

# Why was vindolanda built?

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



Vindolanda Vindolanda was one of a series of Roman forts built in northern England (Northumberland) in the last quarter of the 1st Century AD. It became an auxiliary fort which also had a substantial element of civilian accommodation. The forts stretched from east to west, and are considered to have been a consolidation of the frontier of the Roman Empire. The Romans invaded southern Britain in AD43, and slowly moved north. At one point, they had hoped to conquer all of Britain, but never succeeded. Roman armies had advanced far into Scotland in the 70s AD.

But either by choice or necessity, they abandoned these gains and formed a frontier stretching roughly from modern Newcastle in the east to modern Carlisle in the west. The forts, together with the east-west road now known as the Stanegate connecting them, formed this frontier for 40 years. Then Hadrian's Wall was built just to the north, and the Stanegate forts either went out of use or changed their purpose. Vindolanda remained in use, though the ultimate purpose of its garrison (whether support for the Wall forts or protection in an unruly hinterland) isn't fully understood.

Vindolanda is permanently under investigation by archaeologists and it is estimated that there is sufficient work, for them for the next 150 years to complete the sites excavation. This Roman Auxiliary Fort guarded the Stanegate Road, which ran from the River Tyne, this would also have made it important in providing supplies to wall forts, maintaining a safe supply chain, as well as reinforcements either way if needed. Other smaller forts and marching camps would have been every days march, about 13 miles along the road. Roman soldiers needed to march from one part of the country to another quickly.

So the Romans built roads. Roman roads were made from stones, and were better than muddy tracks for travel on foot or in carts. So they made travelling around Britain easier for everyone. You can still see the remains of some Roman roads today. All the roads they built were remarkably straight. The Romans knew that the shortest distance from one place to another is a straight line, but their roads did zigzag sometimes, to make going uphill easier. The road sloped from the middle to ditches either side, so rain water drained off.

Romans made these roads were wide enough for two armies to go past without having to stop and to waste time. The Stanegate was the road closest to the fort Vindolanda. The Romans would always build a fort near a road, which made it easier for transport. The road was very useful; it was used for trading with the other tribes. In 54 BC Caesar had captured a hill-fort. Then, again, he went away. He did not think Britain was worth a long war, and he wanted to get back to Rome. Nearly a hundred years later, in AD 43, the Romans returned. Claudius sent an army to invade Britain. The army had four legions.

This time the Romans conquered the southern half of Britain, and made it part of the Roman Empire. One of the main reasons why the Roman's wanted to invade was the Britain's wealth and the goods they owned and he wanted to make Britain part of Rome's empire. The Picts and Brigantes are two of the oldest pre-roman inhabitants of Great Britain. Both inhabited and battled the Romans and each other for the lands of Northern England and Scotland. The picts were really rich and Romans wanted to take an

advantage and take over. They invaded the south of Britain and they used the pict's to trade with the Brigantes.

The pict's were the people from Caledonia (modern day Scotland). Some pict's made friends with the Romans in return for keeping their land. The pict's agreed to obey the Roman laws, pay the Roman taxes and to behave. The tribe agreed to give their land to the Romans unlike the Brigantes. Another tribe apart from the pict's were the Brigantes which were a divided group from the Northern England. Most of these would not like each other due to any reason and had hatred against the Romans. The Brigantes fought, and eventually the Romans fell back to the more defensible Hadrian's Wall.

When the Roman Emperor Hadrian visited Britain in 122 AD he recognised the difficulties in establishing control in Caledonia and saw that it would be impossible to introduce the Pict's to the Roman way of life. The Emperor therefore ordered the construction of a great defensive wall which would mark the northern limits of his empire and consolidate the hold on those parts of Britain already subdued. Hadrian's empire would not include Caledonia. The Romans also had to defend Hadrian's Wall, against attacks by Pict's and other tribes these people lived in northern Britain, outside the Roman part.

Soldiers sent to defend the wall lived in forts and camps. Vindolanda was a very well planned fort that was constructed on a flat hill at Northumberland at approximately 122AD. The fort itself was a playing-card shape which allowed the soldiers to see round the corner. The main site is on the top of a hill with much able to be viewed, plus a full size reproduction of a section of wall. It was one of the most important forts in Northern England, because it

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was continuously getting repaired and rebuilt. Vindolanda was built first in timber and earth; it was later built in stone.

Archaeologists believe that there are the remains of ten forts in all. Buildings found so far include the fort walls, bath houses, granaries, officers, accommodation, barracks, a temple, and civilian housing, all served by paved roads. The fort had a hypocaust system visible under the stone floor to allow flow of air to keep food or metal items dry, preventing rotting or rust. The fort has four gateways north, east, south, west. The main part of the fort was the head quarters building which was always located at the centre of the fort.

The building would always contain a well, and a strong room which would contain the valuables of the Roman soldiers. This was very important to a soldier and if they lost anything this meant that they'd lost their ago. The headquarters would also contain the weapons and equipment they would need. The mansio was an accommodation place for travellers from other armies, tribes and also for traders. The bathhouses were always outside the forts because they were a fire risk and it also made it easier for the civilians to use the bath as well as the soldiers.

Another reason of the construction of Vindolanda was the geographical location, it was based on a flat hill which makes it very hard to attack and very easy to defend, because it is on a steep hill which makes the Romans see very easily over miles. The Romans used a very basic way to communicate during battles. They used a flag system which based a soldier miles away on a mountain and used green for safety and red for attack. This was very useful; the Romans were pre-warned if they were being attacked.

The remains of a large roman bath house are south of the fort, and next to the fort is the remains of a civilian settlement (or vicus). A civilian settlement was next to the fort and these continued to be in use until the end of the Roman period around 410AD. The settlement was used for retired soldiers; local traders, smiths, tavern keepers, etc. liked both the protection and trade a fort could offer. Much of the civilian settlement has still not been uncovered, but its existence is apparent due to the unevenness and irregularity of the bumps and ridges in the ground.

There was also the Tyne River by the fort which supplied the soldiers in the fort with clean water to use. They would throw the sewage out into the river. Vindolanda was one of the many forts in England, and it is the most common for wooden tablets discoveries. The tablets provide the best insight into life in the Roman army found anywhere in the world. There is a list of how many troops were present, the commanding officer's cook's diary, listing who he had to dinner and what they ate, and even a birthday greeting, with the commanders wife inviting the wife of another commander to her birthday party.