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The Fabulous Tales of the Common People, Part 1: Representing Hadrian's Wall

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Abstract

Hadrian's Wall is one of the most instantly recognizable ancient monuments in the UK. This paper explores the historical and contemporary visualization practices which have created this iconic image. Moving between the disciplines of archaeology, cultural geography, and heritage and tourism studies, the paper draws upon a variety of data sources such as paintings, photographs, models and reconstructions to consider how the Wall is visually represented within contemporary public discourse. The paper focuses on digital photography and considers the ways in which images create and sustain particular readings of the Wall's function and significance. These contemporary representational practices demonstrate strong continuities and earlier images are used to provide historical context. Emphasis is placed on the monument's landscape setting in visual representations and the importance of this environmental context for readings of the Wall's cultural and political significance. The present paper deals primarily with representations of the Wall, but it is argued that these representational practices are also fundamentally embodied. The physical encounters of visitors and archaeologists will be considered in greater detail in the second part of this study (Witcher in press).

Keywords

Hadrian's Wall; World Heritage; representation; landscape; photography; digital ethnography; imageability

1. Introduction

The fabulous tales of the common people concerning this wall I doe wittingly and willingly overpasse. (Camden *Britain*, 1610).

Writing the first topographical survey of the British Isles, William Camden set out to "restore antiquity to Britaine, and Britaine to his antiquity". His attention was inevitably drawn to the ruins of a massive Roman fortification which crossed the north of England – the Pict's Wall. In describing the structure and its historical importance, Camden drew on published accounts, correspondence with local observers and, eventually, his own first-hand experience of the Wall (visiting in 1599, in time for his fourth edition). Despite his intention to pass over the "fabulous tales of the common people concerning this wall" in order to focus on the facts as he saw them, he goes on to relate a local story about the Roman garrison planting medicinal herbs on the Wall. Camden's conceptual division of popular and scholarly accounts of the Pict's – or Hadrian's – Wall has endured over the subsequent four centuries. In particular, during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the emergence of the discipline of archaeology formalized and rigorously enforced the division between professional and popular, fact and folklore.

Today, however, the need and desire of archaeology to engage with the public and to democratize the discipline raise new questions about the value of the 'tales of the common people'. This paper focuses on those tales as communicated principally through digital media and considers them in the context of two current themes in the disciplines of archaeology, cultural geography, and heritage and tourism studies: i.e. representation and

embodiment. This paper, the first of two, draws on research which aims to explore the recursive relationship between representation and embodiment, or between imagery and experience. Specifically, it considers the evidence for contemporary representations of, and visits to, the monuments now encompassed within the 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire' World Heritage Site (WHS). This subject is contextualized with brief discussion of the history of the image-making and visiting practices of Hadrian's Wall.ⁱ In particular, the archaeological monument is considered within its wider landscape setting in order to understand the importance of its physical context for interpretations of the Wall's meaning and significance in both popular and scholarly accounts.

As it covers much ground and crosses many disciplinary boundaries, it is perhaps important to stress what this research is not. Hadrian's Wall is one of the most intensively studied and best understood of any archaeological monument in Britain. The last decade has witnessed a particularly rich period for Wall studies (summarized in Hodgson 2009) including new insights from developer-funded excavations and extensive geophysical surveys, as well as the publication of old excavations, a comprehensive Research Framework (Symonds & Mason 2009) and a new edition of the Handbook (Breeze 2006). The present paper does not deal with this material in terms of evidence for the Roman past, but rather in terms of its reception in the present. It will become clear that both the history and future of Wall studies is closely connected with visualization and visiting practices. Likewise, this is not a traditional tourist study which aims to generate measurable data about visitor responses or to conduct an evaluation based on pre-determined categories such as age or nationality. Rather, it develops an initial exploration of the chronically underexploited digital resources created and shared online by visitors. In other words, it bypasses conventional approaches which assess how visitors consume pre-packaged heritage sites and advocates a more dynamic situation where visitors create, narrate and project their own images and interpretations (see Crang 1997).

In order to tease apart the complexities, discussion has been divided: the present paper explores the representation of Hadrian's Wall focusing on the cultural biography of well-known Wall views. It considers the reworking of these iconic images in visitor photographs as documented through user-generated online resources and a photo-questionnaire. The second part of this research (Witcher in press) moves from representation to embodied encounter and explores physical experience of the monument; it considers the extent to which familiarity and empathy with the Roman past actively obscures the sensory richness of this landscape and its potential as a reflexive and transformative space. It is important to stress that the division of representation and encounter between these two papers is necessarily arbitrary; photography, for example, will be considered as an embodied technology of representation.ⁱⁱ

2. Methods & Approaches

To see the Wall you must walk. (Collingwood *A Guide to the Roman Wall*, 1932)

Visitors to Hadrian's Wall are regularly surveyed about their experience by both academics (e.g. Kinghorn & Willis 2008) and by local authorities and heritage agencies (e.g. Powe & Shaw 2003). The majority of these surveys use questionnaires to elicit responses. More recent work has equipped visitors with disposable cameras who are then asked to discuss the resulting images (Bell 2008; generally, Garrod 2007). The current paper draws on the results of such surveys but also looks to the massive and expanding resource provided by online user-generated content.

Increasingly, the public turns to the World Wide Web as a primary source of information. A simple Google text search for "Hadrian's Wall" returns hundreds of thousands of webpages and tens of thousands of images. With the rise of Web 2.0, most of this material is generated and uploaded by the general public. By comparison, the online material

produced by professional archaeologists and heritage managers is limited in quantity and often difficult for non-specialists to locate and understand. Xiang & Gretzel (2010) demonstrate the powerful influence of user-generated material on the perception of tourist destinations and in the planning of holidays because of the way in which it is indexed and returned by search engines; user-generated images would appear to be even more dominant in such searches because of the rise of photo-sharing websites.

Although computer scientists and cognitive linguists have begun to engage with this enormous resource (e.g. Snaveley *et al.* 2008), the social sciences and humanities have been slow to explore the potential. This may relate to issues of ethics (e.g. privacy) and to the perception of these materials as low-grade by comparison to the richer data offered by questionnaires or interviews where it is possible to achieve greater control (for general issues, Garcia *et al.* 2009). Following Pink (2008), the present paper emphasizes people's image-making 'as it is' rather than as directed by researchers. In particular, it focuses on the way in which visitors use New Media, digital photography and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to plan, mediate and represent their encounters. This approach has the advantage of defusing one of the key drawbacks of participant work – the distorting effects of the 'anthropological gaze'. However, it also raises some methodological issues. For example, the rise of digital photography is likely to have changed image production and curation practices; multiple photographs can now be taken and winnowed at no extra expense. We might therefore expect that those images that are retained and shared online are only a heavily edited selection. Another consideration is the effect of the 'digital divide' – that is, the uneven societal engagement with technology. These are significant issues. However, it is also important to recognize that these images exert a strong influence on the public discourse of the Wall; for every person who shares online materials, many more view them (see below). Similarly, the 'tags' and comments attached to these photographs may not convey the immediate thoughts and impressions which an interview can capture in the field (e.g. Bell 2008), but they do encompass the memories that the visitor recalls or wishes to share. Most importantly, the enormous size of this resource means that it can capture a far larger and more diverse sample than traditional questionnaires or face-to-face interviews. In summary, the approach has advantages and disadvantages and should be used to complement not to replace more detailed participant work.

