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Richard Hingley

Constructing the Nation and Empire: Victorian and Edwardian Images of the Building of Roman Fortifications

Abstract: This paper explores four images that date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that show building operations in Roman Britain. These include two paintings, an engraving and a book illustration. The images show scenes derived from the Roman northern frontiers in Britain and also the building of the Roman fort at Manchester. A series of human characters included in these scenes provide insight into the ways that the Roman past was envisaged in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. This paper seeks to relate these images of ancient scenes of building to the concerns of contemporary communities about national identity and the imperial role of Britain at a time of heightening international insecurity. It is clear that Romans and ancient Britons represented powerful ancestor figures and the images show a variety of ways in which the past was received and communicated.

1 Introduction

This paper draws upon four contrasting images dating to the period between 1857 and 1911 that show the building of Roman fortifications in Britain: a painting by William Bell Scott (1857), a mural by Ford Madox Brown (1879–80), a book illustration by Henry Ford (1911), and an engraving by Richard Caton Woodville (1911). These images project a number of stock ideas about the present age into the Roman past and, as with all images that deal with historical subjects, it is helpful to consider the underlying rationales that lay behind their production: the commissioning, function, context and the intended audiences (see Moser and Smiles 2005: 1). The Roman occupation of Britain provided people at this time with a strong set of parallels and contrasts with which to explore and conceptualise issues of national origins and imperial purpose (cf. Hingley 2000, Bradley 2010, and Vance 1997). These images seek to place episodes of ancestral empire building into the context of British nationhood and imperialism through references to industry, imperial infrastructure, gender, race and class. In particular, the people that form a fundamental element in all these images focus attention on the make-up of the population of the British Isles and also the relationship of the British to the indigenous peoples of their Empire. Looking to the way that ideas of ethnology and ancestry are made to operate in these images, the main categories of people include Romans and other colo-

nised subjects, including black-skinned figures, Germanic and Celtic peoples. In Victorian and Edwardian society there was a deep interest that linked the historical roots of the British people to ideas of national fortitude, with some looking to the ancient populations of the British Isles – the ancient Britons or the Celts – for ancestral origins, and others looking to the Germanic settlers of the early medieval period or to the idea of the mixing of ancient populations (see Hingley 2000 and Young 2008). The analogy that was often drawn between Roman officers in Britain and British officers in India also played a significant role in life in Roman Britain (see Hingley 2008: 238–241; Mantena 2010). We shall see that the four images played with these identities in drawing imperial messages for the British.

These are the only images of this date-range known to me that illustrate Roman military building works in *Britannia*; three feature Hadrian's Wall and the fourth the Roman fort at Manchester. I have already addressed the images by Scott, Woodville and Ford (see Hingley 2012), but this article contains a substantial re-assessment of my previous observations and also a new assessment of Brown's work. The illustration of scenes set in Roman Britain had appealed to a number of artists during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, with themes derived from a number of stock topics, including Caesar's invasion, the resistance of Boudica and Caratacus, Druids and Christians and the eventual departure of the Britons (see Smiles 1994: 133–164). The use of Roman Britain as a source for artistic inspiration appears, however, to have declined during the later nineteenth century. The Roman fortification images span a key period in which ideas about ancient Britain and Rome were being transformed (see Vance 1997). Public attitudes to Roman imperialism underwent a deep transformation during the 1870s, as the British started to investigate more openly the classical roots of their imperial activities. Before this time, ideas of empire were tarnished by the activities of Napoleon and his successors, but there was an increasingly public following for the debate about the relevance of value of empire after Parliament debated whether Queen Victoria should take the title of Empress of India in 1876 (see McCoskey 2012: 189; Vance 1997: 228–230). Scholars, artists and politicians played their part in this empire-debate through the drawing of regular comparisons between the Roman and British empires, exploring ideas that drew upon the perception that the Romans introduced civilisation to Western Europe, which the British then used to justify imperial control of others across its empire (see Hingley 2000: 48; Vance 1997: 238–240).

This imperial comparison may have led to a more focused interest in illustrating life at the core of the Roman Empire during the later nineteenth century. Lawrence Alma-Tadema's considerable output of work focuses upon hedonistic scenes set in the classical Mediterranean (see Barrow 2001: 7; cf. Goldhill 2011:

69), with only one work set in Roman Britain (see below). However, at this time there was also a significant increase in the number of schoolbooks and novels for young people that featured British history and some of these contained illustrations of scenes drawn from Roman Britain (see Bradley 2010: 151–157). As a result, the medium in which relevant images were produced appears to have been changing. The illustration of these four ancient acts of building convey an increasingly detailed archaeological understanding of the impact of classical Rome upon ancient Britain that was arising as a result of the excavations of the major frontier works (Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall), Roman forts, cities and villas – activities that were drawing attention to the immediacy of the Roman past buried just below people's feet (see Hingley 2008: 238–325). Archaeological excavation and art formed part of the process through which imperial comparisons and contrasts were developed

The main argument here is that, by illustrating the building of Roman infrastructure and peopling these scenes with an assortment of co-operative and resistant Romans, Celts, Britons, Germans, Africans and Syrians, these four artists engaged with issues that brought the Roman past into a direct engagement with the imperial present. In conceptual terms, these art works illustrate the growing use of imperial Rome to provide an analogy for contemporary Britain and its empire, reflecting the opportunities and the growing pressures during the later part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Illustrating Roman military building work reflected the growth of the use of the analogy of classical Rome in Britain to inform the maintenance of nation and empire (see Hingley 2000: 21–27).

