

Swine that they are, wi their grunyies
in the forest flair grumphin and glaggin
durt, wad yese listen tae their glaggerin
mooths whan they talk?

Thon waa is sleekin oan noo, slaw
as an eddir — that'll birl roon tae skite
an airm or a leg, sic a bite
as they had nivver thocht tae thole.

GHOST GARDENER

The soldier at my back some afternoons
digging south of the Wall
is wary how this spade shines — stainless
fist of a god unearthing what's to come.
He seems more content
listening to my mattock dunt
like a workmate's grunt.

Green of young garlic delights him,
and elder blossom, bean flowers.
Both of us are happy then to persevere
till dusk and moon-breath.
Spring frosts are one worry on this ridge.
Behind us, not far west, the sea
is grinning, or girning. We'll soon see.

David McVey

THE INN BY THE WALL

Mr Tenby, well-wrapped against the biting autumn wind, had drifted into something like a doze even though the unsprung wooden cart bounced and thudded along the rough highway. The wilful beast hauling it varied between lifeless dawdling and sudden, frenetic bursts of activity. At one point a stop had to be made to accommodate the swift passing of a stagecoach. Tenby continued to dream and snooze, until jolted by a sudden rise up a steep, cobbled street. There was a sharp right turn, and they stopped. He pulled himself upright, turned to the driver and asked, 'Lang! Where are we? Why have we stopped?'

The driver, a wrinkled, weather-beaten man, replied, 'This is the place they ca Kirkintullo, sir.'

'I don't doubt your word, Lang, but that is scarcely sufficient reason to stop. I have three weeks in which to explore Scotland, and I desire to immerse myself in the grand and the romantic. This,' he went on, waving a hand at a dusty, narrow street in which grubby children and loutish men stared at them, 'is neither grand nor romantic. Is it?'

'I ken fine that Kirkintullo is no much o a place now, but langsyne the Romans bided here.' Tenby still looked doubtful, and Lang continued, 'I'll show ye part o the Roman bigging they ca' Grahamsdyke, and I can take ye tae folk who hae Roman objects in their keeping. They found a wheen o them when they built the canal.' Tenby yawned, and Lang added rather desperately, 'Aa the other gentry were really interested in the Roman remains.'

'I cannot account for the interest of a cultured people like the Ancient Romans,' said Tenby, 'in such a place as this. That they ultimately left it, I can quite understand.'

There was an uneasy silence, after which Tenby allowed Lang to put the horse and cart into the care of an inn, and the two men returned to the centre of town, walked uphill past a steeple, and round the remains of old fortifications to a grassy hilltop. There were wide views to the north, across a flat river valley, to great hills partly hidden behind scudding clouds. Around the green knoll were a few mounds and pieces of crumbling masonry; each dismal relic was dubiously accredited to the Romans by a shabby 'guide' whom Lang had produced, still wielding a pot of ale, from a nearby cottage. Tenby was aloof and abstracted, and remained so when they returned to the hovel and the guide brought out a few sad, broken shards of pottery and bits of discoloured

metal. As they left, he nonetheless pressed a few coins in the man's hand. 'To the inn,' he said to Lang.

The inn proved to be mean, cold, dirty, unused to entertaining touring English gentlemen. Tenby ate a tepid meal in his bare room, and then retired, doing his best to sleep against the din from downstairs, and the shouts of idlers in the streets.

Next morning he was wakened by clatterings from the kitchen; he moved to the window and pulled aside the curtain, admitting a solid block of light which picked out countless dust particles. The window looked over the crazy angles of the rooftops of the town to the hills that lay to the north in a smooth green line, clear in the jewelled sunlight. A clear, new-born day sparkled. Tenby smiled: this was better.

Shortly after, he stood glaring stupidly at the washstand, holding the empty water-jug; there was no basin. He threw the jug down on the bed and fell again to cursing the town and its people.

At length a knock at his door announced the arrival of a serving-lass bearing an unappetising breakfast. When he had eaten, he descended to the tap-room to meet a sheepish Lang. The guide had previously directed his clients to another inn, but had changed to this one to save money. He had been unaware quite how mean it really was. A lad appeared with Tenby's portmanteau, and the two men made to exit; before they could, they were interrupted by the landlord and his wife, who bid Tenby effusive farewells with much handshaking and bowing. Tenby finally made his escape, and clambered into the cart with a strong feeling of uncleanness.

'Where are we going now? Not to some similar charmless town, I hope?'

'No, indeed,' said Lang, wearily, 'we go tae Stirling to view the castle.'

'Ah! Yes. I do recall that this edifice features in Waverley.'

'I dinna ken aboot that, but aa the other gentlemen said it was right fine. Mind you, they a' liked the Kirkintullo Roman remains as weel.'

The way was quiet, but to their right they could see loaded barges, low in the water, being hauled along the canal. They entered a broad valley of green fields and dark, well-grown woods, with the canal a straight, pale blue line on the valley floor. There were steep slopes above it, and from these they saw a puff of steam or smoke suddenly appear. Seconds later came a thunderous, echoing blast, like heavy gunfire. The sleepy pony was spooked into skittishness.

'What was that?' asked Tenby.

'They're bigging a railway line,' said Lang, still trying to calm his pony. 'It's supposed tae run aa the way frae Glasgow tae Edinbro'.' Tenby could now pick

out hundreds of tiny figures on the hillside, working, loading, shovelling and carrying amid a scarred landscape of broken rocks and brown earth. 'Aye,' went on Lang, 'it will likely be the ruin o many o us carriers. And there maun be a wheen mair tourists around in time to come.'

'Then I am glad I have come now before the people are corrupted by many visitors,' said Tenby, 'but we must get on. I cannot find my pocket watch — I must have packed it. What time have we?'

'It's near enough time to find an inn and hae some ale, but I canna be sure as I haena a watch.' The two men and their equipage surged forward again.

Back in the inn they had quitted that morning, the landlord and his wife stood behind the counter of the deserted tap-room, the man fingering a sumptuous, shining timepiece with a gold chain.

'Aye, a grand piece o wark this; and so was ours in getting hold o't. A fool and his gold, eh? He'll no' be back now, and we can sell it to the next gentleman that comes by here tae see Grahamsdyke.'

His wife replied with a delighted cackle.

Morgan Melhuish

HOUSEHOLD GODS

They are a monstrosity.
These household gods
You've brought into our lives
To grease the wheels,
to spare the rod
Of Roman rule.

Immovable, they coldly claim space
When this is my sanctuary.
They are stone-blind
They do not unleash gentle spring rains
They do not calm the storm
They do not provide beans and barley,
They do not speak age-old common sense
They do not breathe in me,
They are like you...
They do not listen, they are not profound.
This idolatry sticks in my maw
A fish bone I cannot choke down
Do what you like outside
But don't interfere in this
This Woman's work.

Dawn's creak
Is where I hear them
The women who went before
Who whispered the word,
brought flame from between their hands
As if cradling a blossom
These are my household gods.
Their pulse is mine.

The dusty light's shaft
is where I see them

The women who went before
Who stirred the pot,
rocked the child.
Even today they wrap comforting arms around me,
Not when I have stumbled,
a splinter embedded in my palm.
Those aren't the consolations I need now.
I know how to suck, how to dust
Myself down and get back up.

The misty morning is where I feel them
The women who went before
The ghost of my mother within me
Emerges in each breath of vapour
To join my ancestors in the chill haar
across dew sodden grass
Steadfast in a way these statues never could be
They unfurl like a seed
They know how to defy kindly
They persist and resist
they rise in ascension.

ENOUGH

It was enough
To share that spring of oysters
Shy glances over sharp shells
My insides a jelly, slurped
Your salted smile a blade of brine

It was enough
to barter all summer
Sweet nothings traded,
kisses given, back and forth
Your empire of consent had me crying out.
Yes!

