

# Britannia

<http://journals.cambridge.org/BRI>

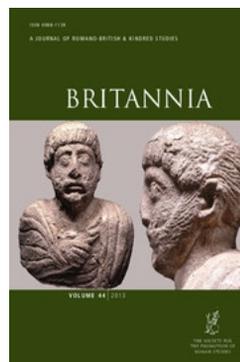
Additional services for **Britannia**:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

***Roman Britain: a New History 55 BC–AD 450.* By P. Southern. Amberley, Stroud, 2011. Pp. 232, pls 95. Price: £25.00. isbn 978 1 44560 146 5.**  
***To Rule Britannia: the Claudian Invasion of Britain, AD 43.* By J. Waite. History Press, Stroud, 2011. Pp. 191, pls 20, illus. Price: £17.99. isbn 978 0 75245 149 7.**

Miles Russell

Britannia / Volume 44 / November 2013, pp 427 - 428

DOI: 10.1017/S0068113X13000135, Published online: 26 February 2013

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0068113X13000135](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0068113X13000135)

**How to cite this article:**

Miles Russell (2013). Britannia, 44, pp 427-428 doi:10.1017/S0068113X13000135

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

finds and dating evidence. A tenth discusses the fort's context within London and its garrison. Appendices describe further work on site WFG9 and catalogue the epigraphic evidence and the visible remains.

The over-long introduction explains the identification of the fort; much of this deserved publication elsewhere as an insight into a past archaeological world. The main sections describe the surviving structures, the west gate well illustrated by contemporary photographs. The account of interior structures on sites WFG 20, 22 and 22a suggests a complex but heavily truncated site. The significant dated finds groups are accompanied by excellent photographs of the samian; finds and structures imply significant occupation from the late first to fourth century, whether or not military. The final sections review the site's history and conclude with an exemplary discussion of the nature of the garrison and its place within the provincial administration.

The original illustrations demonstrate the objectivity lacking in computer-produced diagrams. The representation by tone and symbol of uncertainties in the recognition of stratigraphic divisions accords with Grimes' preference for objective description and interpretation 'from a position of maximum knowledge', an attitude worthy of revival. A plan of the fort in its wider context would have shown the relationship to nearby baths and domestic buildings claimed elsewhere to relate to the military establishment.

Details can be queried; the dimensions on p. 26 conflict with those derived from fig. 123, 243 by 220 m over the walls, giving an internal area of c. 5 hectares. Fig. 22 is wrongly captioned — a. is an isometric drawing of the normal city wall section, b. shows the fort wall with later reinforcement as city wall (cf. W.F. Grimes, *The Excavation of Roman and Medieval London* (1968), figs 9 and 10). For the noun *dishabitatio* (163) read the adjective *inhabitabilis*. Many photographs had already appeared in G. Milne, with N. Cohen, *Excavations at Medieval Cripplegate, London: Archaeology after the Blitz 1946–68* (2001). That work also (p. 45), provides details of later occupation, including the arguably late Roman blocking of the west gate. Shepherd now provides an account crucial to our understanding of the initial epoch-making discovery.

London

[c.spareygreen@btinternet.com](mailto:c.spareygreen@btinternet.com)

CHRISTOPHER SPAREY-GREEN

doi: 10.1017/S0068113X1300038X

*Roman Britain: a New History 55 BC–AD 450*. By P. Southern. Amberley, Stroud, 2011. Pp. 232, pls 95. Price: £25.00. ISBN 978 1 44560 146 5.

*To Rule Britannia: the Claudian Invasion of Britain, AD 43*. By J. Waite. History Press, Stroud, 2011. Pp. 191, pls 20, illus. Price: £17.99. ISBN 978 0 75245 149 7.

As long ago as 1956, in his book *Seeing Roman Britain*, Leonard Cottrell commented that 'there have been so many books on Roman Britain . . . one needs some justification for adding yet another'. Since the 1950s, it seems that every new work summarising the story of Britannia has at some stage felt the need for self-flagellatory apology, as if trying to excuse the unnecessary addition of 'yet another' study of the province. This is a curious phenomenon and one that I do not see in the academic literature of any other period of British history, even the excessively studied Tudor dynasty. There is, of course, much that can be said about any given time period and, thanks to the nature of archaeological discovery, there is constantly something new to say; some alternative angle to examine and discuss. In 1956, Cottrell felt that, given the number of printed works on Roman Britain, it was important to justify 'what this book is about and, almost as important, what it is not'. With regard to these two new contributions to the study of Britannia, by Pat Southern and John Waite, it is also important to explain what both seem keen to achieve and what, ultimately, they do not.