2 William Bell Scott's 'Building of the Roman Wall' (1857)

Scott (1811–1890) was born in Edinburgh and was the first master of the Newcastle School of Design at the time this painting was commissioned (see Figure 1). He was a well-known artist, poet, and friend of a number of pre-Raphaelite painters, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti (see Batchelor 2004; Trevelyan 1994: 56). The owner of Wallington Hall, Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan and his wife, Paulina Jermyn Trevelyan, commissioned a sequence of eight paintings from Scott and evidently played a significant role in the design and content of the Roman Wall painting. Wallington Hall is a neoclassical country house several kilometres to the north of Hadrian's Wall and the central hall is decorated with this sequence of paintings, portraying scenes from the history of the county of

Northumberland. The ‘Building of the Roman Wall’ is the first in the chronological sequence, which ends with one of Scott’s best-known paintings, ‘Iron and Cole’ (1861; see Smiles 1994: 143–144). This sequence equates the construction of Hadrian’s Wall with the early stages of Britain’s progress towards contemporary Christian imperial order (see Batchelor 2006: 125; Smiles 1994: 144–147). The industry portrayed in the building of the Wall is also equated with the growing industrial significance of Newcastle and Tyneside, reflected in ‘Iron and Cole’ (see Usherwood 1996: 153). The additional decoration in the hall includes a series of medallions of local worthies, beginning with the emperor Hadrian and ending with the railway engineer George Stephenson (see Vance 1997: 245).

Scott painted the ‘Building of the Roman Wall’ between January and June 1857 (see Hingley 2012: 159). The letters that the artist sent to Lady Trevelyan indicate that he held several discussions with two of the antiquaries who were currently excavating and publicising the Wall, John Clayton and John Collingwood Bruce (see Hingley 2012: 159–160). Scott aimed for a certain degree of historical accuracy and must have visited the Wall to create his painting, although it is impossible to reconstruct his exact viewpoint since this painting includes a degree of artistic licence. However, Scott examined images of Trajan’s column in order to portray the Roman soldiers with as much accuracy as possible (see Scott 1857). He also borrowed a Roman stone from the Wall to help his composition and illustrated one of the Latin inscriptions that had been found near to the site of the painting in the face of the Roman curtain Wall (see Hingley 2012: 161–163). Susan Greaney (2013: 32) identifies William Bell Scott’s painting as perhaps one of the “first true reconstruction paintings” of Roman Britain to have been created and this painting prefigured a tradition of reconstruction drawings and paintings that were produced during the twentieth century. Greaney (2013: 31) discusses the purpose of reconstructions as “to put flesh on the bare bones of the past by restoring (...) what time has taken away”. This concern with the accuracy of detail was evidently of interest to Scott but does not appear to have been shared too directly by the other three artists considered in this paper (see Greaney 2013: 37).

The scene is set at the base of Hotbanks Crags in the central section of Hadrian’s Wall, looking west. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this painting relates to the variety of people that it portrays (see Hingley 2012: 164–171). ‘Building of the Roman Wall’ drew deeply upon Victorian concepts of the ethnology of the Romans and ancient Britons, although it is unfortunate that Scott did not reflect on these issues in his letters, which makes his motivation difficult to comprehend. The painting evidently reflects imperial concerns, drawing a message from the ethnologically mixed nature of the community that is build-

ing and manning the frontier. Sam Smiles (1994:144–146) suggests that problematic military events in Afghanistan and India during the previous decade provide a context for the painting, while the recent conflict with Russia in the Crimea during the previous years is presumably also relevant. I have argued that the painting includes at least three groups of people: (1) a number of Roman soldiers in legionary and auxiliary dress, (2) romanticised lowland ancient Britons, and (3) a small band of lightly clothed barbarian Caledonians who are attacking the building work in progress from outside the empire (see Hingley 2012: 164). The Roman soldiers are of particular interest since they include a figure in legionary dress with dark skin, presumably an African (see Usherwood 1996: 162 n. 6; Hingley 2010: 234). Close by, other auxiliary soldiers include one with a bow and arrow, a member of the First Cohort of Hamian archers from Syria, while a third soldier wears a ‘Phrygian cap’ and is intently involved in building the curtain Wall (see Hingley 2012: 165–166). These figures drew upon contemporary knowledge of the Roman population of the Wall since Latin inscriptions found in the ruins of the monument and a late Roman source that mentions military units (the *Notitia dignitatum*) indicated the widespread origin of the Wall soldiers.