Blood is thick but oil is more so
My father willed me away
So when you marched with your brothers
And made examples of my kin
You'd already conquered my crawling skin

Just let me go home to my mother now...
Darling, just let me go home...

You gave me a name
A comb, a bronze brooch
In every way a fastening
Clasped me to your heart
Pinned me down

You gave me an ultimatum
Disguised in the robes of choice
When your empire of consent came knocking,
I opened like an oyster — with force.

Just let me go home to my mother now...
Darling, just let me go home...

More than enough
This room with its fine wall paintings
Flowers and vines entwined like lovers
Joyful lovers entwined like vines
But the pigments have faded
And the frescoes are bitter to touch

More than enough
I've lost myself
In a labyrinth of rooms and internal walls
Each space a purpose
Triclinium, culina, atrium
Like naming the bones
Sacrum, ilium, pubis
I have my place and purpose
The space within me burns

Just let me go home to my mother now...
Darling, just let me go home...

I'm full
The tastes of last night linger...
The tears of oysters,
Winter in the wine
You think I'm a vessel running over
A vestal virgin filled to the brim

I am as separate as oil

I want to grind away your seed
Shape black bread coloured by my blood
To knead, nothing but an empire of one
This trade I've made will be my escape,
My fastening
She will be enough.

This is enough

AN EDUCATION

After Sappho

My father traded with Rome and all I got
was this lousy toga. Dragging heels, stupid
in sandals and sent to school to be filled like
Seneca's vessel.

A phalanx of students: close knit and defensive,
conquest in their future, appraise me, pin me
down, drill 'veni, vidi, vici' in new territory
they've assaulted.

Sore from lessons learnt today home should be a
sanctuary yet all I see is muddy
and shameful, primitive compared to Roman
ideals and ideas.

They say sons become the mirror of fathers
cruelly distorted, this race of masculine
heirachy, let these dumb stags compete.
Not me. Not you.

The only boy not to mock, tease me for my
Celtic accent, my Celtic look, Celtic stink.
Oh to have an upwardly mobile father
keen to break birthrights.

You dull rote pain. I've learnt you off by heart. You're
a study, worth the price of subdued
fealty, to see a smile, the nape of your neck.
The parts no one sees.

To chase classes away, race you to afternoons
bathing in the sweat of each other, even
your rough trade has smooth oiled skin, shaved clean
away, sweet on you.

We're a conjugation of verbs, a dance of
numerals, my V, your I, XXX across our skin.
In carnal knowledge I ace the test, pass with
colours that dazzle.

Was this what my father wanted? Lifting me
above my station, fitting nowhere, a foot
in both camps — a harbour in neither, but the
hollow of your arms.

Alan Montgomery

CARRIDEN

Few people visit Carriden nowadays, largely, I suspect, because it is not an easy place to find. The journey from Edinburgh, about fifteen miles as the crow flies, will take over an hour on public transport, hopping on and off trains and buses before finishing on foot. You can drive it in half the time, but there are no signposts to point the way, and nowhere to leave your car when you get there. I ended up taking the easiest but most expensive route, catching a train from Edinburgh to Linlithgow and then calling for a taxi at the station.

The taxi driver was a friendly sort, interested to hear of my plans to walk the Antonine Wall. He was aware of the Roman frontier, but not particularly impressed by what he had seen of it: 'The thing is, it's really just a ditch,' he told me, as if to prepare me for disappointment. For a brief moment I felt the urge to correct him, to explain the unique qualities of this ancient wonder, but in the end, too polite or maybe just too lazy, I simply nodded, smiled and changed the subject.

The taxi dropped me off on Carriden Brae, just north of a cluster of cottages known as Muirhouses, where a lodge house sits at the end of a long driveway. I walked down this drive, past the empty shell of an eighteenth-century kitchen garden, once filled with fruit and vegetables, its collapsing brick walls now offering shelter to nothing more than long grass and weeds. Carrying on through some woods, I passed a cluster of outbuildings, an old stable block recently converted into houses by the look of it, catching glimpses of a larger building hidden further back in the trees to my left before I emerged into an open field.

The harvest had recently been gathered, leaving behind only a rough stubble of straw poking out of the broken earth. I stepped off the tarmacked road and onto the field, through a dark, soggy patch where several lines of tyre tracks ended their sinuous routes through the golden stalks. My walking boots, worn in on London streets, finally got a taste of Scottish mud.

My arrival clearly came as a surprise to the local wildlife. A small brown bird, a female pheasant perhaps, took fright and tottered anxiously across the open ground towards the safety of some nearby bushes. Seconds later a rabbit sprang to life, briefly breaking camouflage as it hopped into a clump of long grass. And then, well nothing much, just the soft sound of the wind in the trees and a few light clouds sailing across the late summer sky, some darker

outliers to the north sliding ominously towards me, bringing with them the threat of summer showers.

Today it looks like an unremarkable corner of rural Scotland, one that continues to hold out against the urban sprawl that has swallowed up so much of the surrounding countryside. But Carriden has not always been so quiet — in past centuries, it saw plenty of dramatic history. The physical remains of that history are all around me, particularly beneath my feet, lying layer upon layer like igneous strata, some layers visible, some buried for now, levels of the past overlapping and folding into one another. Once in a while the top layers will rupture and allow others, long hidden below, to briefly reappear.

Standing there, it was hard to imagine that, for a short while around the middle of the second century, this field was the location of a major Roman military installation that played a key part in the expansion of the greatest empire that the world had ever seen. There is nothing Roman to see above ground now, but that does not mean that nothing survives. In fact, the many fascinating antiquities that have been unearthed at Carriden over the years, most of them dug up accidentally by workmen or turned up by the plough, give some clues as to what lies beneath.

With thoughts of buried treasure filling my head, I began to stroll along the grassy edge of the field, down towards the Firth of Forth. I cast my eyes to the ground, searching for any fragments of terracotta, maybe even the glitter of half-buried gold. Nothing of course, and it turned out I don't really have the patience for this kind of search, known as 'fieldwalking', which requires a steady gaze and a slow, diligent pace. Soon I was distracted by a break in the trees to my left that revealed Carriden House, a hulk of honey-coloured masonry surmounted by pepperpot turrets and surrounded by neat lawns.

The oldest part of Carriden House probably dates from the early seventeenth century, although there may be the remains of an earlier castle hidden in its solid mass of stonework. In England at that time, they were building elegant mansions, their oak-panelled, tapestry-lined rooms bright with sunlight. Up here, although Scotland was by now becoming a more settled nation, they still preferred high, fortified towers with tiny windows and battlements, as if the Scots were too traumatised by centuries of rebellion, civil war and invasion to give up their high-security homes.

The tower's thick walls were later pierced by oriel windows installed to brighten its gloomy vaults, but it still has an austere air about it, as well as several gunloops, tiny round holes designed for taking pot-shots at potential attackers who, in the end, never came. It is interesting to wonder if this site

was chosen by the tower's builders as a place of strength and safety, if they had heard tales of a Roman fortress built on the same spot or even found evidence of it. The name Carriden certainly seems to be derived from the Celtic word 'caer', meaning a stronghold or citadel.

Antiquarians flocked to Carriden in the eighteenth century, drawn by signs of Roman activity. Enthusiastic antiquarian Robert Sibbald visited 'the House of Carridin' in the early 1700s and was shown a gold coin of the emperor Vespasian found by the house's owner, Alexander Milne, as well as a 'Stone with the Head of an Eagl [sic] graven upon it' that Milne had dug up by chance and inserted into the wall of his new west wing. For Sibbald, a huge admirer of classical civilisation, such artefacts were proof that Roman civility had permeated his homeland. He had no hesitation in declaring Carriden the location of a Roman municipium, a town with an adjoining port, one of many Roman settlements that he imagined had been established all across what is now southern Scotland.