There is no established methodology within the social sciences for sampling and analyzing this enormous and dynamic virtual resource. Future work might seek ways in which this constantly evolving dataset can be more systematically characterized and understood. For the present study, text searches were conducted on collaborative image-sharing websites to retrieve relevant photographs and associated 'tags' and comments. Some of these websites, such as Picasa, attract general-purpose users; others attract more specialized users, for example, Flickr is popular with (semi-) professional photographers. Each website offers different possibilities to assess the context of individual photosets (e.g. other photo albums uploaded by the same user). The aim was not to quantify particular trends but rather to establish an overall impression of the character and diversity of online materials. This work identified a number of key themes which are broadly in line with the results of more conventional surveys (e.g. Elliott-White & Cuthill 1998; ERA 2004: Appendix 2; Powe & Shaw 2003). In addition to photographs, a number of other online materials were surveyed. These included websites for the sharing of GPS tracks such as geocaching.com, tourist review sites (e.g. IgoUgo.com) and travel blogs.

Finally, the analysis of web materials was supplemented with two other techniques. First, a ten-page booklet of photographs was distributed at five locations along the Wall including a National Park visitor centre and guest houses. Visitors were given some context about the wider project and asked to comment on any aspect of the photographs and to provide brief details about themselves. Forty-seven questionnaires were returned. Of these, 62%

of respondents used the World Wide Web to research their visit, thus underlining its importance as a primary source of information for the public. By contrast, just 17% of respondents shared their own photographs online; the photo-questionnaire therefore successfully captured many individuals who may be under-represented in the wider online sample. Again, the results were not subject to systematic analysis but rather were used qualitatively to identify recurring themes. The photographs, participant comments and word visualizations form the basis of an exhibition which can be accessed online at www.dur.ac.uk/roman.centre/hadrianswall/phototext (see **Fig. 1**).

Figure 1. Visualization of participant comments on photograph of Sycamore Gap (see Fig. 6) (Image generated at www.wordle.net).

At the outset, it should be stressed that Roman remains are not the only reason that visitors may choose to visit 'Hadrian's Wall Country'. As well as Roman monuments, the surrounding landscape preserves a rich prehistoric and medieval heritage. But many visitors have no direct interest in archaeology at all, choosing to walk, cycle, rock-climb, bird-watch and botanize in areas such as the Northumberland National Park and the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The current research does not aim to make a distinction between those visitors who are specifically attracted by the Wall and those whose primary motive is non-archaeological. Indeed, many visitors may not make such a distinction themselves, understanding the monument and its landscape as part of a single experience (Powe & Shaw 2003). Nonetheless, the methods employed will inevitably prioritize those people who are sufficiently aware of the existence of the archaeology to engage with the photo-questionnaire or to 'tag' and share online their photographs of the Wall.

- a) the distinction between photograph and content, or picture and place
- b) the merging of archaeology and landscape, or Culture and Nature

- c) colonial interpretations (e.g. Roman versus barbarian)
- d) function versus meaning, or admiration versus inspiration
- e) the use of empathy and/or sympathy.

In the context of representation, the present paper puts particular emphasis on the first two themes. The second part of this study (Witcher in press) turns attention to the third, fourth and fifth themes.

3. Picturing the Wall

...you see a smoke from East to West as far as the eye can turn, and then, under it, also as far as the eye can stretch, houses and temples, shops and theatres, barracks and granaries, trickling along like dice behind - always behind - one long, low, rising and falling, and hiding and showing line of towers. And that is the Wall! (Kipling *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 1906)

The interactivity facilitated by Web 2.0 and the associated explosion of user-generated content have diminished any simplistic division between the production and consumption of information. In particular, the online sharing of photographs means that 'amateur' imagery may be as influential in the visual construction of places and destinations as 'professional' photography. Nonetheless, to structure the following discussion, an artificial division will be imposed: this section will examine the emergence of canonical representations of Hadrian's Wall which have, by and large, been established by professional artists and photographers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The relationship of these iconic images to visitors' photographs will be considered in the following section.

The closely-related origins of archaeology, photography and tourism during the nineteenth century are the subject of recent scholarly interest (e.g. Lyons *et al.* 2005). At the heart of this relationship is a tension between photographic representation as a technology for objective documentation and as an artistic medium for evoking the spirit of places and monuments. In the past, archaeological photography has actively defined itself as scientific practice and has sought to conceal the subjectivity of the medium beneath a veneer of technological objectivity in order to protect itself from art historical critique (Dorrell 1994 is the standard work; for critiques, see Hamilakis *et al.* 2009; Russell 2006; Shanks 1997). There is a similar tension around the role of imagery in the promotion of tourist destinations. The images in brochures and holiday websites aim to attract visitors using selectivity and embellishment, but these images must also retain some semblance of the reality which visitors may subsequently experience and judge. Hadrian's Wall provides a particularly clear example of an archaeological site and a tourist destination where the tension between subjective and objective photographic representation is poorly concealed (see below).

Today, Hadrian's Wall is established as an integral part of visitor itineraries to northern England. However, despite its broader renown through the post-Roman period (Hingley 2008; Hingley *et al.* in press), the Wall was slow to emerge as a tourist destination and as a subject matter for visual representation.ⁱⁱⁱ This is particularly clear when compared to the early and prominent development of tourism in the Lake District. Indeed, Hadrian's Wall had no special prominence in eighteenth and early nineteenth century topographical guidebooks to Northumberland and Cumberland which focused heavily on medieval castles and ecclesiastical sites. The Romantic Movement did not find the same resonance in Hadrian's Wall – and the other monuments of Roman Britain – as it found in prehistoric megaliths, medieval abbeys and Gothic castles. Although the Wall attracted a steady stream of visitors such as William Hutton and John Skinner both in 1801 (published 1802 and 1978 respectively), it was the efforts of John Collingwood Bruce which really established the Wall as a tourist destination. Through lectures and his illustrated *Wallet*

book (1863, later renamed *Handbook*) Bruce defined the parameters of Hadrian's Wall as a place to visit, by encouraging people to examine the monument and its landscape for themselves and instructing them on the practicalities of their visit (Bruce 1886: 135). His ambition to attract more visitors broadly coincided with the rise of leisure time as side-effect of industrialization and with the improvement of transport networks such as the construction of the Newcastle-Carlisle railway during the 1830s. Nonetheless, the Wall remained comparatively peripheral to the dominant nineteenth century topographical interest in medieval castles and ecclesiastical sites, as well as a new fascination with engineering achievements such as the Newcastle-Carlisle railway itself (e.g. Blackmore & Carmichael 1836; Dobson 1857).