The painting depicts ancient Britons and Roman soldiers from across the empire and casts a reflective gaze on Britain’s imperial concerns at a time of particular imperial pressure (see Hingley 2012: 157; cf. Smiles 1994: 143–144). Noting the dark, rainy stretch of land on the right (barbarian) side of the painting, Paul Usherwood (2007: 251–252) has suggested that this represents the anticipation of trouble ahead, but he also saw the attack from the north by the Caledonians as desperate and futile (see Usherwood 1996: 153). The symbolism of the painting appears, however, to be particularly complex. Certain Victorians considered that Rome had successfully addressed issues of imperial incorporation that the British were beginning to find problematic by the mid 1850s. I have suggested that Scott’s painting appears to be playing with ideas of military identity, crossing geographical boundaries in a search for a viable analogy for the defence of the frontiers of the British Empire (Hingley 2012: 167). The idea that certain colonised peoples represented ‘martial races’ had a growing impact in Britain during the nineteenth century (see Streets 2004: 1). In this painting, the Roman army, which includes a number of native soldiers (i.e. not entirely Roman nor British), are helping to organise and defend a number of ancient British men, women and children, depicted as behind the curtain Wall, from the attack by Caledonians.

Victorians inherited contrasting views of ancient Britons as both noble and ignorant savages (see Smiles 1994: 2). The works of antiquaries and artists often portrayed these contradictory images of the ancient population as either valiant

upholders of British national freedom or primitive savages more akin to certain colonised people within the British Empire (see Hingley 2012: 170). Some people considered the ancient Britons to represent the ancestors of the current Scots, Irish and Welsh, while the English and lowland Scots often felt themselves descended from the Anglo-Saxon settlers who had replaced the Roman-period populations (see Young 2008). The three ancient Britons on top of the curtain Wall to the left of the painting are shown as peaceful but they are not really co-operating with their imperial masters. They do not have the demeanour or apparel of the Roman legionary soldiers, who stand upright and dominant.¹ Together with a number of the native soldiers, presumably representing auxiliaries, the male figures retain the partly naked character of the Caledonians beyond the Wall. The figures on top of and inside the Wall are lowland Britons who have been subdued by their conquerors and put to work as labourers under the control of Roman officers. The two male Roman Britons in the foreground have put down their tools and are involved with cooking and gambling with dice (see Usherwood 1996: 153; Trevelyan 1994: 58–59). This indolence presumably recalls the sixth-century author Gildas' comments (19.2) that the Britons during the collapse of Roman rule “sat about day and night, rotting away in their folly” when they should have been defending the Wall. Gildas' comments retained a deep significance for antiquaries in Victorian times (see Hingley 2012: 191).

‘Building of the Roman Wall’ appears to contain an optimistic view about British imperial progress, since the Romans dominate both the barbarian Britons and Caledonians and also because the painting is part of a series that championed imperial progress and the triumph of Christianity. To the left of the painting, a soldier stands near an altar, conveying the pagan nature of local religion in the early second century, while later paintings in the series included images that portray the introduction and spread of Christianity to north-eastern England (see Smiles 1994: 143–144). A woman with a baby sits behind the curtain Wall, while two young women with clothes that may indicate that they are Roman bring food to the soldiers, illustrating the possibility of an eventual Romano-British civil life (see Vance 1997: 245). There are, however, also ele-

1 It has long been thought that the centurion in the foreground was based on a likeness of the local land-owner John Clayton, who lived on the line of the Wall at Chester (see e.g. Crow 2004, caption to colour figure 19; Vance 1997: 246). This is not certain, however, since Scott himself recalled later in life that the only likeness that he used in the image was of John Collingwood Bruce, who is the figure in profile just behind the centurion's left knee (see Hingley 2012: 160–162).

ments of insecurity. In contrast to these civilised figures, a bare-breasted female leads the Caledonians in their rush to attack the Wall. The representation of Britons as both attacking and defending the Wall demonstrates a considerable lack of unity among the ancient population, with the result that Roman soldiers must control the construction of the frontier and its defence. Those who viewed the painting immediately after its completion may have been particularly struck by these images. In May 1857, one month before the painting's completion, the so-called 'Indian Mutiny' had broken out (see David 2002), raising issues about the relationship between the British and the native troops of the empire (see Streets 2004: 29–30). Prior to this, the British had been rapidly acquiring new territories but the events in India precipitated a significant psychological shock, leading to a reduction in confidence regarding the invincibility of Britain's control of its colonies (see Hall 2010: 33).

The siege of Cawnpore (Kanpur) during late May and early June 1857 led to the surrender of the British garrison to Nana Sahib, who ordered the execution of all of the prisoners (see Batchelor 2006: 194–195; David 2002: 198–199). Almost all the Christian civilians were slaughtered, including Anna Halliday, the daughter of Walter Trevelyan's sister, together with her husband and children (see Batchelor 2006: 194–195). Scott's painting evidently was not a direct response to these events, since news of the tragedy took some time to arrive and the painting was completed by early June (for Scott's letters of sympathy to the Trevelyans, see Hingley 2012: 168). However, the view that it expressed of imperial co-operation between the races of the empire must have appeared particularly apposite to those who viewed this painting (see Hingley 2012: 168). There was a sensation in the media about the security of British families in India around the time that the painting was completed (see Nagai 2005: 85). During this siege, a loyal band of Indian troops fought alongside the British until the final stages (see David 2002: 198). Native troops remained fundamental to the British imperial effort and parallels between the imperial policies of Britain and Roman continued to be drawn (see Hutchins 1967: 145; Hingley 2012: 168). The folly of allowing native troops to serve close to their homelands was emphasised, to which the troubles in India were attributed and it was suggested that the Romans had followed a better example in posting soldiers to foreign areas (see Hutchins 1967: 145). From this perspective, the mixed character of the Roman soldiers portrayed on the Wallington painting would have appeared to represent good practice for an imperial power under pressure.