In the early 1720s, Alexander Gordon followed in Sibbald's footsteps, also coming to Carriden in search of Roman antiquities. He described (and illustrated, in a clumsy line drawing) that carved eagle in *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, the book that resulted from his extensive research into Scotland's Roman past. He also mentioned Milne's gold coin as well as a stone altar and a supposedly Roman (but probably Bronze Age) sword found. To Gordon, however, this was all evidence not of Roman conquest, but rather of brief and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to subdue the invincible tribes of ancient Caledonia. He dismissed Sibbald's claims of Roman civility and instead presented Roman Scotland as a blood-soaked warzone. Like many unhappy with the British Union of 1707, Gordon found nostalgic solace in the mythical courage of his ancient ancestors, indomitable warriors who had, it seemed, been better at resisting foreign subjugation than his contemporary Scots.

Englishman John Horsley headed to 'Caer-ridden' soon after to inspect the eagle stone while researching his iconic *Britannia Romana*, a book that still commands respect in archaeological circles today. He agreed that Scotland had not been conquered by Rome but did not accept that this was all down to the courage of the indigenous Caledonians. Instead, Horsley suggested that the Romans were simply 'indifferent' to this part of the world, seeing no gain in conquering such a cold, miserable wasteland, a theory that, not surprisingly, found few adherents north of the border.

As for that carved stone, Sibbald had underplayed it somewhat by describ-

ing it as just the head of an eagle. The illustrations of the panel published by Gordon and Horsley (whose drawings skills were thankfully better than those of his Scottish counterpart) both show a full eagle with wings outstretched and a wreath grasped in its beak. Next to it were carved letters. Gordon claimed they were too worn to decipher but thought that they might be read as 'COH IVLIA'. Horsley correctly recognised the sculpture as a centurial stone, a carved panel inserted into a building by one of the Roman soldiers who had constructed it. More confident, also more scholarly than Gordon, he interpreted the inscription as follows:

COH
VIII
STA
TELES

To literate Romans, such texts would have been instantly legible. I have a decent grasp of Latin, having studied it both as a schoolboy and as a mature student, but I still find Roman inscriptions difficult to translate — with all of their obscure terms and cryptic abbreviations, they are a language unto themselves. Modern epigraphists have filled in the gaps and read this inscription as COH(ortis) VIII STA(tili) TELES(phori), 'From the eighth cohort, the century of Statilius [or possibly Statius] Telesphorus (built this)'. Who Statilius Telesphorus was, or what he helped to build, we will never know, but he obviously identified with the eagle, aquila in Latin, that potent symbol of Roman military strength.

*

Carriden House has changed hands many times over the years. By the mid-twentieth century it had fallen into disrepair, and it was almost demolished in the 1960s when (thankfully aborted) plans were drawn up to replace it with a power station. Back in those days, expensive stately piles like this were being dynamited and demolished all over Scotland, but Carriden thankfully escaped the massacre. Successive owners have lovingly restored it since then, and it is now once again a family home. Sadly, that carved eagle has disappeared at some point (antiquarian Robert Stuart found no trace of it when he visited in the early 1840s), presumably lost as the house was repeatedly remodelled. It may well have been destroyed, but I like to think that it has just been covered up and is still lurking in there somewhere, waiting patiently to be rediscovered once again.

Confirmation of Carriden's role as a key part of the Roman frontier finally came to light in 1945. This time the discovery was made not under the ground, but from the air, by pioneering archaeologist and aerial photographer Kenneth St Joseph. He took photographs while flying over the site, images that revealed shadowy parallel lines in the field close to where I was now standing. These are what are known as 'cropmarks' — most visible in dry summers, they appear as the grass thrives in the deep, moist earth that has filled ancient trenches or holes but grows less well in the shallow soil covering buried walls or earthworks.

Featuring a distinctive rounded corner, the ghostly cropmarks at Carriden were instantly recognisable as the defences of a Roman fort. St Joseph's photographs show the fort's eastern side, revealing three ditches and a causeway leading across them to a gated entrance. Excavations in 1946 uncovered not just these once formidable ditches, but also pottery from the Antonine period. Carriden's location by the coast would have provided the perfect dropping off point for supplies arriving by sea, and it could be that the rampart of the frontier extended as far as the fort, although no remains of it have been found in the vicinity.

Another chance discovery shed more light on Carriden's history in 1956, when a ploughman uncovered a sandstone altar at the northern edge of this field. An inscription was carved into the front of the block of soft stone, its letters weathered but legible. It opens, as such altars often do, with the letters 'I O M', an abbreviation of *Iovi Optimo Maximo*, 'Jupiter the Best and Greatest', a dedication to the chief deity in the Roman pantheon. Amazingly, the inscription mentions the place it was set up — Velunia, or potentially Veluniate — making Carriden one of the few Roman sites in Scotland to which we can confidently assign an ancient name.

It also refers to the local *vicani*, meaning villagers, showing that there was a Roman civil settlement adjoining the military fortress. But forget any grand ideas you might have of classical grandeur - rather than paved streets lined with marble-columned temples and centrally heated houses furnished with elaborate mosaics, Velunia was probably just a huddle of simple wooden huts and workshops, home to wives, children, traders and the numerous hangers-on who followed the Roman army on its endless campaigns.

Reaching the northern edge of the field, I stepped through the trees to find a narrow coastal path running along the top of a steep bank. Plonking myself on a rudimentary wooden bench next to the path, I took a few minutes to enjoy the view across the Firth of Forth. The tide was well out that morning, revealing extensive sandy flats riddled with a network of silvery streams.

The Forth beyond was still wide, bigger than a river here, but nothing like the broad, open estuary that it becomes further east. Recent research suggests that the firth would have been even wider and deeper in Roman times, when sea levels were higher than they are today. On the other side was Fife, a patchwork of fields and trees with a hazy range of blueish hills beyond. My OS map did not extend that far, but I later worked out that these were the Ochils, a range that runs for over 25 miles from the Tay down to Stirling, a sort of primordial north/south divide between the Lowlands and the Highlands.

Of everything I had seen so far, it is only this horizon, this distant line of cloud-grazing peaks and slopes that would look familiar to a Roman. I wondered how an auxiliary based at Velunia would have reacted to this view. A shiver of fear as he considered the unconquered (perhaps even unconquerable, depending on who you believe) Caledonians who inhabited the north? A sense of relief or satisfaction that he was on the civilised side of the frontier and not in the barbaric (as the Romans saw it) wastelands beyond?

On that fresh August morning, the rugged open landscape of Fife looked rather inviting to me, that is until I again spied those dark, menacing clouds, still far in the distance, but moving towards me at some speed. I realised that it was time to head off on my walk, a three-day trek that would lead me over windswept moors and through suburban sprawl, past medieval tower houses and concrete tower blocks, along peaceful canals towpaths and over roaring motorways, as I followed the line of the Roman Wall across the heart of Scotland.

This is an extract from *Walking the Antonine Wall* by Alan Montgomery (Tippermuir Books, 2022), reproduced by kind permission of the author and publisher.

