Tynedale U3A Hadrian’s Wall Group
Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery

It is situated on site of Lugavalium, a Roman Fort originally built about AD73. It is probably the best Hadrian’s Wall museum.

http://www.tulliehouse.co.uk/

Peter Lewis former Director of Beamish has written a review

ROMAN FRONTIER GALLERY – TULLIE HOUSE

Each day from my study window I trace the line of Hadrian’s Wall. Here at the Northern edge of a now defunct Empire we still live in the shadow of the largest of the world’s Roman artefacts. It is our regional “unique selling feature”. Our “international profile”…as a “truly world-class tourist destination” has a distinctly aquiline nose.
The military necklace of turrets, forts and milecastles runs from Bowness in the west to Newcastle in the east, a total of 78 miles. Historians still debate the purpose. Hadrian insisted that the gods had ordered him to “keep intact the Empire”, “to divide Romans from the barbarians.” As always the Romans had a word for us; the brittunci – the nasty little brits.

This ethnic divide is eloquently illustrated at the start of Tullie House’s newly opened Roman Frontier Gallery. The replica of a tall tombstone, now incongruously in Hexham Abbey, shows a young Gaulish officer/standard bearer on horseback in full parade armour and face-mask. He carries the Imperial standard. His stirrupless foot boots a cowering naked enemy in the backside. The barbarian who, resembles me, ineffectually waves a short sword.

The image sets the stage for a very remarkable and long overdue exposition of the Roman occupation of Britain. The vast majority of artefacts and records for these centuries come from the Romans. The colonised left no written records. Soldiers were recruited from the wider reaches of the Empire, including North Africa and Syria. Local British recruits might be sent to Switzerland, Romania and Algeria. Britain was a tough posting. Only 4% of the Imperial territory required 10% of the total Imperial forces.

What did Romanisation really mean? Tullie House seeks to tell stories exploring the social consequences of invasion. Early in the exhibition visitors are reminded of the great cliché blockbusters of the screen, Julius Caesar, Quo Vadis, Cleopatra, Spartacus, Gladiator, Ben Hur, The Robe and I Claudius et al fight for our attention. So too does the Life of Brian and the inevitable quotation, now so beloved of curators and designers: - apart from better sanitation and medicine and education and irrigation and public health and a freshwater system and baths and public order – what have Romans done for us?. Adjacent words from Tacitus provide an immediate riposte, a frank delineation of Imperial policy and tactics: - arcades, baths, and sumptuous banquets – the unsuspecting Britons spoke of such novelties as “civilisation” when, in fact they were only a feature of their enslavement

The exhibition shows the day to day domesticity of military life, not so much under canvas, but sub pellibus in specially constructed eight-man goatskin tents – six to sleep – two to guard. Visitors are invited to test the weight of the average military back pack. Endearingly on display is a soldier’s sewing kit – needles and bobbins of thread for darning socks and stitching shirts packed in a small box, forerunners of those kits we purloin from modern hotels. We learn of the root vegetables, herbs and livestock the Romans imported to supplement their diets. A fragment of an amphora advertises “top quality old Tangiers Tunny Relish – the famous garum made from the fermented intestines of fish. Mixed with wine it made a culinary sauce. Diluted with water it was supplied to the legions as a tonic or a medicinal treatment for bites, dysentery, constipation and the removal of unwanted hair or freckles. In one cabinet two contrasting cultural pieces co-exist. A finger ring carved from a single piece of Baltic amber has a relief carving of Minerva. Nearby is a fragment of blue glass, a piece from a souvenir charioteer cup made for the masses.
The sheer scale of Imperial travel is shown. An inscription, recording the visit of the Emperor Septimus Severus and his sons Caracalla and Geta to Britain, has the latter’s name deleted. We know that when Severus died in York Caracalla slaughtered his brother, deleting all documentary mention of Geta. Last year I saw an identically defaced stone in the National Museum in Damascus - a ruthless censorship of news at the two extreme ends of the Empire. I was intrigued too by the memorial to Marcus Aurelius Musaeus Valerius Carausius, an Emperor long both in name and venality. Keeping booty and other taxes, he bought loyalty and a title before being murdered by his finance officials.

The gradual accumulation of exhibits illustrates how Roman military precision, administrative expertise and ease of living was gradually eroded in Britain by political corruption and by the need ultimately to transfer troops to other war fronts. It remains a lesson learnt elsewhere historically and geographically. One modern display, Living Frontiers, illustrates modern examples of politically constructed hard partitions. Just as Hadrian’s Wall divided communities, created checkpoints, customs posts and created excuses for abuse, so do modern-day barriers; those between the USA and Mexico, the Western Sahara and Morocco, Israel and Palestine ad infinitum. I had thought that this display might be a foolish gimmick but the juxtaposition is powerful and salutary. As someone who has lived and worked either side of the Berlin Wall and the barricades of Belfast I’ve witnessed the misery walls can cause, whether as the graffiti proclaims “prepared for peace” or “ready for war”.

This small gallery, built on the site of Carlisle’s first Roman fort, has an importance beyond its 500 square metres. It is brilliantly conceived and beautifully executed. I was struck by the obvious deep concentration of visitors. They lingered, pondered and considered. Museological provocation is a tricky art form. It is relatively easy to excite folk sensually with artefacts, much more difficult to make them think. A week after opening a great number of handwritten visitor comment labels are evident. One states what I was struggling to articulate: - I have had an intense interest in the Romans .... I have visited Hadrian’s Wall numerous times ....this is the first time I have seriously considered the social and personal consequences of the wall. “

In recent years a great deal of money - multi- millions - has been spent wisely and magnificently in both Newcastle and Vindolanda on blockbuster displays, extolling the Romans. All cheap at the price, no more each than the cost of an international footballer. This superb gallery in Carlisle, so valuable in its intellectual achievement, cost a mere £1.5 million, less than it would have cost for the local football team to hire a decent goalkeeper. Politicians and the Treasury please note!

Article in MUSEUMS JOURNAL WINTER 2011
The Crosby Garrett Helmet

It was on show here in December 2013 & January 2014.

A Roman cavalry helmet bought for £2.2m at auction after it was discovered in a Cumbrian field and is only the second time it’s been on display.

The Crosby Garrett Helmet, named after the village near where it was found. A private collector outbid a Carlisle museum at the auction in 2010.

Bronze co-curator David Ekserdjian said the helmet, which is almost 2,000 years old, was a "masterpiece".

He said: "Even if this helmet had been known about for as long as anybody can remember, we'd still want it in the show because it's a fantastic work of art.

"But the fact that it came out of the ground in 2010 doesn't fail to add to its interest and appeal.

"This is a masterpiece that we didn't know about until recently and that's absolutely thrilling. That combination of quality and novelty is a win-win."

The helmet joins sculptures by Rodin, Picasso, Giacometti, Henry Moore, Jeff Koons and Anish Kapoor in the exhibition.

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- **Expert explains why the helmet is so special**

It would have been worn for cavalry sports rather than battle.