Although this painting was produced for a private house, the impact of its message was felt across the North East and further into England. The eight paintings of the Wallington Hall sequence were exhibited at the French Gallery in Pall Mall at the end of June 1861 and also in Newcastle. The eight Wallington

paintings were fairly widely reviewed in the national press and engravings produced for a number of publications, including a London newspaper (see Scott 1879). John Batchelor (2006: 200) has argued that this painting cycle represented an innovation of national significance and ‘The Building of the Roman Wall’ appears to have influenced the images discussed below.

3 Ford Madox Brown’s ‘The Romans Building a Fort at Mancenion’ (1879–80)²

Brown (1821–1893) was a painter and designer, born in Calais of British parents (see Barringer 2004 and Treuherz 2011). He undertook a variety of historical paintings and had befriended the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood during the late 1840s and 1850s and was an acquaintance of William Bell Scott. His paintings included a range of works that addressed British history and the landscape. In 1878, Brown was asked to provide wall paintings for the Great Hall of Alfred Waterhouse’s Gothic Town Hall in Manchester, illustrating twelve subjects drawn from local history, a series that he completed by 1893 (see Treuherz 2011: 47–59). Tim Barringer (2004) notes that “(e)xaggerated postures and gestures characterise this triumphantly inventive though somewhat uneven series of compositions”. The first mural in the sequence shows the building of the wall of the Roman ‘camp’ at Manchester and was painted between April and September 1880 (Figure 2; see Hueffer 1896: 338–339; Treuherz 2011: 64). A copy of the design for the mural also survives as a one-quarter sized colour oil painting that was produced in 1879–80 and is now in Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum (see Treuherz 2011: 284–285).

This painting appears to depict at least four categories of people and these draw upon but differ somewhat from those in Scott’s painting: (1) Roman officers and a lady with a child, (2) Roman legionary soldiers involved in the work of masons, (3) British navvies doing the more laborious building work, and (4) two Black slaves carrying a covered chair. As in Scott’s image, the Romans are the dominant figures, placed above the Britons (see Treuherz 2011: 284). William Michael Rosetti sat for one of the labouring Roman soldiers, possibly the legionary soldier with the helmet and trowel on the left (see Treuherz 2011: 284). In keeping with the two legionary soldiers in Scott’s image, the three Roman

² The Manchester mural names the Roman fort ‘Mancenion’, although it is now thought to have been named *Mamucium* (see Rivet & Smith 1979: 409).

officers in the middle of Brown's mural are standing upright. The artist's notes indicate that the main figure, with his back turned, was originally intended to represent Agricola, Roman governor of Britain during the later first century A.D. (see Hueffer 1896: 338), although Brown later abandoned this identification since it was pointed out that there was no evidence that Agricola ever visited Manchester (see Treuherz 2011: 284). Brown also noted that the female figure represented the general's wife and she is shown, in the artist's words, in a cloak with hair dyed yellow to indicate "the luxury of Roman living, even in a camp" (Hueffer 1896: 338). She has stepped out of her litter "to take the air on the half finished-ramparts", with her "little son", dressed in a soldier's uniform and boots, close beside (Hueffer 1896: 339).

This fresco certainly seems to be influenced by William Bell Scott's earlier painting (see Treuherz 2011: 285), although the direction of the mural is turned around with the interior of the fortified area to the left rather than to the right. Brown had met Scott in 1850 and visited him several times in Newcastle in subsequent years (see Hueffer 1896: 78, 115, 166). Several of the figures of builders in this image are in a comparable pose to those on the Wallington painting, although at Manchester there was evidently no need for the Roman builders to defend themselves in what is evidently a rather more civil and settled landscape than that of Scott's Hadrian's Wall. The governor's wife represents one of the dominant figures, replacing the ancient British woman with the baby in the Wallington Hall painting. A second woman stands at the base of a ladder outside and to the base of the rampart.

Brown observed a hierarchy of order in that "(t)he legionaries are doing the masons' work; but the bearers of stone and cement are Britons" (Hueffer 1896: 338). In the company of Scott, Brown clearly shows the ethnicity of some of those involved in the building works. The two figures on the bottom right of the painting show tattoos that illustrate that these are native British, indeed Mancunian, workmen (see Treuherz 2011: 284). Unlike the situation at Wallington, these individuals are actively helping to build the rampart, if in a subservient role. Despite the co-operation of the locals in the work, Brown uses touches of comedy to illustrate the potential instability of the Roman imperial order. The Roman officers are uncomfortable as a result of the chilly northern climate and are looking at the plan of the camp upside down as a result of trying to hold it still in the powerful wind (see Treuherz 2011: 284; cf. Hueffer 1896: 338). The Nubian slaves are shown in a highly racist characterisation and they are carrying a sedan chair away from the scene. The governor's son is kicking out at one of them, while the Nubian grins back insubordinately (see Treuherz 2011: 284).

