

# The Roman Empire: Conquest

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The reconquest of southern Scotland was completed by AD 142 and work began on the military installations designed to ensure the Roman grip on the area. A new frontier, the Antonine Wall, was built across the narrow waist of Scotland, the Forth-Clyde isthmus. Behind the Wall regiments were based in the forts and fortlets on the roads leading north.

Hadrian's Wall was abandoned, together with most of the forts to its south. At 40 Roman miles ( 37 statute miles or nearly 60 km) long, the Antonine Wall was just half the length of Hadrian's Wall. It consisted of a turf rampart, perhaps 3 m high, placed on a stone base probably intended to be 15 Roman feet (4.3 m) wide. In front lay a wide and deep ditch.

The material from the ditch was tipped out on to the north side to form an outer mound. Along the Wall lay forts, fortlets and `expansions', which were perhaps beacon-platforms. The first plan entailed the construction of six forts along the Wall with a fortlet at each mile interval in between. Before this scheme was completed the decision was made to add at least ten more forts to the Wall, reducing the distance between each from about 8 miles to a little over 2 miles.

These forts held either whole regiments or smaller detachments. The 6,000 men based in these forts were not there to defend the Wall itself, but to protect the province from attack. In the event of a major invasion they would move out into the field to meet the enemy in a set-piece battle, at which the Roman army was pre-eminent. The purpose of the Antonine Wall was essentially bureaucratic.

It was to mark the difference between Roman and barbarian territory, prevent unauthorised entry to the empire and enforce the regulations which governed access to the guarded entrances (forts and fortlets). The new Wall was built in the most convenient geographical location, but it was not necessarily the frontier of the empire, for three or four outpost forts lay to the north.

Information and images in these pages are extracts from the HMSO publication 'Invaders of Scotland' by Anna Ritchie and David J Breeze. This fascinating volume contains many more images and drawings and continues the invaders theme with sections on the Vikings and Angles. Well worth the price. To buy this book try at Amazon.com for ISBN 011494136X