Many of the illustrations for Bruce's *Handbook* were based on original watercolours by the Richardson brothers and etched by F.W. Fairholt and C.J. Spence. The majority of the illustrations in the earlier editions of the *Handbook* (and Bruce's more comprehensive scholarly work, *The Roman Wall*, 1853) demonstrate a close visual focus on individual archaeological structures (e.g. gateways, buildings). In particular, many of these features are represented at the moment of their discovery. This visual motif draws upon the Romantic tradition of picturing ruined structures, half-concealed and half-exposed, framed by verdant vegetation (e.g. T.M. Richardson's *Works at Heddon-on-the-Wall* reproduced in Bruce 1853: facing p.117). The frequent inclusion of a pair of human figures serves both to indicate the scale of the structures and to mediate between viewer and monument. Simultaneously, wild goats, sheep and cattle stress the untamed and pastoral environment of the Wall.

Views of the monument in its wider landscape context comprise a surprisingly small percentage of eighteenth and early nineteenth century images, especially compared to their dominance in public discourse today. Nonetheless, it is these views, such as William Collard's 1837 *The Wall on the Nine Nicks of Thirwall* (reproduced in Birley 1961: pl.3), and another view of the same stretch produced for Bruce's *Roman Wall* (1853: 231), which constitute 'pioneer images' (Balm & Holcomb 2003: 159), that is, images which establish an iconic visual representation of the monument and its landscape and which have been heavily influential on subsequent image-making. These mural representations, which became dominant during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, developed a clear 'geometry', using elevated viewpoints, diagonal leading lines and multiple horizons to visualize and contain the Wall's structure (**Fig. 2**). These visual motifs focused particular emphasis on the opportunities afforded by the upstanding archaeology and dramatic topography of the central stretches of the Wall. The subsequent continuity of these 'pioneer images' across different media, through painting and woodcuts to photography, is typical of iconic representations of tourist and heritage sites (e.g. the Colosseum, Szegedy-Maszak 1992; **Fig. 3**).^{iv}

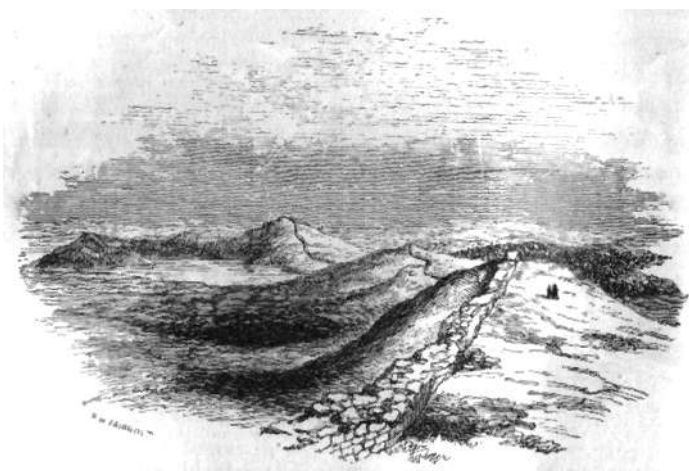


Figure 2. *Hadrian's Wall near Hot Bank. Wood-cut by F.W. Fairchild (from Bruce 1895: 164)*

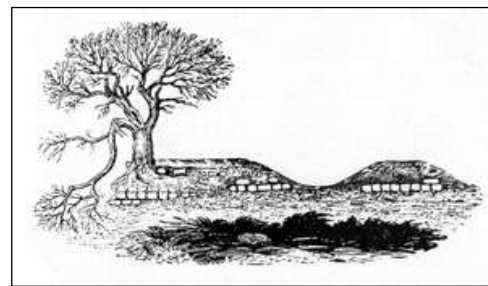


Figure 3. *Photographing an iconic view of Hadrian's Wall and Crag Lough near Milecastle 39 (Castle Nick). (Photo: A. Hiley)*

Today, the iconic representation of the stone curtain wall rising and falling over the Whin Sill crags has come to dominate the public discourse of Hadrian's Wall. By its very ubiquity, this image shapes popular expectations and understanding (see below). However, other less prominent stretches of the Wall can demonstrate similarly long, if less well-known, histories of depiction which illustrate other aspects of picturing practices. A good example is provided by the fragment of stone curtain wall at Denton Bank (Newcastle-upon-Tyne). Hutton (1802) presents a square-on schematized view of the curtain wall, topped by a 'heraldic-style' apple tree, with no attempt to indicate its wider physical setting; T.M. Richardson's version of the same scene in 1823 takes a more naturalistic approach, with some token foreground vegetation; H.B. Richardson's c.1848-50 woodcut (from an original watercolour) depicts the wall and the now-dead apple tree but puts equal emphasis on the surrounding landscape (Brewis 1927: plate 17, figs. 1-3; **Figs. 4-6**). Over time, the style of representation therefore evolves from diagrammatic to naturalistic. Simultaneously, the visual frame expands to include more of the stone wall's setting, grounding the structure in a landscape from which it draws ever more meaning. Arguably, the framing of these increasingly wide vistas can be understood in the context of the impact of economic and industrial development on the landscape of Victorian Britain, not least in North-east England. Like much nineteenth century art, these images assert a pre-industrial and rural world in the face of rapid urbanization and industrialization (Cosgrove 1984: 223-53). Indeed, Bruce (1853: 145-6) comments on the increased quarrying of the stone curtain wall at Denton Bank to repair the – notably unseen – highway alongside the structure and notes "It [the wall] has lost a course of facing-stones since Hutton saw it, and the apple tree is but the shadow of what it was". Arguably the real subject matter of all three images is the apple tree; its demise as depicted by H.B. Richardson for Bruce's *Roman Wall* seems to resonate with the latter's concerns about the threat of urban encroachment to the Wall's very survival. Today the site is surrounded by suburban development but, under the ownership of the City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, has been protected since 1924 (**Fig. 7**). As will be explored further below, this careful manipulation of landscape context to directly or indirectly comment on the historical interpretation or contemporary significance of the Wall is a recurrent theme running throughout the visual history of the Wall.