Norman Vance (1997: 245) has observed that this mural drew upon the recovery of information for the Roman fort at Manchester that had occurred dur-

ing the dramatic industrial urban expansion of the 1830s and 1840s; indeed, the selection of a Roman building theme suggested that Manchester had always been a building site, “a place of expansion and consolidation”. As in the case of the series of paintings produced by Scott for Wallington Hall, a direct connection was being drawn between industry and empire, linking the Romans in Britain to contemporary times. Indeed, like the Wallington Hall series, the Manchester murals end with two scenes derived from the industrial history of Manchester (see Treuherz 2011: 47–59, 302–305). Connections were often made between the Victorian and Roman industrial activities in Britain, including the construction of canals and railways and urban development (see Vance 1997: 244). Four years after the completion of Brown’s Roman mural, Lawrence Alma-Tadema painted a work that showed *Hadrian in England: Visiting a Romano-British Pottery* (1884). In Alma-Tadema’s painting, the emperor is shown taking an interest in ordinary life, reflecting Agricola’s role in Brown’s painting (cf. Barrow 2001: 116–119). Hadrian has the most prominent position in Alma-Tadema’s painting and is accompanied by three Roman ladies, including his wife, Julia Sabina, together with number of pottery workers.

Sam Smiles (1994: 146) has argued with regard to the Wallington Hall and Manchester paintings that

“the Roman invaders’ superior intelligence and civilisation is in some contrast to the Celtic labourers toiling at their behest. Their faces are a neat demonstration of the impact of pseudo-sciences such as phrenology on Victorian attitudes to Celtic peoples. (...) Two concepts embedded in (...) mainstream phrenology have a particular bearing (...): the general idea that the lower classes of civilised nations correspond physiognomically to savages (...); and the specific identification of the lower classes in Victorian Britain with the dark complexion and temperament of the aboriginal Celt.”

My reading differs somewhat from this, since although the distinction between workers and their masters appears to be clearly exemplified, the ancient Britons (or Mancunians) do not appear particularly characteristic of the pseudoscientific racial characteristics supposed by many Victorians to characterise Celts and working people. It appears rather more likely that Brown at least was seeking to promote an alternative view of working classes in Manchester as noble through their labouring activities. Treuherz (2011: 285) observes that Brown’s

“anti-heroic subtext favours the Mancunians, exemplified by the tattooed labourer lifting a heavy sack of cement, cut off by the bottom edge. Brown had pushed him to the front of the picture space and placed him on the same level as spectators in the Great Hall. Like the young navy in *Work* (...), he is the real hero of the painting, and typifies the prominent, sometimes subversive role Brown gave to ordinary people throughout the series.”

Brown's painting *Work* (1865) was one of his most famous compositions and again working people form the core theme, drawing on the writings of Thomas Carlyle (see Treuherz 2011: 188). In contrast to Scott's image, the Britons at Mancenion are fully engaged in the work, if in rather subservient roles. Scott and Brown both appear to be making a point about class in their works, using the distinctions between Romans and Britons to support the idea. The Romans at Wallington Hall are upright and fully involved in building and defending, while the Britons are indolent. At Mancenion, the Romans, including the figure based on William Michael Rosetti, supervise and undertake the craftsmanship while the Mancunians carry the rocks.

In Brown's Roman mural, as in Scott's painting, the Romano-British past is directly related to contemporary English life, but the Romans in this image look rather less military than Scott's Roman soldiers and the main female figure is the wife of a Roman governor rather than a Briton. Perhaps these distinctions should not be overstressed. Roman Britain was often used to provide an imperial parallel for British India (see Hingley 2008: 238–241). British officers were stationed in India and other parts of the Empire and their families often accompanied them. The Roman general and his wife at Mancenion probably stand in for British families in colonised territories. Perhaps the Roman centurions in Scott's painting represent a comparable connection with British officers overseas. The downgrading of the dark-skinned characters from the role of a legionary soldier at Wallington to that of slaves at Mancenion characterises contrasting views to colonised peoples of non-Western origins, while also calling upon a Victorian fascination with the cosmopolitan character of Roman society.

4 Henry Justice Ford's book illustration 'The Building of the Roman Wall' (1911)

Henry Justice Ford (1860–1941) was a painter and illustrator of children's books and his image of Hadrian's Wall was printed as one of a number of illustrations in C.R.L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling's *A School History of England* (1911). This was a very successful book, but Fletcher's views of history were so extreme that Oxford University Press had serious misgivings with a view to publication; the involvement of Kipling, who wrote a number of poems for this small volume, made it irresistible (see Symonds 1986: 57–58). The text is racist, bigoted, anti-Irish and anti-Parliamentary (see Gilmour 2002: 176–177). In this image, a very high curtain Wall is portrayed with a milecastle that appears to be at least ten metres in elevation. The curtain Wall and milecastle appear close to completion

but are viewed from a very different position, to the south of the Wall, from the two previous image. Ford portrays the Wall as largely rebuilt and the scale of the curtain Wall suggests that it was inspired by medieval town walls, the Great Wall of China, the Roman fort at Pevensey, or all three. The idea that Hadrian's Wall had a significant national and imperial relevance was coming to the fore at this time and this appears to have resulted in an exaggeration of its scale and magnificence (see Hingley 2012: 223).