First, it should be noted that, contrary to their respective blurbs, neither book sets out to create an alternative discourse nor radically re-examine the Roman past; in fact, despite many new archaeological discoveries and theories, both works are very much set within established orthodoxy. A sense of the traditional is evident from the outset, both books suffering to some degree from a sense of over-familiarity: the title of S.'s tome sharing that with Guy de la Bédoyère's book of 2006, the sense of *déjà vu* continuing as both have images of Hadrian's Wall on the dust jacket, while W.'s has a cover that deliberately echoes John Peddie's 1987 work *Invasion: the Roman Conquest of Britain*, with the Ermine Street Guard striding in front of dramatic, primary-coloured, cloud-strewn sky. Such similarities unfairly

detract from the textual worth of both books, as they immediately invite comparison with these earlier works and do not, at first sight, inspire confidence that anything new will be said within.

The story presented by S. follows a tried and tested (and somewhat predictable) format, commencing with 'First Contact' (the campaigns of Caesar and tribal development to the eve of the Claudian invasion), 'Invasion and Conquest' (Claudius to the eve of the Boudiccan revolt), 'Rebellion and Reconstruction' (Boudicca to the year of the three emperors), and so on to ch. 12, 'Transition and New Beginning' (Constantine III to St Patrick). S. writes in a clear and fluid style, explaining complicated events in an engaging fashion. This is, as the title suggests, however, very much a history in the traditional sense, focusing upon dates, events and a predominantly male, militarised Britain, archaeological evidence relating to the normal and everyday rarely getting much of a look in. The history presented here is therefore *new* almost solely in the sense of it being the most *recently published* and, as such, it will certainly appeal to a general audience unfamiliar or largely unaware of Britain's Roman heritage (and all power to it for that), although academics and researchers will find little here that is challenging. Illustrative material is unfortunately restricted to a single section which, as with the text, focuses primarily upon military establishments, rather than the towns, villas, industries and richly diverse artistic culture of the province. Maps and plans are few and are sadly confined to the central section, rather than being distributed more helpfully (for a general audience) at relevant points in the narrative. In-text referencing is absent, although sections on further reading, 'what the ancient authors said', glossary and places to visit are an invaluable resource to the uninitiated.

One curious feature is the presence of 'text boxes' liberally sprinkled throughout the book. In the context of a more populist project, information dumps make perfect sense, but in the context of this book, however, such inserts are intrusive, completely disrupting the narrative flow. The addition of bite-sized blocks of information could have been handled far more effectively if the book itself had been presented in a larger, almost 'coffee-table style' format.

W.'s book covers the first two chapters of S.'s, the military expeditions of Caesar and the two-stage invasion of Claudius, in considerably more detail. His book is, in essence, a reboot of Peddie's 1987 work, attempting to resolve issues surrounding the strategy and logistics of the invading Roman army. Consideration of the problems faced by troops on the move at sea and on the land are considered well and intelligently discussed, but there is a (Claudian) elephant in the room: namely that everything that is (and has been) stated with confidence with regard to the siting of harbours, fortifications and battlefields during the campaign of A.D. 43 is ultimately pure conjecture. Unfortunately, the near total lack of hard evidence concerning the conquest on the ground is neatly skipped over by W. and, despite the genuinely interesting 'belt-and-braces' approach to the actual problems associated with the landings, the Richborough/Medway/Thames/Colchester model of subjugation that has been espoused for decades, here remains stubbornly in place.

Thirty years ago, Richard Reece noted that 'text books on Roman Britain to date make the subject appear like a nice sand pit in which toddlers can safely be left to play' adding that he was thankful that it is instead 'a wild, overgrown garden in which anything may happen'. Although the two works cited here essentially present the Roman past as a familiar, child-friendly, toy-laden, sand-filled play pit, there are occasionally hints of a darker, adventure-filled wilderness at the margins; an overgrown, unexplored space that is desperately crying out for attention ... one only needs to push open the rusty gate that separates the two in order to explore the exciting and unfamiliar world beyond. I, for one, have got my torch.

Bournemouth University  
mrussell@bournemouth.ac.uk

MILES RUSSELL  
doi: 10.1017/S0068113X13000135

*Roman and Native in the Central Scottish Borders.* By A. Wilson. British Archaeological Reports, British Series 519. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2010. Pp. vii + 164, figs, maps, plans. Price: £36.00. ISBN 978 1 4073 0722 0.

Alan Wilson has examined the effects of Roman occupation between the Walls for over 20 years, through a series of regional studies of Strathclyde, Galloway and Dumfriesshire published in the *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* and the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Society's *Transactions*. In this volume his focus moves eastwards to an area traditionally equated broadly with the territory of the Selgovae, perhaps