A



B



C



D

Figures 4-7. Representations of Hadrian's Wall at Denton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne. Sources: 4) From Hutton 1802: facing p.185 (reproduced by permission of Durham University Library); 5) by T.M. Richardson 1823 reproduced in Sykes 1833: 3 (reproduced by permission of Durham University Library); 6) by H.B. Richardson reproduced in Bruce 1853: 114 (reproduced by permission of Durham University Library); 7) the Wall today (photo: author).

'Pioneer images' create and perpetuate the use of a limited series of visual motifs for well-known tourist and heritage sites. However, these motifs can be actively reworked to create new or more nuanced meanings. For example, the influential mid-twentieth century photographer Bill Brandt provided the photographs to illustrate a *Picture Post* article *The Threat to the Great Wall* (Joad 1943). In the context of wartime Britain, both images and text draw a loose parallel between Hadrian's Wall and the (English) national frontier; the former threatened by quarrying and latter by Nazi Germany. The framing of many of these photographs carefully echoes pioneer representations of the Wall, but Delany (2004: 198) suggests that Brandt was consciously showing the familiar in unfamiliar ways, using turbulent clouds glowering above depopulated landscapes to evoke a bleak and threatened atmosphere. Nearly twenty years later, one of the images, *The Roman Milecastle*, was reused in Brandt's *Literary Britain* (1951) to illustrate Kipling's novel *Puck of Pook's Hill*, which is partially set on the Wall. Closely cropped to focus on a small stretch of the Wall high above Crag Lough, the image reduces both monument and landscape to a beautiful but stark *chiaroscuro* effect. In contrast with the 'pioneer image' of the assertive Wall commanding infinite horizons, the scene is re-imagined as claustrophobic, embattled and foreboding.

It is informative to compare Brandt's work to more recent images of the Wall by (semi-) professional photographers such as Roger Clegg, Graham Peacock and Joan Thirlaway, which have been much used in marketing campaigns. These photographers draw on the same motifs found in the 'pioneer images', such as leading lines and multiple horizons, but project a more expansive and contemplative space, evoking different emotions and meanings. Clegg explicitly aspires to look again at a much photographed monument and to see something new and to capture its mood (Richards & Clegg 2008). In strong contrast

to the washed-out monochrome of earlier images (cf. Bergström 1975), all three photographers make particular use of light and (often saturated) colour to suggest a landscape of hope (sunrise), reflection (sunset) and escape (solitude). This is not the threatened and threatening landscape of Brandt; instead these images are designed to attract and invite. Nonetheless, this is still an unmistakably peripheral landscape, at the very limit of Roman civilization and contemporary England alike. There is a greater presence of human figures, notably visitors (e.g. walkers) rather than locals (e.g. farmers), but overall it is still portrayed as a thinly-populated and unspoilt landscape. These images suggest that the Wall has survived because of its isolated location in a wild and remote place; potential visitors are promised a direct and authentic encounter with the Roman past, untouched by the intervening centuries. Indeed, we are encouraged to believe that today's landscape has changed little since Roman times. Yet the cultural construction of these dominant contemporary notions is clearly revealed when compared with Kipling's Edwardian vision of the Wall as a thriving linear town (quoted above), a place full of human life, culture and diversity (for archaeological evidence for the Roman environment, see Huntley 1999).

In reality, both the physical environment and the fabric of the monument have been continually transformed during and since the Roman period (Witcher *et al.* 2010). The stone curtain wall has been extensively rebuilt several times both in antiquity and in the recent past (e.g. conservation work, particularly during the nineteenth century; Woodside & Crow 1999). Today, the landscape is intensively managed (see Norman 2008 for a sense of the complexity of this task). 'Desire lines' are mown in the grass-sward in order to limit erosion by subtly guiding visitors elsewhere; weedkiller suppresses vegetation which would otherwise have long ago reclaimed stone structures; linesmen, rangers and volunteers move along the Wall repairing damage and picking litter. Of course, visitors are not naïve and many will recognize this artifice and will be quite content with it; for example, Prentice & Anderson (2007) note that visitors to the Danish heritage attraction of *Den Gamle By* are well aware of the inauthenticity of the ensemble of relocated buildings from different periods and places, but they are quite happy to 'play along' (for more on visitors' awareness of the branding of Hadrian's Wall, see Witcher in press).

All of these examples demonstrate that the visual representation of Hadrian's Wall encodes a tension between objective documentation and artistic licence. This is the same for any heritage monument or tourist destination. However, in the case of the Wall, this tension is ill-concealed. Indeed, comments collated from the photo-questionnaire and photo-sharing websites demonstrate a widely-shared ability and desire to distinguish between picture and place; that is, between the medium (photography) and the subject (Scott & Canter 1997). People are able to discern and express the ambiguity of images as both documents of record and as resources for emotive responses, and to reflect on how this constructs understanding of both the (Roman) past and the present landscape. It will be argued below (and in Witcher in press) that Hadrian's Wall therefore provides a powerful example from which to develop the idea of enabling visitors to read the landscape and to reflect on the cultural construction of imagery and the past it represents.

4. Picturing the Landscape

The aspect of the country in the immediate vicinity of the heights of Sewingshields is dreary enough, but the elevation enables the eye to revel in the fertility and beauty of the distant landscape. (Bruce *The Roman Wall* 1853 Second edition)

Above, it has been suggested that pioneer images of Hadrian's Wall have established a particular geometry which implicates the landscape setting of the monument as a central part of the monument's visual representation and meaning. The physical scale of the Wall – and other linear monuments such as roads and aqueducts – means that it can only ever

be experienced partially; it can never be experienced instantaneously in its entirety (Sam Smiles pers. comm.). It is therefore always a composite of separate encounters under different meteorological conditions, during different seasons and in different company.^v In such a situation, representations of linear monuments take on added responsibilities. Very often they must stand *pars in toto*, communicating wider truths through the representation of fragments. In this context, it is easy to see how representations of the Wall's central sector – with its dramatic geological sub-structure (**Figs. 2 & 8**) – have become shorthand for the Wall as a whole, even though this distinctive topographical setting and the curtain wall's structural responses to it are hardly typical of the frontier as a whole. The unspoken necessity of Wall photographs to communicate unseen 'wholes' may require the use of visual clichés which effect quite specific meanings. For example, Manghani (2008) notes that photography of the Berlin Wall prioritized stretches cutting through urban streets even though most of the structure ran through open agricultural landscapes, and that this has shaped a specific reading of the structure's purpose and meaning. Similarly, the visual bias to the central upland sector of Hadrian's Wall may be deceptive because both the original significance and contemporary experience of the monument in this area are likely to differ significantly from the more extensive low-lying stretches of the Wall to the east and west.



