



Review

The Antonine Wall in Falkirk District. By Geoff B. Bailey with nine other contributors. Falkirk Local History Society, Falkirk, 2021. Pp. iv + 600, illus. Price £18 (hbk). ISBN 97818838298807.

The most easterly 15 miles of the Antonine Wall lay within Geoff Bailey's purview in his role as Keeper of Archaeology and Local History for Falkirk Museums. This monograph brings together reports on excavations and occasional fieldwalking directed by him between 1991 and 2019 at various sites along the Wall from Castlecary to Carriden. Bailey is well known for the high quality of his excavations and for his emphasis on community involvement. Over time he has built up not only unprecedented local knowledge, but strong community contacts and support. This is most evident in the contribution of his band of local volunteer excavators, who rapidly came to be known as the 'Walnuts', and is further affirmed by the number of opportunities he was offered by homeowners to excavate in their gardens.

This large A4 volume, divided into three parts, is extensively illustrated with over 600 plans, diagrams, drawings, tables and colour photographs, the majority produced by Bailey himself. The first part is made up of a number of synthetic chapters that provide more general discussion of a range of topics reflecting the author's varied interests. These include the linear components of the Wall and its construction, minor installations, a reinterpretation of the sequence of development at Duntocher, fort settings and their defences, three different types of internal buildings (*principia*, *praetoria* and *horrea*) and the identification of possible aqueducts. The linear components of the Wall (ditch, rampart, berm and Military Way) are usefully introduced with tabulated data on their varying characteristics, and comparisons are drawn with Hadrian's Wall. There are, however, a number of issues of interpretation that are questionable. Though the case is not made explicitly in the text, Bailey's various reconstruction drawings seem to depict a vertical north face for the rampart, which is structurally improbable. Dealing with minor installations, his discussion of fortlets is somewhat marred by the generalisations made on the basis of the evidence from Laurieston. Its identification (presented in more detail in Chapter 8) is highly dubious as it is based on a drain that supposedly flanked a road running through the putative fortlet, but which seems most likely to be post-Roman as it is not perpendicular to the Wall-ditch and cuts through defensive pits on the berm. He also continues to assert that the Wall was provided with occasional towers on the basis of the somewhat tenuous evidence of a single possible post-pad at Callendar Park and an entirely hypothetical tower at Wilderness West.

In the two chapters that relate to building the Wall, it is clear that Bailey does not favour the hypothesis that it underwent a major change of plan during its construction. He offers his own interpretation of the sequence of building, preferring a variation of the concept of a phased implementation of the different elements. However, the basis for some of his critique of the structural evidence for primary and secondary forts is out of date, particularly his assertion that the ramparts of the fort at Rough Castle were contemporary with the Wall (compare Hanson in *Britannia* 51, 215–16). He suggests an interesting minor re-interpretation of the sequence of construction at Duntocher, pointing out that the Wall on the west side of the fortlet was aligned so as to incorporate it directly into the linear barrier. This rather undermines his general thesis, however, as it would imply that the addition of a fort was not part of the original plan.

The detailed reports on Bailey's numerous excavations constitute part two and provide the important core of the volume. They include examination of environmental evidence and finds reports, as appropriate, all of the former and some of the latter provided by relevant specialists. The detailed examination of the Roman pottery, authored throughout by Peter Webster, is particularly acknowledged in the introduction. Though some larger projects were undertaken – most notably at Mumrills, Carriden and within Falkirk itself – most of the excavations were very small-scale. These were often confined to gardens and provided with

only limited resources, so that Bailey operated as something akin to a one-man research and rescue archaeology service for the Roman Wall in the area. The excavation reports are grouped together geographically and provided with useful individual and/or general contextual discussion.

As well as helping to identify or confirm the line of the Wall in the built-up areas that constitute much of its route through Falkirk District, Bailey's excavations have made a number of substantive contributions to our knowledge. Three stand out: the identification of the site of the fort and associated annexes at Falkirk; the discovery of a bathhouse at Carriden and the recognition that the fort there, identified from the air in 1945, was in fact an eastern annexe; and the discovery of defensive pits at various locations on the berm, similar to those recorded on Hadrian's Wall (though the best examples, at Callendar Park and Garnhall, are published in detail elsewhere). Some of the reports, however, illustrate Bailey's tendency to push interpretations beyond the limits of the data. The dubious identification of a fortlet at Laurieston has already been noted and his suggestion that there may have been an earlier fort on the site of the western annexe at Mumrills (Chapter 6) is open to serious challenge as there is no direct evidence of the hypothesised earlier ditch under the road leading to the annexe entrance (see Hanson in *Britannia* 51, 213).

The third and final section of the volume provides a number of brief synthetic overviews relating to certain categories of finds. Those covering Roman coins, pottery supply and brooches have been provided by specialist contributors (Brickstock, Webster and Hunter respectively), Bailey adding a chapter on box-flue tiles whose detailed study has led him to suggest that each fort produced its own.

The volume was written over decade or more, its publication delayed, in part at least, by unfulfilled waits for specialist reports. Navigating through the volume is not always straightforward as the subdivision of the chapters is not indicated within the list of contents, nor is there a list of illustrations. Most annoying to this reviewer was the habit of referencing particular features in the discussion sections but not always indicating the relevant figure on which they feature, thus making it more difficult to follow the argument. There are also a number of minor, if sometimes glaring, typographic errors.

Despite the various issues noted above, the full publication of this large corpus of work is most welcome. It provides, at a bargain price, a mine of well-illustrated, fundamental information about the Antonine Wall in Falkirk District and offers some alternative interpretations of its layout and construction that are worthy of consideration.

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