Jane Overton

A ROMAN LEGIONARY'S COMPLAINT

march march march march march march march march
eat march fight march eat march sleep march
onward northwards onward northwards
Caledonia empire's border
build the wall for Antoninus
build march build march build march build march
road fort road wall road fort road wall
mud rain dig ditch mud rain dig drain
build build build build build build build build
cold tired cold tired cold tired cold tired
want bath steam bath want bath steam bath
cold room warm room hot room plunge pool
want them want them want them want them
but first we must but first we must
build them build them build them build them

eheu eheu eheu eheu*

*Latin: *Alas!* (*dismay, pain or grief*)

Richard Price

BATHING RUBBLE

For Sylee Gore, who taught me the technique

For Edwin Morgan, remembering his translation of 'The Ruin'

Her mother had made a laminated symbol the size of a playing card, magnetized on the back, the symbol for BATH. 'Wonder holds these walls,' Eddie said to me, he was Edwin then. A woman told her boyfriend a life ago she once shaved completely — her friend Carol said men much preferred it — and her boyfriend-at-the-time looked in shock: 'You don't look grown up!' The first act was to kill the historians — but tell the locals Fortuna is adaptable, yes, even they could have good luck. (No, the asset-stripping never stopped).

The girl had no language and then she picked the card up and they carried her to the water, all peach Body Shop bubbles — the euphoria, BATH is bath. 'Gigantic battlements are crumbling.' A life away they started to share the space: one night all candles and oils, Ali Farka Toure, and then comedy-contortion, everything brimming, brimming over: 'Let's face it Boyfriend this bath came out of a doll's house.' If you couldn't fight them off, you bought them off.

Every night the card was played, as chancy as a chromosome: she was carried to her life and pleasure, exhausting mermaid. 'The lavish swimming halls.' Mid-forties and her last home-movie — swimming towards him in a pool way up in Minas Gerais, even her questions had serenity, 'What's the matter is the camera broken?' We are international law: you build a wall to keep everyone occupied.

Then any symbol meant bath, then just a glance at the comms board, then nothing: she'd crawl, five years old, still unable to stand, to the bathroom door, cut out the middle-man. 'There a hundred generations of the people have dwindled and gone.' After her aneurysm he brought his brother in and they gutted the bathroom, too many obstacles, 'Wet rooms are luxury items, you know — it's going to be fabulous!' 'The stone courts stood then, the hot steam broke, welling strongly, all was close and sweet.' In twenty years the soldiers had left the turf monument, moved back to the first wall, all atrocity, marketing, puff-legacy.

the oil
the oil and the dirt
the oil and the dirt and the scraper ('the strigil')
everything stripped back

Kay Ritchie

CALCEUS

One worn-down Roman sandal, like
something stylish I might find in Greece or Spain.

Not the footwear of a legionnaire
whose leather hobnailed boots

marched fort to fort, Firth of Forth to
River Clyde - the Military Way -

supplies, commands & news.
No. Probably a mason's or a joiner's or

an engineer's, those men who marked the route,
cut the turf, laid the stone foundations,

the completion of each section inscribed on
sandstone distance slabs,

while soldiers learned of siege techniques &
use of arms or hung out in their Thermae,

tepidarium, frigidarium, baptisterium,
where temperatures increased from west to east.

And how they must have suffered from the cold
up here in this, their northernmost frontier,

their letters home requesting extra underpants and socks
while they showed off their military might by

driving back the hordes from
Bo'ness, Seabegs, Auchendavy, Croy.

And when at last they left they left behind,
(often buried,

for they set alight or razed their buildings
to the ground), a shrine, a coin,

an iron saw, an axe, an adze,
a children's toy, a doll, a ball,

a cooking pot,
the remnant from a leather tent,

a sandal.

FOUND

cooking pots pottery cheese press glassware &
in the ablutions block traces of vegetarian fare

hazlenuts raspberries strawberries
blueberries beans wheat & barley

quern-stone-ground which children helped to grow,
then sold on to the garrison

figs wine coriander olive oil luxuries
from Cordoba or Crete sailed to Cramond

then pulled the miles by mules
along the Military Way

soldiers would exchange base metal coins
Victoria winged goddess balancing the globe

with those who trailed around the empire
following the camps the merchants & the shopkeepers

then take their turn in cooking
meals often feasted

in the bathhouse where
sat on long stone benches

they made business deals hung loose
played games & drank

by the flick-flame light of
a wick & oil brass lamp

before retiring for the night

Julie Robertson

OVER THE WALL

Bridei had not been on the other side of the high turf and stone wall since she had been brought into the Roman camp as a child. She could still remember snuggling up next to her mother, the smell of juniper berries in her hair, under a turf-covered roof. Back then she had danced with other children around huge stones in the light of bonfires and traced the patterns of blue tattoos on her father's arms. Then there had been the raid and she had been stolen by a rival tribe and traded to the Romans. She did not know if her parents were alive or dead.

At the gates of the fort she could see a messenger arriving — his horse frothing at the mouth and the man red in the face and covered in mud. He ran inside to the commander's office.

Something was afoot, thought Bridei — what could it be?

As she approached her mistress's quarters carrying a pitcher of water, the commander came out of his office and banged into her, spilling water on the floor of the corridor as he headed in the direction of his wife's, Julia's, room. Bridei mopped up the water and waited until he came out before she entered. Julia was dancing around the floor and the air in the room felt lighter — the oppressive atmosphere of most days had vanished — Julia looked different — happy.

What was going on? thought Bridei.

'Ah — Bridei — you'll never guess — we're going back to Rome — yes — we are leaving soon — in a couple of months. Isn't that wonderful? And I am taking you with me...'

Rome! Bridei's heart leapt. How exciting! She would see the arches, the temples, the festivals, the fashions and feel the warmth of that sun that Julia always talked about.

'So — we have something to celebrate tonight. At last we will be bidding those little beasts — the Picts — goodbye — those little gnats — those mosquitos that make a meal of us here every summer. I can't wait to go home. Tonight's feast will be a sorry affair compared to the banquet we will have when we arrive back in Rome,' said Julia, 'but I'll have to rise to the occasion — Go — get my hairdresser — I need my hair curled like Augusta's — she knows what styles they are wearing in Rome. I like to keep up — You can take the girl out of Rome

but you can't take Rome out of the girl, I say. And I'm going back to it all — Rome — the best city in the world.'

'These Romans and their foods!' said Bridei, later on that night to the cook as she carried a platter of roasted and stuffed dormice into the dining room. The last peacock of the camp took centre stage as the main dish on the table. The commander and Julia sat on their sofas entertaining their friends while Bridei and the other slaves ran back and forward to the kitchen with plates and amphorae.

After a couple of courses, back in the dining room, it did not take long before Julia was slurring her words and closing her eyes. Oh no — thought Bridei — she's overdone the poppy juice again — the medicine that Julia took for her melancholia did not mix well with wine.

'The excitement of our news is just too much for her, apologised the commander,' You need to retire, my dear. Ladies, lead her away.'

Julia left the table helped out by her friends and the commander dismissed the lyre players. The mens' voices became louder and rowdier with the talk of the return to Rome and how much they were looking forward to the city's chariot races, gladiator fights and brothels.

'Let us make a toast — I am glad to return to Rome,' said the commander,' but I am disappointed that we have not defeated the Picts — those little bastards! When I think of the victories that I have achieved in other far off parts of the Empire...hordes put to the sword...to think that these little barbarians have resisted four emperors. Four emperors! But never mind — To Rome!' said the commander, raising his wine cup.

As the night wore, the men fell asleep one by one and the slaves cleared the tables. Bridei was left on her own with the sleeping guests, sweeping up the floor strewn with the debris of the feast — cherries, nutshells, crusts, bones. And then she saw it — in the centre of one of the small tables — a pomegranate cut open, its interior full of seeds like rubies — just like the fruit in the fresco on one of the courtyard walls. She loved the painting of the girl lounging about on a sofa eating the fruit. She could not resist scooping out some seeds, savouring their sweetness, wiping off the juice running down her chin with the back of her hand. She turned around and was about to stoke the brazier and met the eyes of the commander who had woken up and was watching her like a cat over a mouse.

'Ah — Persephone! You just couldn't help yourself — could you!'