Figure 8. Section of Hadrian's Wall west of Housesteads fort consolidated by John Clayton during the nineteenth century (Photo: author).

The fundamental importance of landscape context in the representation and meaning of linear monuments is revealed by the observation that whilst it is possible to distil the visual essence of WHSs such as Stonehenge, the Pyramids or the Taj Mahal without their landscape context (no matter how integral that landscape was to their original *raison d'être*), it is almost impossible to visualize Hadrian's Wall and other linear Roman monuments such as the Pont du Gard (France) similarly deprived of the shapes and colours of their landscape setting.^{vi} The repetition of basic architectural forms means that one stretch can look much like another, so specific locality and meaning must be signalled by the representation of linear structures' physical settings.^{vii} Hence the landscape 'background' in mural imagery carries particularly heavy responsibility for intended or possible meanings. Further, because these landscapes are often chronologically dissonant with the monument they surround (e.g. a Roman frontier wall in a largely nineteenth century landscape), there is scope for those meanings to be ambiguous or misleading: did Roman soldiers garrison a landscape similar to the one we see today or not?

Finally, monument and landscape are not only co-represented, but also are frequently elided. Both visual and textual representations of Hadrian's Wall effect a merging of Culture and Nature. With particular reference to the Whin Sill crags of the central sector, the Wall sits on top of the outcropping rock rising vertically from the solid geology – the monument and landscape are physically and conceptually merged.^{viii} Statements such as the 'natural north-facing rampart of the Whin Sill' (Pickett *et al.* 2006: 38) may even be read as implicitly political – the Wall's presence was predestined, a natural limit has been reached, the Roman frontier simply confirms the natural order. An alternative take on the Culture-Nature divide is suggested by the lichens which have colonized the stonework and the verdant turf-cap which protects those sections of the Wall conserved by John Clayton during the nineteenth century (**Fig. 8**). Here Nature seems to reclaim the hubristic monument of a past civilization and invites contemplation on ruination and the fall of empire (e.g. Bruce 1853; see Hingley 2000).

5. Other Modes of Representation

And, while I travel the long and dreary Wall, would have you travel with me, though by your own fireside; would have you see, and feel, as I do; and make the journey influence your passions, as mine are influenced. (Hutton *The History of the Roman Wall* 1802)

So far, this paper has focused on paintings and photographs of the monument. However, there are other forms of representation which exert powerful influence on popular understanding of the Wall. First, a specific category of representation is reconstruction of the Wall as it was 'in the days of the Romans' (Graham 1988). This includes two-dimensional images and three-dimensional models. The former can be traced back to the nineteenth century and include G.B. Richardson's (1851) view of *Pons Aelii (Newcastle)*, Bell Scott's (1857) fresco *Construction of the Roman Wall* at Wallington Hall and R.J.S. Bertram's (1923) *The Emperor Hadrian's Visit to Pons Aelii (now Newcastle) AD 122*. More recent reconstructions include the rain-lashed imagery of Alan Sorrell (Pitts 2005) and the prolific and influential work of Ronald Embleton (e.g. illustrations in Graham 1988; for Embleton's famous *Housesteads Latrine*, see Witcher in press). Scale models and full-size reconstructions have also been powerful and popular ways of representing the Wall including the 12.5m long model of the Wall in the former Museum of Antiquities (Smith 1959) and a number of full-size reconstructions at Vindolanda, South Shields and Wallsend (Birley 2009: 36-7; Witcher in press; **Fig. 9**). In each case, visual and physical reconstruction blends extant traces of the Wall with archaeological and iconographical evidence from around the wider Roman Empire in order to re-imagine and re-materialize the Wall for a variety of political motives from association with imperial glory through to economic regeneration in the post-industrial city (see Hingley *et al.* in press).



Figure 9. Reconstruction of stone curtain of Hadrian's Wall at Wallsend, with original Roman foundations in foreground. (Photo: author)

A second category of representation is cartography. The massive scale of the monument makes cartography an obvious mode of representation; maps can reduce the Wall's size and complexity to a level which can be more easily apprehended. The Wall has appeared

on maps for centuries, not least because of its proximity to the English-Scottish border (Shannon 2007). The Roman frontier was of great political significance during the medieval and early modern eras, both symbolically and even as a potential military line. The renewed strategic significance of the Wall's route in the aftermath of the Jacobite Rebellion led to extensive mapping surveys of enormous significance for scholarly and popular awareness of the monument and its political and cultural value (Hingley 2008: 134-8). The Wall continues to be a privileged feature in contemporary cartography. As well as its own dedicated mapping (e.g. AMHW 2010), it frequently appears in road atlases which lack any indication of other ancient monuments. Its great length and cultural prominence merits special treatment. The route of the Wall also appears on the Ordnance Survey maps which frequently travel with walkers along the Hadrian's Wall Trail. These maps form an important and highly visible item of equipment for Wall-walkers (generally, see Edensor 2000); like photography, cartography can be a fundamentally embodied form of representation. In discussion, one National Park Ranger questioned the purpose of these maps: "it's hard to get lost on the Hadrian's Wall Trail". But arguably the significance of these walking maps is less about wayfinding and more about monitoring progress along the monument. As noted above, the monument is too large to experience at a glance and one stretch of wall can look much like another; walkers do not need maps to find the Wall, they need maps to find *themselves* on the Wall, to position themselves in relation to the monument as a whole.

Another category of representation is literature and poetry. The present paper focuses on visual imagery but arguably two of the most well-known representations of the Wall during the early twentieth century were textual: Kipling's (1906) *Puck of Pook's Hill* and W.H. Auden's *Roman Wall Blues* (for other literary material, see Chettle 2006; Hingley 2010). More generally, a number of novels have taken the Wall and its military garrison as the basis for plotlines (e.g. Dietrich 2005; Sutcliffe 1954). The Wall has also provided inspiration for travel writers. There is a long tradition of narrating Wall journeys including Hutton (1802), Mothersole (1922) and Davies (2009). In each case, the Wall provides a spatial sequence to structure texts which are as equally concerned with the contemporary world as with the Roman monument. The opening of the National Trail in 2003 has inspired a recent proliferation of Wall travelogues (e.g. Bibby 2006; Mortimer 2007).

