



# Hunterian Museum Press Information

## War and peace on the Antonine Wall

A new permanent gallery at the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum uncovers new evidence of violence, death and destruction on the Antonine Wall, which is only just emerging from the Museum's world renowned collections.

*The Antonine Wall: Rome's Final Frontier* opens on 16 September and unveils The Hunterian's unique collection of Roman monumental sculpture and other important artefacts recovered from the Antonine Wall. Many items are on display for the first time and give a taste of what life was like at the time of the Roman occupation of Scotland.

Two thousand years ago wealth, power and position among the native tribes of central Scotland came from farming and archaeological evidence suggests that at first, the settled wealthy tribes of the region also enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with their new Roman neighbours.

Many native settlements have produced evidence of extensive trade or gift exchange in luxury objects from the Roman Empire and Leckie broch, a fortified roundhouse near Stirling, was home to a rich and powerful group who had access to imported prestige goods. Excavations have produced a remarkable quantity of high-quality Roman ceramics and glassware together with jewellery, silver, bullion coins and vanity objects dating to the end of the 1st century AD.

A ring and intaglio (carved gem) on display in the new Hunterian gallery are very fine examples of Roman jewellery and may represent diplomatic gifts to the local aristocracy. They are displayed alongside fragments of Roman glass beads and a highly polished tinned bronze mirror, which would have been instantly recognisable as Roman, confirming the native owner's status. Access to objects from the Roman world, including imported luxury goods implies that the local aristocracy had close contact with the Romans and developed a taste for sophisticated Mediterranean living.

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*Distance slab with Triton and captive*



However, the interaction between the people of Iron Age Scotland and the Roman Empire was not always as harmonious. Archaeological research suggests that Leckie was destroyed soon after AD 140, around the time of the building of the Antonine Wall, probably as the result of a violent assault by the Romans. Both Roman and native weapons have been found in the destruction levels of the broch and the objects on display in the new gallery give an insight into this catastrophic event.

In particular, a heavy stone shot found in the destruction layer appears to have been red-hot when fired from a catapult, probably with the intention of starting a blaze. It bears the characteristic heat cracking pattern seen on stones that have been made red-hot then suddenly cooled. One interpretation is that it was launched into the broch as a superheated missile, which the inhabitants threw cold water over in an attempt to stop it causing fire. An iron head of a heavy arrow shot from a *ballista* artillery piece can also be seen alongside native weapons including spearheads and part of a sword.

Leckie was probably destroyed as part of the short but bloody Roman campaign to subdue the northern tribes. On his election in AD 138, the new Emperor in Rome, Antoninus Pius, needed a military 'victory' to cement his imperial credentials, and the people living on the northern frontier of Britannia were an easy target. The question of what actually happened to Leckie's inhabitants remains unclear but a clue can be found on the commemorative 'distance slabs' which were positioned along the Antonine Wall.

The scenes on the slabs suggest that those who did not die in the assault would have been sold into slavery. The elaborate carving celebrates the culmination of a successful campaign by the Romans to extend the limits of their empire. The Wall acts almost as the equivalent of a triumphal arch, celebrating the army victorious and the native population in defeat.

*The Antonine Wall: Rome's Final Frontier* perhaps asks as many questions as it answers but should also encourage debate and further research. Apart from forming the first visitor orientation point for the Antonine Wall World Heritage Site, The Hunterian's new gallery aims to enhance our appreciation and understanding of Scotland's long cultural heritage and first encounter with the classical world. In addition, the new displays serve to underscore the contribution of the University of Glasgow to the record, preservation and interpretation of over three hundred years of Roman frontier research in Scotland and its continuing commitment to improving access and understanding of this unique cultural asset.

*Notes to Editors...*



## Notes to Editors

After almost two years of closure, September sees the re-opening of the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum. The Museum will re-open to the public on 16 September and will feature a new permanent gallery devoted to the Roman frontier in Scotland. Admission is free.