He laughed and stood up, swaying before her. For a second, she thought of fending him off with the poker but put it down. He grabbed her wrists and pulled her into a room at the back of the banqueting hall.

The inevitable happened...it was her first time — but not her first choice — she had imagined that her first lover would have been a handsome soldier or a freeman maybe even a centurion — not the commander — an old man with a paunch and nostril hair. But it wasn't too bad — at least it was quick — she rolled out from underneath him when he had finished and left him to snore like a saw. The next day her chin was raw and in between her legs was sore.

A month or so after that, Julia's packing was well underway. As she rummaged around her jewellery collection, she couldn't find some earrings — the Thracian gold pieces were missing and she lost her temper.

'You've put them away somewhere — lost them. If you have stolen them — you will be punished. You stupid girl! If it wasn't for me, Bridei — you would be living on the other side of wall, grubbing about with the rest of the barbarians worshipping their ridiculous gods. There's laundry over there for you to attend to. And put some more wood on the brazier. It's freezing as usual in this godforsaken place.'

Bridei moved over to the basket and saw the blood stains on the white linen. Julia, the commander's wife, had failed yet again in her role as a Roman matriarch. She'd not even got to the starting point again.

By the end of that week, soldiers were starting to dismantle the fort, throwing stone columns down the well and razing wooden buildings to the ground. They kept the altars in the wall dedicated to the gods and Bridei accompanied her mistress on a last visit to Venus's shrine. Dread filled Bridei — she did not like the visits to the shrine in the wall dedicated to the goddess where chickens and puppies were killed as a sacrificial offerings on the altar.

The mistress and slave stood in front of the shrine. Julia had found her Thracian earrings and wore them with a special ceremonial gown.

'It'll all work out in Rome,' Julia said, — the doctors are so much better there — I'll have a son in no time...'

'Where's your offering?' asked Bridei, feeling anxious — she had seen the latest litter of puppies in the camp and hoped that the offering would not include one of them. 'Is it a chicken or a puppy this time?'

A cold chill came over Bridei — she looked around — there was nothing there to sacrifice apart from — her.

Julia looked at her and laughed.

'If you could see the expression on your face! You're frightened, aren't you? And you should be — don't think I'm stupid...' she said, 'I can see your belly getting bigger every day — you'd make a good offering,' said Julia, — except

that little Roman inside of you has saved you — I don't want to kill a Roman — even if its mother is a Pictish bitch. Get out of my sight before I sacrifice you. You can go back to your barbarians on the other side of the wall. I don't want you anywhere near the commander.'

Bridie ran towards the gates. The soldiers let her through and she left the camp. It was goodbye to a comfortable life — even though she was a slave — she had enjoyed the luxuries of the commander's villa — the under-floor heating, the private bathhouse, the courtyard with a small garden. Now she was cast into the wilderness of the pine woods and rolling hills — a place where wolves and wild boar roamed.

She walked and walked until at the edge of a wheat field — she saw a woman standing. As she walked towards her the woman stretched out her arms. And Bridei ran into her embrace. The woman's hair smelt of juniper berries and in a language that Bridie had not heard for many years, the woman told her that winter was over.

Tawona Sithole

CLIMBING HILLS

like faces of the sun
black ice is invisible
unsteady feet
slurred speech
but no intoxication
just fresh air of winter
nae bother big man
cheers big man
thrown into slight confusion
but somehow feeling alright
alright, it gets soggy and smoggy
in these layered streets
but can't get drowned
in the hailstone sleet
got to look up
or miss the architecture
got to look up
or miss the mist

here comes another hill to climb
this one has a different slant
dark secrets glazed in skyline
past riches drawn in storyline
attraction
 extraction
 expansion
 extension

here comes another hill to climb
this one has another slant
tunnels unravel in parallel options
round and round in opposite directions
underground

playground
break ground
common ground

here comes another hill to climb
this one has another slant
happy hourglass steadily silting
hearty swigging and slowly sipping
soirée

hooray
holiday
hogmanay

here comes another hill to climb
this one has a different slant
odd friction caused by colour of skin
contradiction for the recycling bin
recycle

full cycle
spin cycle
life cycle

here comes another hill to climb
this one has another slant
waterways and other ways
concrete shapes and open space
flowing

going
showing
growing

here comes another hill to climb
this one has another slant
hectic heat cooled in rain shower
how slowly things move in rush hour
expect

accept
respect
reflect

here comes another hill to climb
this one has a different slant
momentum lost, momentarily
firm footing found, eventually
reclaim

regain

retain

remain

like faces of the sun
black ice is invisible
unsteady feet
slurred speech
but no intoxication
just fresh air of winter
nae bother big man
cheers big man
thrown into slight confusion
but somehow feeling alright
alright, it gets soggy and smoggy
in these layered streets
but can't get drowned
in the hailstone sleet
got to look up
or miss the architecture
got to look up
or miss the mist

THE NIGHT WATCH

Marcus Cocceius Firmus stamped his feet trying to alleviate his discomfort. Thick mud was frozen hard to the parapet beneath his own stout leather boots, his feet threatening to slide as he moved. He leaned his spatha and shield on the timber wall, put his hands to his lips and blew his warm breath into his cupped palms. His fingers tingled briefly, before numbing again. He retrieved his weapons and peered out into the darkness.

There was little to be seen beyond the Wall in the darkest hours before dawn. He was tired, but he would take his turn on watch, set an example for the men to follow. A centurion of Legio II Augusta had a duty and Firmus was a stickler for the rules that governed military men. It did not matter if he froze to death in this new outpost. He was following orders just like Quintus Lollius Urbicus, who was building the Wall and the forts here. Emperors gave directives and their will was done. It was a simple thing, the chain of command. Firmus never questioned Antoninus Pius' decision to send his legion and auxiliary forces to establish a new frontier further north of the first wall. Such questioning as he had heard among his fellow centurions was not for him. Following orders kept his life simple and straightforward.

It was difficult sometimes not to complain, he acknowledged silently to himself as the icy cold air tested his resolve. It slithered insidiously between the chinks in his close-wrought mail gluing his linen undertunic to his skin. Linen was not suitable for a northern night in early spring. Firmus grimaced wryly, seeing clearly his worried mother braving the blistering heat of a Baetican day, a bundle of finely sewn tunics pressed close to her chest. Mother could never imagine the vast frozen wasteland in which her son now found himself. But he wore the linen out of love even though warm wool would have been the more sensible choice. At least he had put on the rough leggings recommended by Nectovellius before standing watch that night. The wool itched his skin, leaving red welts where he scratched.

Although he had to admit that it was worth the discomfort because his legs were somewhat protected from the worst of the cold.

Firmus sighed as his eyes scanned the blackness beyond the fort's timber palisade for any hint of movement, his ears straining for sounds that did not belong. Nothing struck him as amiss and he was tempted to relax. He shifted his grip on his spatha for something to do. His numb fingers complained

about the movement beneath their tight woollen wrappings. Firmus knew that his hands would ache unbearably when he warmed them on the brazier at the end of the watch, but he longed all the same for the warmth that would bring that sweetest of pains. A glance at the moon hovering above the horizon told him that this would not be for some time yet. Diana, wreathed in lemon gossamer, was still ranging among the countless stars strung overhead.

His companion cleared his throat and shuffled. Firmus' eyes flickered over the Brigantian's tall form. So far, he had been a silent brother, hunched and braced solidly against the bitter cold. Only Nectovilius' alert eyes showed that he was alive and not a statue. Firmus saw their dull gleam as they roamed restlessly over the sleeping landscape. The rest of Nectovilius was almost invisible. He was completely ensconced from head to foot in layers of wool and hardened leather. A magnificent wolf-skin hung thickly over his shoulders.

'Nothing out there,' Firmus stated. Nectovilius grunted by way of response. 'Not long until the relief comes,' he persisted.

