

Mason, D. *Roman County Durham: The Eastern Hinterland of Hadrian's Wall*. (Durham County Council, 2021) 557 pages; 485 illustrations, 350 in colour. £37.50

Review by Katie Mountain:

Roman County Durham: The Eastern Hinterland of Hadrian's Wall is the first volume of its kind, with over 500 pages dedicated to the rich Roman heritage of County Durham. Over 19 well set out and clearly written chapters, Dr David Mason takes us on a journey through an area often overshadowed by Hadrian's Wall and places a well-deserved spotlight on the wealth and uniqueness of archaeological evidence of Roman County Durham.

Dr David Mason, Durham County Archaeologist since 2004, has a clear passion for Roman military archaeology. He has already done a great deal to promote the archaeology and history of the County through his varied roles including manager of Binchester Roman Fort visitor centre and editor and organiser of Hadrian's Wall and County Durham Archaeology Magazines and Conferences. Knowledge and understanding of Roman County Durham has been vastly transformed over the last 20 years due to focussed excavation campaigns and surveys, of which Mason has had much first-hand involvement. In this volume Mason details these important discoveries and successfully reveals an extensive network of military and civil infrastructure and gives new insights on the interactions between the diverse frontier communities as well as the lasting legacy the structures and people have left on County Durham.

Mason begins his comprehensive analysis setting the pre-Roman scene and detailing the start of the Roman presence in County Durham in the late first century (Chapters 1 and 2). Chapter 3 continues the essential background with an excellent overview of the Roman Army, accompanied by fantastic illustrations of the army's dress and weaponry along with photographs of Roman military re-enactors which help to bring the archaeological evidence to life.

Chapter 4 begins the exploration of the military infrastructure in County Durham and how it quickly became a vital military frontier zone made up of a vast network of camps, signal stations and watch towers. Mason often highlights the uniqueness of some sites and points out gaps in current knowledge and how we might begin to fill these gaps with further focussed research.

Mason continues to explore the County's seven auxiliary forts (Chapters 5 to 11), detailing previous knowledge including antiquarian accounts, to the recent discoveries such as those from the successful excavation project at Binchester 2009-2015 which produced invaluable structural evidence to prove a long and varied life of the fort, and a huge quantity of artefacts providing further understanding of the people associated with the site. The excavations at Binchester attracted both local and international participants, and it is particularly good to see also mentioned the work carried out by the wide range of people who have a keen interest in the County – from Durham Council and University, to commercial archaeology companies and local archaeology and history groups, to investigations by the popular television programme *Time Team*.

Each fort chapter follows a similar outline of looking first at the fort structures, extra-mural military/official building and facilities, followed by the associated civilian settlements, religious buildings and cemeteries, then finally the people connected to the forts, both military and civilian. Mason gives extensive descriptions of the forts and building phases but in an informative and easy to follow manner assisted by numerous archaeological excavation photographs, maps and reconstruction plans. The volume's overall focus is the structures and remains of sites, and military presence. Mason states himself in the preface that he is not an artefacts person so objects do not feature greatly. However, the artefacts Mason has chosen – including dedicated altars, building inscriptions, objects marked with personal name stamps and graffiti – are highly beneficial in offering valuable insight to the individual men, women and children who built, lived in, and used the fort sites.

The following chapters (12 to 14) focus on the hundreds of civil settlements, farming complexes, and villas, all pointing towards a complex, intensively settled area. Mason then considers the interactions between these communities (Chapters 15 to 17) and discusses the evidence for agriculture, animal husbandry, trade and the industries that supported the military community and infrastructure. Mason also details the evidence for traditional Roman religious practices and the evidence of early Christianity which leads neatly to the concluding chapters (18 and 19) discussing the development of Roman County Durham into an Anglian Kingdom and the legacy left on the County not only in the excellently preserved archaeological remains, but also in the buildings, road networks, modern settlement locations and layouts we can see today.

Roman County Durham is an attractive production with hundreds of high-quality images, maps and figures, the majority of which are in full colour and all are integrated fittingly with the text throughout. The text itself is often conversational in tone and with in-text references kept to a minimum, makes for easy and enjoyable reading whilst benefiting from informative and thorough academic analysis. For any reader wishing to know more about the sites and ideas covered in the volume, Mason provides a concise, essential bibliography and an index helpfully grouped by theme. At a RRP of £37.50, the volume is excellent value for money, and it is understood that proceeds from sales will be reinvested in further archaeological research and publications.

It is clear that County Durham deserves this long-awaited dedicated volume. Mason demonstrates, beyond any doubt, the wealth of archaeological remains and rich Roman heritage of County Durham. Mason also brings new insight and perspective to the lasting legacy of the Roman presence in County Durham and this volume will benefit a wide audience including those with an interest in Roman archaeology and anyone looking to learn more about the history and heritage of the County.

Katie Mountain holds an MA in Roman Archaeology from Newcastle University. Her specialist interests include Hadrian's Wall and frontier communities, and Late Roman/Early medieval artefacts. Katie currently works as an archaeologist for Pre-Construct Archaeology Durham Office, and is also co-editing a forthcoming volume of papers on the cultural resource management of Hadrian's Wall.