Ford's image is comparable to all the other three in showing both Britons and Romans, although no further class or racial sub-divisions are apparent in this case. The Roman officers are to be seen in the context of British officers across the empire and appear to be standing to attention. Forster and Kipling's book drew upon Hadrian's Wall to provide contemporary imperial guidance in the philosophy and practices of imperial frontier maintenance (see Hingley 2000: 32). They wrote (Fletcher & Kipling 1911: 22):

"I fear that Roman Britain went to sleep behind her Wall [Hadrian's Wall], recruiting fell off, the strength of the legions became largely a 'paper strength'.

And not only in Britain. The greatest empire that the world had ever seen was slowly dying at her the heart, dying of too much power, too much prosperity, too much luxury. What a lesson for us all today!"

The *School History* also included Kipling's poem 'The Roman Centurion Speaks', which places distinctly imperial and pro-British sentiments into the mind of a late Roman soldier who has served from the Isle of Wight to the Wall and has just been ordered to return to Italy but wants to stay in Britain.

This poem and the *School History* in general drew upon the powerfully imperial message about the Roman frontiers projected in Kipling's earlier novel, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906). A substantial section of *Puck* was based upon Hadrian's Wall. Ford appears to have directly drawn upon this source since Kipling's description of the curtain Wall dramatically exaggerated its scale and magnificence (Kipling 1906: 173–174). Kipling consciously recreated Hadrian's Wall in this novel as an analogy for the British imperial north-west frontier in India and for concerns about the potential state of decadence in the British empire, that drew, in particular, on recent events in South Africa and India (see Ricketts 1999: 305–306; Roberts 2007: 114). Fletcher and Kipling's contributions formed part of a substantial outpouring of literature and scholarly work during the first decade and a half of the twentieth century that addressed the nature and relevance of Roman frontier policy in the context of the problems that the British were facing in their own empire (see Hingley 2000: 56–59).

The mass of Britons in Ford's illustration is again carefully supervised by a handful of Roman officers, but the former are stooped and look primitive in

character, drawing a direct contrast to the very upright Roman officers. The Britons are certainly not comparable to the Mancunian navvies in Brown's mural; indeed, they look distinctly Palaeolithic in character (see Hingley 2012: 223). The figure at the bottom right is in chains and deeply stooping, although he does not appear to be carrying a Wall stone; the style of his hair and his general demeanour appears to draw upon Victorian and Edwardian representations of South Sea Islanders and, although his tattoos indicate his Celtic identity, he may well have been intended to draw imperial parallels for the schoolboy reader (see Smiles 1994: 15). This Briton is in a comparable location to the Nubian slaves in Brown's Roman mural, although it is not certain that Ford drew upon Brown here. The stooping position of many of these Britons may be explained by the very large stones that they carry on their backs and, perhaps, Ford was drawing here upon a popular image apparent in the writings of the Victorian Wall-expert John Collingwood Bruce (1875: xi–xii), who has observed:

“We cannot (...) view from the vicinity of BORCOVICUS [Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall] the thin lines of ways leading from the quarries on the opposite side of the valley, without fancying we see moving along them a string of half-naked, half-famished savages, bearing upon their galled shoulders the stones wherewith to construct the Wall intended to keep them in perpetual subjection.”

These primitive figures represent unreconstructed Celts and it may be significant that the illustration appeared in Ford and Kipling's *School History*, since these may have been produced as a result of Fletcher's highly racist views of the Irish. For example, the book contained the following statement (Fletcher & Kipling 1911: 21):

“It was (...) a misfortune for Britain that Rome never conquered the whole island. The great warrior, Agricola, did (...) penetrate far into Scotland; but he could leave no trace of civilization behind him, and Ireland he never touched at all. So Ireland never went to school, and has been a spoilt child ever since.”

Brown's mural draws upon a directly contrasting concept in linking ancient Britons to contemporary Mancunian navvies, but the native Britons in Ford's image may stand in as ancestors of the Irish or as highly racist portrayals of colonial subjects. The Victorians often portrayed Irish people and 'Celts' in very critical ways, making them seem childlike, unreasonable and violent (see Gibson, Trower & Tregidga 2013: 7; Young 2007: 94–109).

5 R. Caton Woodville's 'The Building of Hadrian's Great Wall' (1911)

An article published in the *Illustrated London News* in 1911 is entitled 'The Making of the Modern Englishman. No. 1: England under the Roman Empire' and this was illustrated with a black and white image 'From a painting by R. Caton Woodville' (see Figure 4).³ As a result, it is uncertain whether this painting was produced for a patron and the broader context of the work is unclear. Richard Caton Woodville (1856–1927) was a fairly well known Victorian and early twentieth-century war artist employed by the *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*) and resident in London (see Stearn 2004). He produced hundreds of illustrations of modern conflicts across the British Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and these were reused in histories, encyclopaedias and on postcards. He also produced a number of historical images including one portraying the landing of Julius Caesar in Britain.⁴ Richard Stearn suggests that for many people, Woodville's illustrations became their 'images of historical reality'. Woodville was an enthusiastic imperialist and was convinced about the justice of British imperial rule, including the holding down of India (see Stearn 2004). The *ILN* had a wide readership and played a particularly powerful role in communicating new archaeological discoveries and ideas about the history of Britain to a wide audience (see Phillips 2005: 74–76). Part of the power of the publication related to the inspiring images that it contained and the associated articles that were often very well informed.