'No sir,' came the curt reply.

'You're warm in the wolf-skin?'

'Yes sir.' A shrug of Nectovilius' shoulders was barely perceptible in the dimness.

Firmus felt mildly annoyed. The man's response was not insolent to his superior but it irritated him nonetheless. Nectovilius regularly boasted among his cohort, regaling them with tales of the day he had brought the fearsome beast down. Firmus knew this and that was why he had brought up the wolf-skin. He thought it would give him an opening to engage the soldier in conversation. He inhaled and the cold air rushed in burning his lungs. He would try once more.

'I heard that the rogue wolf tore sheep, even cattle to pieces, that farmers were scared to go out at night, locked their women and children indoors until you hunted the beast down. Quite a feat that.' Firmus let admiration seep into his last comment and was rewarded when Nectovilius turned to face him. The man was taller than him by a head. Brigantians were not known for their height, but no one had told Nectovilius that he was not supposed to grow so tall. He was broad of shoulder too, narrow hips, with long muscular legs. His spatha scraped the ground as he moved. A stray breeze ruffled the fur on his shoulders.

'I tracked the beast for two days and came across him hunched over a fresh kill. I waited silently, hidden by a rock, almost right beside him. He didn't sense me, I'm sure of it. I crouched perfectly still while he tore into

raw flesh, crunching easily through gristle and bone. Then, just as he was finishing his bloody meal, I leapt out with a mighty roar brandishing my spatha and gladius.'

'You were alone,' Firmus interrupted, unable to keep his scepticism to himself.

Nectoveliu s took a sharp breath, drew himself up to his full height and turned away, strode along the parapet.

'Wait!' Firmus' command halted the Brigantian in his tracks but he did not turn to face his superior officer. Firmus relented, silently cursing himself for pulling rank. 'I'd like to hear the rest of it, that is, if you're willing to tell it.'

Mollified by the conciliatory words, Nectoveliu s swung around and made his way back towards Firmus.

'You don't believe me, sir,' the Brigantian stated. 'But I swear by Jupiter, Juno and Minerva that it happened as I say. I was alone and I killed it.'

'Tell me then, the wolf saw you,' Firmus said encouragingly.

'His gaping muzzle was smeared in blood. He had surprise in his eyes. The supreme hunter was not used to a better hunter sneaking up on him and attacking. His eyes were yellow slits. He crouched low on the ground and sized me up, growling low in his throat, baring yellowed teeth. I moved in for the kill but the wolf reared up and I was pushed back. We circled each other then, the wolf and me, each waiting for the other to make his next move. I came steadily closer, looking for an opening, keeping my eyes locked on his.' Nectoveliu s swallowed. His face was in shadows but he appeared to be remembering the moment.

'What happened then?' Firmus asked, eager to hear the rest of the story.

'I was watching the beast, dared not glance away. I was sweating and my grip on my weapons was uncertain. He was large for a wolf.' Nectoveliu s moved his shoulders and the huge pelt rippled. Then he spoke again, more softly, leaning slightly towards Firmus. 'The wolf blinked and fainted in, rushing right at me. I read his intention, so I dived to his left, thrusting my spatha slightly upwards and to my right as I moved. I shoved it into his dripping jaws as he hurtled towards me. My spatha clove through his skull, the point came out on the back of his head. The impact threw me off my feet. I landed flat on his back with the dying wolf held fast on my spatha above me. Blood poured from his mouth. It was hot and I was drenched in it. The light went from his eyes and he spasmed once before he died.'

Firmus shivered and it felt darker all of a sudden. A wolf howled far away. Another answered. Both men stepped back from the parapet.

‘His friends miss him,’ Firmus whispered.

‘He had no friends, sir,’ Nectoveliuſ spat. His spittle landed at his feet. He put his boot on the globule grinding it into the hard mud. ‘Afterwards, I went back to the fort. I was doubled over under the weight of him. I wanted everyone to see he was dead, no longer a threat. People gathered to watch me pass by as word spread that the wolf was dead. I took him into the fort, gave him to my slave. He prepared the pelt.’

Firmus smiled ruefully to himself. Nectoveliuſ told a good tale, but his ending was lacklustre.

‘I hear that our recruits hero worship you,’ Firmus said.

‘Don’t matter to me, sir,’ Nectoveliuſ shrugged. ‘Almost nine years of service in the Thracian cohort impresses young men enough. The pelt simply reminds them how much they have much to learn.’

‘Perhaps we can hunt together soon,’ Firmus suggested lightly.

‘Perhaps,’ Nectoveliuſ echoed.

Firmus went back to watching over the land beyond the turf rampart as it slowly emerged from the receding night. Nectoveliuſ went along the parapet, his tall figure silhouetted in the grey pre-dawn light.

Rebecca Smith

SCENES FROM THE WALL

There are seven of us today. It is a Monday, the weekly buggy walk. Most of us are new mums, here to talk to another adult, another person who might be struggling with feeding, sleeping, partners. Or at least that is why I am here.

We push the buggies in single file through the gates of the wood. When the path allows it, we push alongside one another, crocodile style. The babies are young, all under one, and are asleep. Or at least, they are quiet. The wood rises and falls, the ground is thick with needles from the fir trees. The chimneys of the petrochemical plant roar through the branches. We talk about sleep a lot. How do you get yours to nap? Does he use a dummy? I can't say what is happening at home as I don't really know it yet.

*

My son is one. I walk with another mum around the park. We sit in the shadow of the high-rise flats built on the ancient frontier. We give the babies ice lollies and they grin as the juice melts on their bare legs. She hugs me but I am fine. Baby and I are fine.

*

November. My son and I stand on top of the hill with hundreds of others. We are wrapped up to the nines, scarfs, hats, gloves. We tilt our heads star-wards and watch the fireworks burst the sky open. When we walk home, we start through the woods, but the darkness is absolute. We turn back and walk along the road with the crowds.

*

It is nearly New Year. We are collecting holly and ivy from the same woods the buggy walk was in. A friend is having a party in a barn. I will decorate the walls and tables with the ever-green plants. I tell my son I used to bring him here as a baby. He cannot comprehend this as he is so grown up now, nearly six. He throws stones in the river that runs beneath the old wall. It was built by Romans, I say, 2000 years ago. This is also hard to comprehend. He says

it doesn't look like a wall. Later on that evening, while he sleeps at his dad's, I dance on the cold concrete and kiss the man I met a few months ago. It is another year.

*

Spring. My son cannot go to school. No one can go more than five miles. The world, which has spun itself too quickly the last few years, like the frantic final cycle of an old washing machine, now lies quiet. We are ok. I take him and his little sister, who is now toddling, to the woods with a rucksack full of dinosaurs. He uses my phone to take pictures of stegosaurus balancing on branches, brontosaurus in burns, T-rex's chasing ankylosaurus through moss and grass.

*

Saturday. I am taking all three kids to the park. He kicks a football down the road as his little sister sticks to my side, holding on to the buggy. The new baby sleeps. I leave a spare key under the wooden Roman as my partner has forgotten his. The two-foot-high carving sits at the foot of our front door like a sentry. My brother carved it with a chainsaw, chiselling his finer features and then washing a red paint over his uniform. The sun splits the clouds and throws shafts of light onto the pavement. We walk down through the woods, my little legionaries flanking me all the way to the swings.

Leela Soma

THE WALL

Borders, walls, lines of demarcation the cartography of the world,
Manmade, tribalism at its worst, keep out the 'other'
Not like the mountains or seas that form after millions of years
Nature as nature intended, rifts and lands appear, glaciers melt.