The fourth and final category of representation is television and film. The Wall and its landscape have made many screen appearances, but arguably the single most influential representation in the last twenty years is the short sequence in the Hollywood film *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves* (1991). This film has helped to establish Sycamore Gap as the most photographed section of Wall (see Crang 2003 for layering of cultural references in the creation of destinations; Beeton 2005 and Tooke & Baker 1996 on 'film-induced' tourism; **Fig. 10**). No historical or folkloric tradition associates Robin Hood with the Wall or with this specific locality. Indeed, the film's narrative implies that the scene is set between Dover and London and the plot does not directly allude to the Wall itself. Rather it simply uses the location for its scenic qualities. Subsequently, however, Sycamore Gap and Robin Hood have become closely intertwined in the popular imagination (note the presence of *Robin, Hood, Prince and Thieves* in the participant responses, **Fig. 1**). Many visitors appear to retain direct awareness of the cinematic origin of this association and some find knowing amusement in Hollywood's rearrangement of British geography. Visiting and photographing 'Robin Hood's tree' is now a central part of many people's visit to Hadrian's Wall.



Figure 10. Sycamore Gap viewed from the north. The stone curtain wall runs along the top of the crags. (Photo: author)

6. Re-presenting the Wall

The woodcuts and plates, illustrative of the antiquities found on the line, have...been prepared from original drawings...from the objects themselves. I am not without hope that the well-read antiquary will value these delineations for their beauty and accuracy. (Bruce *The Roman Wall*, 1853 Second edition)

Earlier sections have considered some of the history of the imagery of Hadrian's Wall. This section turns to the way in which contemporary visitors represent the Wall and its landscape through the embodied practice of photography. Visitors' understanding and behaviour is shaped by the circulation of imagery and ideas. In particular, scholars of tourism have observed how visitors reproduce iconic destination images in their own photographic practices. This process has been described as 'closing the hermeneutic circle'; prior exposure to imagery frames places in particular ways and this creates specific expectations about a place which then forms the metric by which subsequent experiences of that place are judged (Caton & Santos 2008; Crang 2003; Hunter 2008). By this interpretation, tourists travel to reaffirm prior expectations, often rationalized as 'authenticity' and documented through photography.^{ix} However, Edensor (2001) has questioned this interpretation, arguing that visitors are capable of resisting such 'scripting' through playful and knowing reworking of these expectations.

To understand the ways in which modern day visitors document their encounters with Hadrian's Wall, this section focuses on the enormous resource provided by photo-sharing websites. These images are considered for three reasons: firstly, Ewin's (2000) cultural history of Hadrian's Wall, which includes some consideration of visual imagery, predates the rapid rise of photo-sharing websites and digital photography – the nature of image production and circulation has profoundly changed over the subsequent decade. Secondly, the World Wide Web now forms one of the public's most important sources of (visual) information about the Wall; thirdly, the World Wide Web provides an enormous untapped collection of images, captured and annotated by visitors independently of the restrictions and distortions of traditional academic or consultation exercises (see Murthy 2008; Pink 2008).

Photographic images are mnemonic devices to connect people with a sense of past experience (Crang 2006). In other words, it is the narration of objects and images which is important, not the objects *per se*. In this sense, the 'tags' and comments attached to images shared online are equally if not more important than the images themselves. These provide a commentary on the interpretations and values read into and out of these images.

Visitors to Hadrian's Wall have clear ideas about what they expect to see and experience. These expectations are shaped by a highly selective set of iconic images which prioritize certain aspects of the Wall and its landscape (Fig. 8). In turn such images exist within a wider visual economy, for example in relation to images of the Great Wall of China.^x It is

against such specific preconceptions that visitors judge their experiences. The effects are straightforward to trace. For example, some walkers on the National Trail speak of disappointment at the lack of tangible traces of the Wall for the first 40 kilometres west of Wallsend and then delight at ‘finally reaching’ Hadrian’s Wall in the central upland sector.

Such responses encode two issues which both affect and reflect understanding: the landscape context and the materiality of the monument. Firstly, on the basis of the circulation of imagery, there is a general expectation that Hadrian’s Wall is located in a rural landscape. This resonates with the impression of the Wall as a frontier, on the edge of civilization (i.e. the Roman Empire) or the nation state (as noted above Hadrian’s Wall and the English/Scottish border are often conflated). It is clearly easier to imagine the rural landscape of northern England as the authentic context of the Wall, than the modern urban sprawl of Tyneside and Carlisle.

Secondly, the materiality of the Wall has a profound effect on representation and interpretation. The visualization of Hadrian’s Wall is heavily dependent on just one component part of this complex archaeological monument – i.e. the stone curtain wall. An important reason that Hadrian’s Wall could be created as a visitor destination through a set of iconic images is because of its inherent *imageability* – “that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer” (Lynch 1960: 9). As all archaeologists know, earthworks are hard to comprehend from ground level, making them difficult to photograph. Even the most well-preserved and striking sections of the Vallum, the immense linear earthwork to the rear of the stone curtain wall, lacks obvious visual impact (**Fig. 11**).^{xi} However, the very imageability of the stone curtain wall creates a self-reinforcing myth about the nature and significance of the monument as a whole.

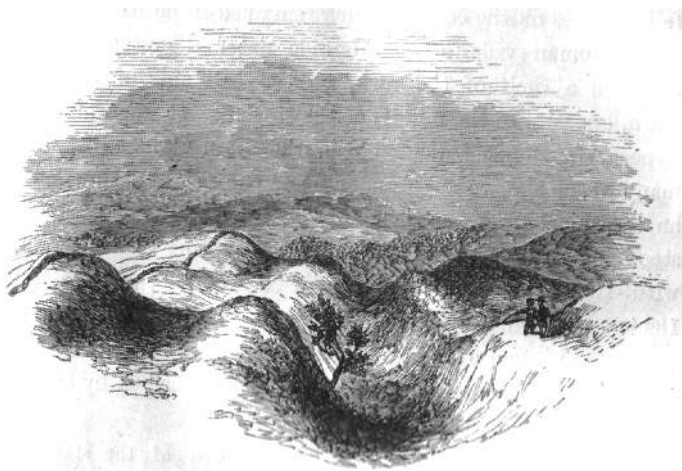


Figure 11. The vallum east of Housesteads fort. Wood-cut by F.W. Fairchild (from Bruce 1895: 137).

There is much more to Hadrian’s Wall than the stone curtain wall. But if the authenticity of a visit to the Wall is measured against the metric of these iconic images, appreciation of the complexity of the broader monument is obscured. By focussing almost exclusively on the stone curtain wall, of which less than 2.5% of the original structure is visible (Bidwell & Hill 2009: table 3) – and that heavily biased to the central upland section – then expectations are narrowed and visitors concentrated at a few ‘honey-pot’ sites which are not fully representative of the frontier as a whole. This creates practical management problems (e.g. parking, Guiver *et al.* 2006) but also reinforces particular understandings of the Wall’s function and significance. As noted above, if visitors all head to the central sections where the stone curtain wall is best preserved and the landscape setting is most dramatic, particular readings of the Wall’s function may be reinforced (see also Witcher in

press). These perceptions may not be wrong, but they may comprise only a select subset of possibilities.

