



Hunterian Museum

Press Information

New gallery shows sophisticated living on the Roman frontier

The new permanent gallery at the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum brings to light the surprisingly sophisticated lifestyle enjoyed by some on the Roman frontier almost two thousand years ago. Showcasing The Hunterian's unique collection of monumental sculpture and other important Roman artefacts recovered from the Antonine Wall, the new gallery brings together a remarkable collection of unique objects for the first time.

The Antonine Wall: Rome's Final Frontier opens on 16 September and not only tells the story of the building and abandonment of the Antonine Wall, one of the UK's most important Roman monuments, but reveals the huge cultural impact the monument had on those living in Iron Age Scotland. The arrival of the Romans not only altered the social and political structure of local society but also changed the landscape.

The imposing columns which form the impressive entrance to the new gallery come from the headquarters of the Roman fort at Bar Hill. They were excavated from the well where they were dumped when the fort was dismantled no more than two decades after its construction. As the native tribes were still living mainly in round houses, Roman architecture, in particular the dressed stone buildings with windows, columns and architectural ornament, would have looked and felt very alien to the native population.

Romans soldiers in Scotland lived in cramped conditions, but officers and centurions had a higher standard of living. Many of the objects on display illustrate to what extent some maintained the sophisticated Mediterranean lifestyle they were accustomed to.

Ceramics from sites along the Antonine Wall show the rich and varied table culture enjoyed by the occupants of the Roman forts. Much of the pottery used for cooking and storage was made in Britain but cups, bowls and plates of red gloss Samian Ware together with glass and bronze were imported from around the Empire. Large storage jars known as amphora were used to transport the olive oil, wine, figs and other consumables that were part of the Mediterranean diet enjoyed by the Roman army.

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Fountainhead from Bearsden Roman Fort



Other items of interest include a rare bronze lamp found at Loudoun Hill Fort in East Ayrshire. The example is very unusual in Scotland as most lamps which have been found are made of clay. The Loudoun Hill lamp would not have been out of place in Rome.

The statue of an armour-clad Mars, the Roman god of War, was found at Balmudry Roman Fort at Cadder and has been restored from a few small fragments. Mars was one of the most important Roman gods and was venerated by the legions. Religion featured strongly in everyday Roman life and soldiers built small shrines outside the forts and placed altars and statues in them. The style of sculpture was essentially classical but many Celtic influences can be detected.

The new displays contain a bust of Silenus found at Bar Hill fort is also on display. Silenus was the drinking companion of the wine god Bacchus and is usually portrayed as a drunken older man who has to be carried around or transported on a donkey. Because of his mischievous exploits, this figure of fun appealed to soldiers and his extended fingers are to ward off the evil eye.

Roman bathing culture provided a level of personal hygiene and relaxation that would have been unheard of in Iron Age Scotland. Every Roman fort had a bath-house which featured under-floor central heating, cold plunge baths, heated rooms and a sauna, all decorated with sculpture and altars. The fountainhead found at Bearsden Roman Fort is in the shape of a man's head with a gaping mouth from which the water would have flowed into a basin. This is a rare example and similar items have only been found in Italy and Gaul.

On the frontier, those who died were given the same treatment that they would have received in Rome. Cemeteries remembered the dead with tombstones and mausoleums but the richly carved funerary monuments found at Shirva in Kirkintilloch are more than just gravestones. The sculptured reliefs show figures of the deceased reclining on couches, indicating that they were of high official status, perhaps a husband and wife. One depicts a funeral banquet and the deceased with a cup in hand and members of the family standing behind. Such scenes may have been intended to show the deceased contented in the afterlife.

As well as highlighting the surprisingly high standard of living available to some on the Roman frontier, *The Antonine Wall: Rome's Final Frontier* provides new insight into everyday life on the northern frontier of Roman Britain. 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

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