Civilisations rise and fall, the Mayan, Indian, Chinese, Roman,
Forts, walls, palaces, statues art on stone sometimes preserved.
Like nature, a cyclical circle of the great and the lowly, inscribed,
chiselled in stone, centuries of history brought alive in museums.

The twenty-first century unfolds, we share artefacts on the internet
proud of The Wall becoming a World Heritage Site, but what have we learnt?
Lessons of building walls on the ether, spouting hatred, 'othering' a sport
Globalized oneness a dream, as we continue to build walls to separate us.

Don J Taylor

FINIS

In the still morning, the Legion, a thousand strong, stands in marching order awaiting the word of command. Strangely silent, but for the chink of armour, a hoof on stone, the creak of leather.

Marcus looks north for the last time, past the barrack blocks, to where the rampart snakes along the hilltop. Beyond the frontier, on the hill, eagles harry the mountain hare.

Soon it will all be one: a single barbarousness.

Twenty years! Almost like home. In the village by the fort's edge, Brei of the flaming hair and, by her, his son Clyde. Once the legions go The Wall will waste away and they may fare ill.

Last night Brei shared his supper, and then his bed. Fear in her eyes.

Who will protect us now?

Though she asked for nothing, he gave her a purse. Heavy enough, he thought. He must husband his pension.

Water had brought him here, and water would take him hence: home, to Gaul. Every legion needs a hydrologist— for what use is a fort without a bath-house? And a bathhouse without a spring, or a stable without a trough? One flows from the other.

'The well!' the Legate orders. 'Anything of value that the wagons cannot bear—into the well.'

Sweating in the glare of the torched granary, the Syrian auxiliaries amass the gear. Into the darkness they toss a sculpted altar, an iron window grill, a thousand arrowheads, three score of children's shoes.

In the wood the wolf-pack howls, scenting the village goats' dread. At dusk, men with pricked and painted skins will come to rake among the ashes.

Still time, thinks Marcus.

He sends a slave: 'Bring Brei and the boy, and call my friend Gaius to bear witness.'

By marriage they will be Citizens. Volens deos my pension will suffice.

Douglas Thompson

LOSS OF DEFINITION

Crossing the old Roman wall at twilight
the golfers all gone home, the place desolate suddenly
ancient beyond words, the half-moon up
I look left and right and shiver at the grassy ramparts
sense that time itself like light is weakened
at this magical hour: everything slipping
from the gloved fingers of reason
Then I hear them: an army overhead
two hundred geese all honking and hooting in unison
a steampunk machine, their V-formation
graceful, powerful, tiny engines achieving
vast distances through patience and cooperation
overtaking me effortlessly they vanish
into sudden low clouds, only their sounds left behind
like ghosts. I turn the corner, find the ancient church tower
growing out of climbing streaks of moss and ivy
darkness, and the stars coming down
then I'm thinking of showing this to my brother
of healing him with this walk, these scenes he'd love to paint
if I could only forgive and talk like the old days,
rediscover the love all the intervening years have killed.
Then there it is: the state of grace when we least expect it
a deer stirs in the leaves in the woods to my left
and I stop dead and wait. One more, then another:
three of them, ears up, eyes trained, nostrils flared
regarding me like Conscience like Nature like God
a tiny Robin skips out of the hedge between us
eyes each ruefully, looks right then left, wonders
what all the fuss is, knows all of us are harmless,
puny compared to those who fly.

CAMPSIES

These ancient hills
the Romans faced
glowing red in evening light
not yet spoiled quite
but spoiling for a fight
inimical battlefront
not even peaks but Fells
the Ordnance Survey tells
that hide beyond their fold
all Highland highlights of
bleak moor and wraithlike fog
their rolling smiling face
so smooth and low conceal
with cunning what fierce
geology strains at bay beyond.

They wracked their brains
and built a wall, turned their backs
and horsehair plumes
on the blue devils who would hide
in bogs up to their necks to amaze
and elude capture spurred on perhaps
by some Druid dream of rapture
it seemed the line of Antoninus
would hold in stone and turf
tamed like the Tiber or the Nile
and it did, it was, a while
then something came at night
to leave their world
in smoke and fumes.

And now the wall's a lost scar
criss-crossed by the farmer
the golfer, and the car
yet all there was to fear was us
the untamed savages who today

weed gardens, write poetry
and catch the bus, do all manner
of slavery willingly for meagre pay
just enough to oil our chains
and keep clean and bright
these cages of mortgages
a round of golf you say?
no need to hide neck-high
in bog. Just keep your balls
out of the rough. Brains clogged?
then walk the dog.

L Wardle

MAXIMUS LEGIONNAIRE

—after a statue of a Roman soldier, Bearsden Baptist Church

Maximus, what did you eat for breakfast?
Ground elder and eggs with dill
figs with nasturtium leaves and celandine
wild poppy, apple, radish
coriander and fennel flowers
hearty lentil, beans and barley
the fuel of occupation
leftover
a garden legacy
not fragments
but fragrance
jasmine, achillea pungent as a legionnaire's foot
rosemary
for remembrance

Hamish Whyte

BEHIND THE WALL

The Emperor Hadrian on the point of death
speaks to his departing soul:

Wee wandering creature, happy
guest and friend of the flesh,
where are you off to, looking
peelie-wally, stiff and naked,
with no more jokes to crack?

Well, he's off to see what his heir
the pious Antoninus is up to.
He thinks he's a bit of a softy,
what with laws against maltreating
slaves and not being keen on battles.

But what's this? A wall? In Britain?
Hadrian's been there, done that, got the toga.
It's not a gameshow!

Wait a minute. It's OK. Tony's pushing
the frontier further north — a hundred
miles! A different construction:
he's got it sussed from firth to firth.

Satisfied, the wee soul scuttles off
to the Elysian Fields.

*

Arithmetic's the order of the day
for the work of rampart-raising.
Cutting turf, counting turf, laying turf.
Howking stones out of streams.
Digging the ditch, rolling out the road.

Bit of betting between legions,
relieve the tedium —
how many turfs put down in an hour,
a week — what's the record?
Long live the Twentieth! Boars for ever!

*

It's lonely and cold on this new wall,
marching up and down with my spear.
Soggy sandals, helmet's too heavy —
Oh how I wish I wasn't here.

(Anonymous graffito scratched on a stone at the Bar Hill fort)

*

There's soldiers and families from all over:
Spaniards, Galls, Syrians, Thracians,
a few Africans like me, Vibia Pacata, proud wife
of Falvius Verecundus, centurion of the Sixth —
even managed to bring our own cooking pots,
must have some home comforts.

We try to stick together, new neighbours
and all that. We clubbed together for Salmanes
the Syrian who had to bury his fifteen-year-old,
Salmanes Junior.

I made a vow — if my family got here safely,
I'd raise an altar and dedicate it to the spirits
of the forest and the crossroads. And so I did.

*

Sextus Calpurnius Agricola,
Governor of Britain, writes home:

All that work for nothing!
Only thirty years here
and we've to fall back
from the frontier —
some to the other wall
some recalled to Rome.
No reason given.
Troop shortage?
Men needed elsewhere?
Who knows? Oh well.
Redeployment's redeployment.
As long as we keep
those pesky Caledonians at bay.

No wonder Britannia looks
down in the dumps on the coins.

Our new emperor Marcus Aurelius
sends me here then hardly
have I got a boot on the ground
he wants me away. What's he thinking?
I bet he'll whizz me off to fight
on the Danube — more barbarians.
That won't be a waltz in the park!

Contributors

Ghanima AbdulKarim has lived in Glasgow for 4 years. She loves to read and write poems and was invited by Interfaith Glasgow to participate in a Renga group, which stirred her passion to write poetry again! Visiting the Hunterian Museum and the Antonine Wall in Bearsden generated many questions, which she wrote about in her piece for this anthology.