This is the predicament in which Hadrian's Wall Heritage Limited (HWHL)^{xii} finds itself. It is charged with increasing visitor numbers, but needs to spread these across under-visited sections of the Wall in order to facilitate economic regeneration. In developing a strategy, HWHL is compelled to build on public discourse; its brand must resonate to some degree with existing perceptions (e.g. the 'Plan Your Invasion' publicity campaign, 2007).

However, the resulting emphasis on images of the stone curtain wall, forms the metric against which visits are then measured. If a stone wall is central to the brand, then its absence presents a problem. It becomes more difficult to convince visitors that Hadrian's Wall is more than simply a stone wall in an upland rural setting – it can, for example, be found in urban, estuarine and coastal landscapes, dismantled and reworked into early Christian monuments, or reduced to a slight earthwork alongside a road. If the monument's perceived identity is restricted to the stone curtain wall, it is harder to convince people that Hadrian's Wall is more complex and that it can be in other places too.

In recent work, scholars of tourism have focused on the way in which visitors take photographs which reproduce the iconic views which drew them to the destination in the first place (Caton & Santos 2008). However, visitor photographs of the Wall are not completely determined by such views (Edensor 2001). A striking trend, well-documented through user-generated photographs shared online, is the inclusion of street furniture and public art which names or alludes to the Wall. References to the Wall have long been found around its wider landscape, most obviously in place names (Whitworth 2000), street names (generally, Azaryahu 1996) and the names of business (e.g. Hadrian Paints at Haltwhistle). Along the route of the Wall, there has been a long-term trend for 'Romanizing' the names of pubs, restaurants and guesthouses (e.g. the Milecastle Inn at Cawfields, formerly the Common House). Over the past 15 years, this trend has accelerated markedly leading to a new prominence of 'Roman-ness' in the landscape. There is a particular concentration in areas of urban regeneration such as Wallsend (e.g. Hadrian Mews), Byker (e.g. Hadrian Square) and Haltwhistle (e.g. Hadrian Business Park). More generally, the opening of the National Trail in 2003 has led to a significant re-presencing of the Wall through street furniture and art installations, both on the route of the Wall itself, and in new areas where the Trail and Wall diverge (e.g. Newcastle Quayside; Witcher *et al.* 2010).

The inclusion of these signs and artworks in visitors' photographs, either as the principal subject matter or as a backdrop to individual and group portraits, is striking. These photographs may have an obvious humorous motive: the visual irony of a sign for Hadrian's Wall affixed to a stone wall. Another explanation is that, as the Trail encourages exploration beyond the best-preserved sections, especially in urban areas where the Trail deviates from the line of the Wall altogether, these signs become a substitute. Tourist destinations are framed by a proliferation of markers which serve to make the original place real and authentic; indeed, the signifier may become more important than the signified (Crang 1997: 361; 2006). One definition of tourism is therefore travelling to see the signs (in this case, literally signposts) which authenticate experience. Visitors may travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places (Crang 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 169-71). Without a visible stone wall, signs are a guarantee to both photographer and audience back home that the visitor really was 'on the Wall'.

The importance of these signs and substitutes is that they demonstrate that it is possible to commemorate or rematerialize the Wall both on its former course and – importantly – elsewhere as well. Such mobility and elasticity of the concept of the Wall is vitally important for the goals of HWHL. This agency has the stated intention to develop a more expansive vision of the Wall – both in terms of geographical extent (e.g. spreading visitors to new areas) and in terms of broadening associations beyond the Roman period and

military archaeology (e.g. the Border Reivers; HWMP 2008). One possible way to assess the future success of such an exercise, and the effectiveness of other similar heritage marketing brands, is to map user-generated content. For example, the geograph.org.uk website aims to collect visually representative photographs for every square kilometre in the UK. Taking the route of the Hadrian's Wall Trail, **Figure 12** plots the numbers of images which depict the Wall or are 'tagged' with associated terms, in comparison with all other photographs. This demonstrates that currently Hadrian's Wall still has a rather discontinuous presence. The Wall dominates perceptions of the landscape in the central upland area, but is much less prominent in the lowland and urban landscapes to the east and west. It is perhaps too soon to judge whether HWHL has achieved its objectives in terms of transforming perceptions, but it would seem that the analysis of online user-generated materials could be a sensitive – and cost-effective – barometer of public awareness.

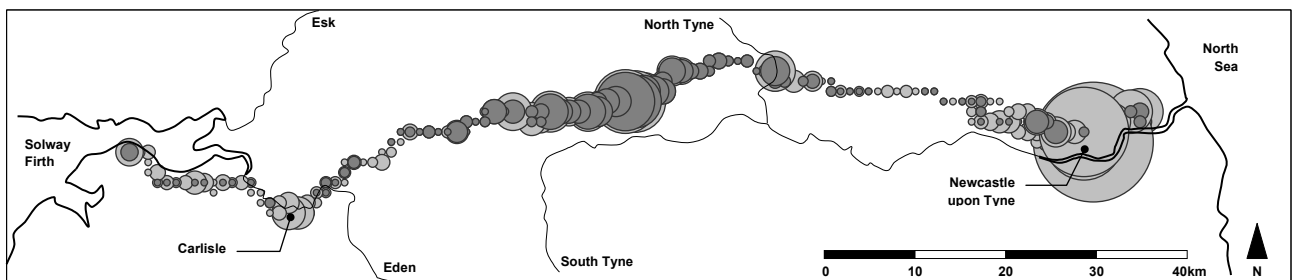


Figure 12. Distribution of photographs tagged as 'Hadrian's Wall' or related terms along the course of the National Trail based on data from geograph.org.uk (n=1951). The symbols indicate the relative number of photographs per kilometre grid square which document or allude to Hadrian's Wall (dark grey) and all other photographs (pale grey).

Finally, alongside photographs of iconic views and signs, are photographs of people – the visitors themselves. It is easy to allow embodied experience to slip away from discussion of image-making practices. However, it is important to retain a focus on the multisensory and embodied status of both photographer and the photographed. Focusing on photography might be expected to give primacy to sight at the expense of other senses which may be more difficult to visualize. However, analysis of online images demonstrates that a broader range of senses is not only represented, but that these are important for the experience of the monument and the articulation of those experiences.