The *ILN* image is illustrated across a double page spread and is captioned 'Sign of the military genius of an emperor: the Building of Hadrian's Great Wall across England from the Solway to the Tyne' (*ILN* 1911). A description explains that the group figured in the foreground is on top of one of the milecastles along the Wall. It appears to contain at least four categories of men, in this case unaccompanied by women: (1) the emperor Hadrian and high-ranking Roman officers and officials, (2) Roman labourers and soldiers, (3) Celts and Druids, and (4) a black-skinned man of uncertain status. The *ILN*'s caption notes that the emperor Hadrian is shown seated and that the faces of most of the other people shown are of the 'Northern type', illustrating the men of the various provinces of

³ I am very grateful to Hella Eckardt for bringing this image to my attention. I have been unable to find any further information about this painting and discussion of this image of Roman frontier building relies on the information provided in the *Illustrated London News* article.

⁴ Many of these paintings, including the Caesar image, can be viewed on Google images.

the Roman empire incorporated into the frontier fighting force (*ILN* 1911). The most dominant of these figures is a Roman centurion who stands to attention just behind Hadrian. The labourers in the background are too small to make much sense of, but they do appear to include a number of Britons, indicated by their longer hair and flowing cloaks, in addition to the Roman soldiers. As at Mancenion, Romans and Britons are building the Wall, but there seems little distinction in the activities that they undertake, apart from the fact that some Roman soldiers appear to be superintending. The similarities to the Wallington painting and the Manchester mural are evident and once again Britons are present in the foreground, since there are two figures that are intended to represent Celts watching the emperor and also a standing figure to the right which may well represent a Druid (see Smiles 2006).

A black-skinned man with a ring in his ear and a torc or neckring is sitting on the left of Woodville's image, just behind the emperor. He is in approximately the same position as the two black slaves in Brown's Mancenion mural, but in this case he may well not represent a slave; indeed, he is dressed in what appears to be opulent clothing and is a significant figure in the composition. There was a considerable emphasis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the idea that the Romans had managed to assimilate and incorporate native peoples far more effectively into their empire than had the British to date, although this view continued to be associated with highly racist overtones (see Hingley 2000: 48–51). The African in Woodville's image is observing the architect who, as in Brown's mural, is showing a plan of the works that are underway to Hadrian and another the Roman military centurion. As at Manchester and in Ford's image, the Roman officers presumably stand here in the place of British officers in the colonial possessions of the British Empire, particularly in India. Their upright stances recall the idea of standing to attention in the company of senior officers. They are comparable to various British military figures in other war paintings by Woodville. The reference in the *ILN* article to people of the 'Northern type' draws upon the nineteenth-century view that races could be defined through craniological considerations (see Young 2008: 71–93). The reference here is to Germanic recruits to the Roman frontier force in Britain, which were known from inscriptions found along the Wall to have been stationed along the Wall in large numbers. These were supposedly representatives of an ethnological community who, according to the popular Victorian Teutonic myth of racial origin, had a genetic relationship to modern Englishmen (see Hingley 2012: 227; Young 2008: 16), as illustrated by the title of the article, the 'Making of the Modern Englishman'. The Roman officers are Germanic and stand in lieu for British officers on the north western frontier of the British Empire in India.

Woodville draws a clear visual distinction between these Roman-British officers and the Celtic figures; perhaps the latter are likely to have been thought to represent the ancestors of modern Welsh, Scots and Irish and the romanticised way in which they are illustrated contrasts directly with Ford but draws upon a long artistic tradition (see Smiles 1994: 75–112). In contrast to the Wallington painting, there are no signs of dissent in Woodville’s image of Wall building and also none of the satire present in Brown’s image. James Phillips (2005: 85) has noted that 1911 was a year of social unrest in Britain, with anarchists rioting in the capital and strikes and disputes in other areas. Later in 1911, the *ILN* featured an article that highlighted the comparatively nature of the ancient Britons at Glastonbury Lake Village, illustrated with images by Amédée Forestier (see Phillips 2005: 78).⁵ Forestier’s images aimed to portray ancient Britons as ‘civilised’ and to counter influential earlier ideas of woad-daubed savages and, indeed, the Britons in Woodville’s image appear comparable in that they are fully co-operating with the Romans in their empire-building activities. Woodville’s illustration appears comparable with Forestier’s images of life at Glastonbury Lake Village in that they show highly co-operative societies in which everyone is working happily for the greater good of the community. In Woodville’s image, the Roman soldiers, Celts, Druids and the dark-skinned figure are all working hard or attending to the building operations underway. There are no disengaged figures, attacking Caledonians, or children aiming kicks at black slaves.

From an archaeological point of view, Woodville’s image is far less realistic than Scott’s, although perhaps slightly less fanciful than Brown’s.⁶ The curtain Wall in Woodville’s image is shown rather too wide and high, while the northern ditch is far too close to the Wall; the milecastle in the distance resembles a blockhouse and the turrets are incorrect in projecting beyond the curtain Wall (see Hingley 2012: 227). The reconstruction of Hadrian’s Wall appears to bear quite a resemblance to the Great Wall of China in terms of the size of the milecastles and turrets and the scale and width of the curtain Wall; along with Ford’s illustration, Woodville’s work forms part of an Edwardian tendency to exaggerate the scale and significance of the structure. The curtain Wall in Woodville’s image has a cart on top and this is running in ruts that may be in-

⁵ Woodville and Forestier both worked for the *ILN* and it is quite likely that they knew each other’s work. Indeed, Woodville’s article was in a series searching for the first Englishmen and Forestier appears to have picked up on this theme in producing his illustrations of Glastonbury (see Phillips 2005: 76).