David Bleiman lives in Cramond, where a Roman fort guarded the eastern-most end of the line of the Antonine Wall. Widely published, his first pamphlet *This Kilt of Many Colours* celebrates a mixed and multilingual identity. His second is *Gathering Light: A Cramond Causeway*. Twitter: @BleimanDavid, web page: <https://www.dempseyandwindle.com/davidbleiman.html>

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A C Clarke's fifth collection is *A Troubling Woman*. She was a winner in the Cinnamon Press 2017 pamphlet competition with *War Baby. Wedding Grief*, centred on the marriage of Paul Éluard and Gala, was published by Tapsalteerie in 2021. <http://www.tapsalteerie.co.uk/product/wedding-grief-by-ac-cl Clarke/> <https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/authors/a-c-cl Clarke/>

Ross Crawford is a writer/scriver/poet based in Stirling, working in Scots, English, and Gàidhlig. He was shortlisted for the Scottish Book Trust's New Writers Award 2022 and his work has most recently appeared in *Eemis Stane*, *Product*, and *Dreich*. You can find him on Twitter at @RRMCrawford

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Odile Mbias Gomes is a Cameroonian who moved to the UK in 1999. She is interested in writing what she sees and creates poems and stories based on her discoveries. She participated in Interfaith Glasgow's Weekend Club

Project and the Rediscovering of the Antonine Wall, and visited the Hunterian Museum and the Antonine Wall in Bearsden, where she wrote about her vivid experiences.

Linda Haggerstone: I'm a ChristoPagan Druid, which means I practice a mix of Bardic Druidry, Animism, and Celtic Christianity. I hold degrees in Anthropology and Adult Education, plus a diploma in Interfaith Studies. As an ESOL teacher I've had students of all ages from around the world. Storytelling is a big part of my life, as are spiritual pilgrimage, going to the theatre, and making new friends.

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Angi Holden is a retired lecturer, whose published work includes poetry, short stories & flash fictions. She won the Victoria Baths Splash Fiction competition and the Mother's Milk Poetry Prize for her pamphlet *Spools of Thread*. Her short story 'Preserving History' was selected for Open Book New Writing 2021.

Nina Lewis has two pamphlets, *Fragile Houses* (2016) and *Patience* (2019), V. Press. She was Worcestershire Poet Laureate and an International Guest for Perth Poetry Festival. She has produced two poetry shows and a Transatlantic Poetry Project. Nina was a Poet in Residence for Cheltenham Poetry Festival. @Neens07 ninalewispoet.wordpress.com/ facebook.com/NinaWriter

Peter McCarey (Glasgow / Geneva) has produced The Syllabary, www.thesyllabary.com, *Orasho* (Redsquirrelpress.com), *Petrushka*, and an exhibition on transitional toys in Glasgow, Geneva and Milan. He runs molecularpress.com

Joanna B McGarry: I have always been interested in the history of the Antonine Wall, especially the history of the Roman fort at Old Kilpatrick. This story grew from the research I did for my novel, *In the Shadow of Rome*. The paperback and Kindle version are available on Amazon <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07SZ1VKT1>.

James McGonigal is a poet and editor who lives, writes and gardens by the Antonine Wall. Recent publications include *Edwin Morgan: In Touch With Language. A New Prose Collection 1950–2005* (Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2020) and *In Good Time* (Red Squirrel Press, 2020).

David McVey lectures at New College Lanarkshire. He has published over 120 short stories and a great deal of non-fiction that focuses on history and the outdoors. He enjoys hillwalking, visiting historic sites, reading, watching telly, and supporting his hometown football team, Kirkintilloch Rob Roy FC.

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Alan Montgomery studied History of Art at University of Glasgow and spent many years working in the art world. More recently, he completed a PhD investigating eighteenth-century attitudes towards Scotland's Roman past. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, he has published two books, *Classical Caledonia* and *Walking the Antonine Wall*.

Jane Overton is an Ayrshire-based creator of poetry and spoken word. She has read her work at open mic events, poetry slams and festivals as well as having been published in print and online. Her style is sometimes humorous or satirical but always, she hopes, humane.

Richard Price's poetry collections include *Lucky Day*, *Small World* and *Moon for Sale*. He grew up in Renfrewshire. He is Head of Contemporary British Collections at the British Library, London. His website is hydrohotel.net and his magazine is at paintedspoken.com

Kay Ritchie grew up in Glasgow and Edinburgh, lived in London, Spain and Portugal & worked as a freelance photographer and radio producer. Her work appears in anthologies, magazines, archives & a Covid memorial installation. She has performed at Aye Write, Billion Women Rising, Refugee Week, Edinburgh's Fringe & Inverness's Film Festival.

Julie Robertson is an artist and writer who lives in Glasgow and enjoys time travel — especially her last visit to the fringes of the Roman empire. She may return there for a longer period.

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Tawona Sithole (better known as Ganyamatope, his ancestral family name) is a poet, playwright and short story writer who uses both Shona and Ndaui in his work. A storyteller and musician, he co-founded Seeds of Thought and is UNESCO artist-in-residence at University of Glasgow.

Rebecca Smith is an author. She writes non-fiction and her first book about rural industry and land will be out in spring 2023, published by William Collins. She's on Twitter at @beckorio.

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Don J Taylor has had short fiction published in print and online in the UK, US and Germany. He is currently working on a novel based on his grandfather's experiences in Edwardian theatre, the Machine Gun Corps in France and Russia, and life as a rural schoolmaster.

Douglas Thompson has appeared widely in magazines and anthologies, and published over 19 novels, short story collections and poetry since 2009, from various presses in Britain, Europe and America. His first poetry collection was published by Diehard in 2018, and his second *Eternity's Windfall* was published by Dreich Books in 2022. <https://douglasthompson.wordpress.com/>

Lynnda Wardle's work has appeared in *Gutter*, *New Writing Scotland*, *thi wurd* and *New Orleans Review*. In 2007 she received a Creative Scotland New Writer's award. She is currently studying for an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. She works at Interfaith Glasgow and collaborated with Rediscovering the Antonine Wall to deliver a series of writing workshops based on walks around remnants of the wall in Bearsden.

Hamish Whyte lived in Glasgow before moving to Edinburgh in 2004. *Paper Cut* (2020) is his fourth collection from Shoestring Press. He runs the award-winning Mariscat Press. A memoir, *Morgan and Me*, was published by HappenStance, who will bring out *Scottish Testimonies*, poems based on trial reports, this autumn.

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Most of all, I am delighted that so many fabulous writers were inspired by the part, present and future of the Antonine Wall. Your words are a vital part of its rich heritage: *gratias vobis ago*.

A NOTE ON THE TYPES

The body text of this book is set in Chronicle, a contemporary ‘Scotch’ typeface from the Hoefler digital type foundry in New York. Its designers call it a ‘hard-working’ text face suitable for a variety of contemporary uses. For historical reasons Scottish type designers’ types, notable for their functionality and clarity, were widely adopted and influential in twentieth-century American typography.

Titles are set in Palatino Sans Light, a contemporary addition to Herman Zapf’s classic original serif.

History is story.

The Antonine Wall was built around AD 142, by order of Antonius Pius, by members of the three Roman legions who were stationed in Scotland — the Second, Sixth and Twentieth Legions. It was abandoned by the Romans around AD 165. Almost nineteen centuries later, it is still part of the daily lives of many people in the Central Belt of Scotland: glimpsed across the landscape, walked on, worked on, lived on.

In *All Along the Edge*, new and established writers respond to the past, present and future of the Antonine Wall. Their voices let it take life in the imagination, through poetry, short stories and creative non-fiction. Together, these contemporary writers have made a new topology of the Roman frontier in Scotland, honouring and challenging the past and contributing to a rich and lasting future.

—Zoë Strachan