After vision, the most obvious sense to be represented is touch (see Crang 2003). Whilst there are plenty of images of visitors standing in front of the monument – the Wall-as-scenery – many photographs document direct physical contact. These include people sitting on, standing on, propping up, and jumping off the Wall. The representation of these haptic encounters suggests that for many visitors it is not enough simply to be pictured with the Wall, there is a need to experience it physically. Its scale and antiquity invite and demand a more intense and direct encounter than that offered by sight alone. Some visitors recount the liberating contrast with the closely monitored environment of a museum and perhaps having already 'seen' the Wall many times prior to visiting, touch is an important way for visitors to affirm the Wall's authenticity. The institutions which manage the Wall actively discourage visitors from climbing and walking on the monument in order to protect the archaeology, but the importance and immediacy of touch to visitor encounter is recognized, for example, though the 'Touching the Wall' workshop run by a local heritage education group (Tyne Team 2009). Finally, it is useful to remember that the senses cannot be arbitrarily divided: most obviously, visitors stand on the Wall in order to see get a better view or to frame a photograph.

7. Conclusions

Hadrian's Wall is one of the most well-known and well-researched archaeological monuments of the Roman Empire. Like many other World Heritage Sites, the modern history of the site is closely linked to image-making and visiting practices, and to the recursive relationship between them. Academia has traditionally privileged text over imagery but it is clear that visual representations exert strong and defining influence on the perception of landscapes and monuments. Similarly, Web 2.0 and digital media open new opportunities for people to engage with virtual places and tourist destinations, and new challenges for academics to develop methods to assess these developments. For example, user-generated content signals a breakdown of traditional categories of representational analysis such as professional/popular and producer/consumer, requiring new conceptual approaches; similarly, it will demand new methods to document and analyze these vast and constantly-changing datasets.

By looking at the historical context of representations of Hadrian's Wall, it is possible to trace the emergence of a series of iconic images. Whilst earlier imagery focused on short stretches of Wall and moments of discovery, by the mid nineteenth century a set of iconic mural images had been defined. These images increasingly incorporated the physical setting of the monument within the frame of view and these contextual landscapes have come to sustain particular readings of the Wall's function and significance, for example, as inevitable and peripheral. Such images structure expectations about the Wall and, since at least the eighteenth century, visitors have sought to verify these representations during their own visits and subsequently to reproduce them. Notably, despite the changes in technological medium, there is strong continuity in contemporary visitor image-making practices. Whilst it is possible to discern some innovations in visitor photography, most notably the inclusion of National Trail street furniture, the bulk of images continue to rework a small set of pioneer images which emphasize a basic grammar of leading lines and multiple horizons, and evoke a wild and depopulated frontier landscape.

This situation will be considered further in the second part of this study (Witcher in press). Specifically, it will assess the possibility that New Media can stifle as well as diversify representations of heritage sites and landscapes. This will form part of a broader analysis of the influence of the New Media on the nexus between representation and encounter. To balance the emphasis on representation in the current paper, the second part of this study will focus on physical encounters with the Wall. In particular, it will consider the way in which movement around the monument and its landscape explicitly and implicitly structures visitors' understanding of the Roman past through a process of embodied empathy. It will go on to consider some alternative approaches taking inspiration from virtual communities, such as geocachers, to enable the creation of new modes of representation and encounter.

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ⁱ In this paper, 'Hadrian's Wall' is used to refer to the Roman frontier complex as a whole. The famous stone wall which forms just one component of this wider system is distinguished here as the 'stone curtain wall'.

ⁱⁱ This paper derives from a larger collaborative research project, *Tales of the Frontier*, which has explored the post-Roman history and reception of Hadrian's Wall and its landscape from a variety of perspectives. For other results from the project, see *inter alia*: Hingley (2010); Hingley *et al.* (in press); Nesbitt & Tolia-Kelly (2009); Witcher *et al.* (2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ The prolific engraver Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) was born and lived for many years only a few miles south of Hadrian's Wall at Cherryburn, yet not a single image of the Wall has been found amongst the many thousands he produced. Notably, his personal library included a copy of Hutton's (1802) *History of the Roman Wall* (Gardner-Medwin 2009).

^{iv} Despite the deployment of photography during the mid nineteenth century at classical sites around the Mediterranean such as Rome, Paestum and Athens (Lyons *et al.* 2005) – and Stonehenge in Britain (Chippendale 2004) – the technology came late to Hadrian's Wall. Bruce's *Handbook* was generously illustrated with woodcuts from the first edition, but photography did not appear until the 1885 third edition (a single portrait); a photographic view of the Wall did not appear until the fourth edition in 1895.

^v In this context, Davies' introduction to a reprint of his 1974 bestseller *A Walk along the Wall* notes "I could of course have walked the Wall in its entirety once again, but that would have produced a new book" (Davies 2009: xi).

^{vi} The impossibility of experiencing cities in their entirety has similarly led to distinctive styles of urban representation, most obviously aerial or cartographical views, e.g. Rome, see papers in Haselberger & Humprey 2006.

^{vii} For the architectural rhetoric of Hadrian's Wall as a Roman 'design feature', see Hartis (2010).

^{viii} See Welfare (2004) for observations on the way in which Roman engineers may have enhanced the natural rock in order create either visual and/or strategic effect.

^{ix} Warburton (1753) produced a small pocket companion "for such learned travellers and others whose curiosity may lead them to visit the superb remains of the famous Picts Wall [i.e. Hadrian's Wall]". Birley (1961: 18) notes that Warburton's book encouraged comparison between the copperplate illustrations and descriptions of Roman altarstones and the original objects. Visiting the Wall as a means of verifying visual and textual representations has therefore occurred since at least the eighteenth century.

^x Comparison with the Great Wall of China has a long heritage. Hodgson's (1840) work on Hadrian's Wall included images of both walls.

^{xi} Generally, artists and photographers have found it challenging to depict ancient earthworks, at least from ground level. In this context, we might note the lack of any truly iconic representations of the Antonine Wall in Scotland (another Roman frontier which briefly replaced Hadrian's Wall in the mid second century AD) or of Offa's Dyke (the early medieval earthwork which bounded the Kingdom of Mercia), though in both of these cases, there may be specific political reasons for the relative lack of attention when compared with Hadrian's Wall. In contrast to linear earthworks, prehistoric barrows (e.g. Silbury Hill) and hillforts (e.g. Maiden Castle) are more amenable to representation (I thank Sam Smiles for the latter point).

^{xii} Hadrian's Wall Heritage Limited is a not-for-profit company, part-funded by the One NE and North West Regional Development Agencies, to co-ordinate the activities of the many institutions involved in the management of the World Heritage Site. It also manages initiatives intended to develop the local economy, for example, through the promotion of tourism.