⁶ For the archaeological fixation on accuracy in illustration, see Moser & Smiles (2005) and Greaney (2013).

tended to remind the viewer of railway tracks. It appears that Woodville may have been drawing on the industrial exploits of the railway builder George Stephenson. Robert Henry Forster had recently concluded his account of Hadrian's Wall in *The Amateur Antiquary* by comparing Roman engineering works to modern and referring to George Stephenson, who had been born in 1781 at Wylam a few kilometres south of the Wall (see Forster 1899: 203). Remarking that a number of road engineers and industrialists were born close to Roman roads across this northern landscape, Forster observed (1899: 204):

“we might almost imagine that the spirit of the Roman engineers haunted the scenes of their labours, and in some mysterious manner inspired their unconscious successors – that the walls, roads and bridges of the Romans are in some fashion the parents of the great engineering achievements of the present century.”

As in the case of Brown and Scott's images of Roman Wall building, industry linked the Roman past to the present in Tyneside and Manchester.

6 Conclusion

The paintings discussed here appear to share a number of characteristics but also to differ in detail. Firstly, they all draw comparisons between the building of ancient imperial frontiers in Britain and contemporary concerns in the British Empire. The contrasts and similarities between the Roman and the British empires that are raised by these images will not have been lost on their patrons and viewers. A number of themes that derive from national and imperial unity and defence are projected through these works. One of the main issues to arise from all is the contribution of particular groups that made up the empires to their stability. Scott's painting illustrates native soldiers fully involving themselves in the construction and defence of the imperial frontier and partly civilised Britons lying around playing while barbarian Caledonians attack. The Roman officers and native soldiers are involved in earnest actions, but the ancient Britons are indolent, an image that draws upon Gildas' observations on the end of Roman Britain. Scott was presumably also reflecting the troubled times with recent defeat in the Crimea War and the first unrest that resulted from the 'Indian Mutiny'. It is certainly interesting that Scott chose to draw so directly upon the idea of native soldiers, including an African, a Syrian and a man in a Phrygian cap. This evidently reflected current antiquarian knowledge about the manning of the Roman Wall by units derived from all across the Roman Empire, but it also appears to be a comment on contemporary British frontier policy.

This is not just a military landscape since two women behind the Wall are carrying food to the soldiers, while one has a baby on her back. From the north a savage female, perhaps a northern version of Boudica, leads the attacking Caledonians.

The woman in Brown's painting is again accompanied by her son and is the wife of the provincial governor, a high ranking Roman. This is a more settled scene and no Britons are shown attacking. The two black figures are involved in a joking altercation with the governor's young son but are carrying a covered chair and not involved in the building or manning of this fortification. By contrast, Brown's working men, based on Mancunian navvies, are energetically involved in building activity. Roman soldiers and also a number of officers, including the governor, who are planning the construction work and carry out the skilled masonry, superintend these Britons. There is a purpose to the efforts of all the people in this image that reflects Manchester recent rise as a major industrial and market centre and the efforts of working men and their employers to support this. Woodville's engraving is comparable in the co-operative nature of the venture, but by 1911, the British were far more concerned about the potential fate of the empire as a result of the rise of Germany as a military, industrial and imperial rival. Despite this, the *ILN* article that accompanied Woodville's illustration drew attention to the ethnological connections between the ancient Germanic soldiers involved in building the Wall and contemporary Britons. In the company of Brown, Woodville seems to draw upon the message of national and imperial unity, the idea that all should work together to assist build and maintain the defences, and Roman officers, Celts, Druids and a black-skinned man all co-operate in building a wall that resembles a really substantial engineering operation such as the building of a railway line. Despite the recent efforts of women to gain the right to vote, or perhaps as a result of this, there are no women shown in Woodville's image.

Ford's image draws a very different conception of nationhood and empire. This image and the writings in the book that it helped to illustrate portray a far more concerned vision of the imperial present than the other three images. Romans and Britons are so strictly divided that there can be no imperial assimilation; the Britons will only co-operate if subject to armed force. In this image, the Roman officers stand in the place of British imperial officials and military men across the frontier regions of the British Empire, particularly in India. Ford and Kipling's *School History* was partly successful, because it accompanied and supported the vision of imperial duty incorporated in Rudyard Kipling's highly influential novel *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

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Illustrations



Figure 1: The painting by William Bell Scott at Wellington Hall entitled 'Building of the Roman Wall'



Figure 2: The mural by Ford Madox Brown at Manchester Town Hall entitled 'The Romans Building a Fort at Mancenion, A.D. 80'



Figure 3: Henry Ford's image of 'The Building of the Wall'.
From Fletcher & Kipling (1911: 23)



Figure 4: An engraving taken from a painting by R. Caton Woodville (1911)
entitled 'The Building of Hadrian's Great Wall'.
Taken from the *London Illustrated News* (1 April 1911, 468–469)