*The Antonine Wall: Rome's Final Frontier* has been supported by Museums Galleries Scotland and the University of Glasgow Chancellor's Fund.

From 10 September the Hunterian Art Gallery and The Mackintosh House will move to new opening hours: 10.00am - 5.00pm Tuesday - Saturday and 11.00am - 4.00pm on Sunday. From 16 September, the Hunterian Museum will also open from 10.00am - 5.00pm Tuesday - Saturday and 11.00am - 4.00pm on Sunday.

*The Antonine Wall: Rome's Final Frontier* is located in the Museum entrance gallery. Many items are on display for the first time, allowing greater access to the internationally acclaimed Roman collections.

The Antonine Wall is one of the UK's most important Roman monuments but its precise purpose and short lifespan remains an enigma. Constructed in the AD 140s and stretching some 60km from the Firth of Forth to the River Clyde, it was the most northerly frontier in the Roman Empire.

This feat of engineering consisted of an approximately three foot high turf rampart fronted by a ditch. It is the second of the two great walls built by the Romans in Britain.

Inscriptions on an ornate series of distance slabs reveal that the Antonine Wall was built by soldiers of three legions stationed in Britain, namely the Second, Sixth and Twentieth. A group of nineteen slabs have been found over the centuries and the exhibition brings together the largest group for the first time.

Whether a symbol of Roman power intended to celebrate victory over the northern tribes or a barrier to control trade and movement, the Antonine Wall was abandoned by the Romans from the late 150s AD onwards. The new displays of sculpture, together with a rich array of military and civilian artefacts from the wall, some unique to Roman Britain, explore the impact of the Romans on the Scottish landscape and its peoples and questions why the wall was constructed and then abandoned so quickly.

The display has four key themes: the building of the Wall, its architecture and impact on the landscape; the role of the Roman army on the frontier and the life and lifestyle of its soldiers; the cultural interaction between Roman and indigenous peoples and evidence for local resistance and the abandonment of the Wall and the story of its rediscovery over the last 350 years.

The new gallery also reflects the story of over three centuries of collecting and research by the University of Glasgow on what is now a World Heritage Site.

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## New initiatives

From 10 September, The Hunterian will also introduce a number of new initiatives including Sunday opening, a new look website, gallery tours, a Friends scheme and a new bi-annual exhibition programme which begins with *Colour, Rhythm and Form: J. D. Fergusson and France*, a major exhibition in the Hunterian Art Gallery devoted to Scottish artist J. D. Fergusson.

## The Hunterian

Founded in 1807, The Hunterian is Scotland's oldest public museum. Built on William Hunter's founding bequest, the collections include scientific instruments used by James Watt and Joseph Lister; a unique collection of Roman monumental sculpture, spectacular architectural fragments and other important artefacts recovered from the Antonine Wall; major natural sciences holdings; one of the world's greatest numismatic collections and impressive ethnographic objects from the Pacific Ocean.

The Hunterian is also home to a major art collection ranging from Rembrandt and Chardin to the Scottish Colourists and contemporary art; the world's largest permanent display of the work of James McNeill Whistler; the largest single holding of the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and The Mackintosh House, the reassembled interiors from his Glasgow home.

There are four Hunterian venues on the University of Glasgow campus - the Hunterian Museum, Hunterian Art Gallery, home to The Mackintosh House, the Zoology Museum and the Anatomy Museum.

### The Hunterian (Museum)

University of Glasgow  
Gilbert Scott Building  
Glasgow G12 8QQ

From 16 September, open Tuesday - Saturday 10.00am - 5.00pm

Sunday 11.00am - 4.00pm

Admission free

[www.glasgow.ac.uk/hunterian](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/hunterian)

### For further information contact:

Harriet Gaston, Communications Manager

Email: [Harriet.Gaston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Harriet.Gaston@glasgow.ac.uk)

Telephone: 0141 330 3310



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