

The Military History Society of New South Wales presents:

# HADRIAN'S WALL

DEFENSIVE BARRIER OR COMMUNITY IN ROMAN BRITAIN?



Public lecture by military historian Lt-Col (retd) David Wilson

10:30AM Saturday 2 September 2023

The Auditorium, Anzac Memorial Hyde Park, Sydney CBD

Hadrian's Wall once marked the boundary between Roman Britain and the unconquered lands of Caledonia to the north. The term 'Hadrian's Wall' refers not only to the physical wall itself, but all the towers, milecastles, fortlets and nearby large garrison forts that supported the legions and auxiliary troops who manned it. But why was the Wall built? Construction commenced in AD 122 at the direction of the Emperor Hadrian. He wanted a recognizable limit to his empire and was concerned about keeping out the constantly troublesome Pictish tribes from what we now call Scotland. The Wall remained in use in various forms until around AD 410 when the Romans abandoned the Province of Britannia.

This lecture will address the political and military aspects of the need for such a massive defensive structure at the edge of the Roman Empire. In military terms it facilitated control of the local populations on both sides; it was a tool to strike fear into the enemies of Rome, then the most powerful empire in the world and it also provided an opportunity to tax anyone wishing to pass through the wall for trade. But quite apart from its military purposes, the Wall had significant social impacts. We will examine how the various garrisons lived and their interaction with local communities in terms of migration, settlement and trade. We cannot talk about Hadrian's Wall without mentioning the other, more northerly structure known as the Antonine Wall, begun in AD 142 and its brief function at the edge of Empire.

We will also cover the structure of a Roman legion and its cavalry auxiliaries as well as Roman defensive construction techniques. We will also examine some speculative uses of the Wall and its defences after the Romans left in AD 410 and then through the medieval period when the Wall

was robbed out and fell into disrepair. Efforts to archaeologically examine and preserve the Wall for posterity began in the mid-19th Century. Nowadays, several sites such as Bird Oswald and Vindolanda are open to the public with museums that display archaeological finds from recent digs.

**LECTURE TIME AND VENUE: 10:30AM Saturday 2 September 2023 at The Auditorium, Anzac Memorial Hyde Park, Hyde Park South, corner Elizabeth and Liverpool Streets, Sydney CBD. Admission is free of charge but a donation would be appreciated. For information call 0419 698 783 or email: [president@militaryhistorynsw.com.au](mailto:president@militaryhistorynsw.com.au)**

## Biography – David Wilson



*Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret'd) David Wilson, BA (Military Studies) UNSW, MSc (Instructional Systems Design) Florida State University USA, psc (n), jssc.*

David Wilson graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1975 into the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He completed 47 years of service in a variety of Regular Army and Army Reserve postings before retiring in 2019. His overseas postings included duty in Uganda with the Commonwealth Military Training Team (1983) and in Cambodia with the United Nations UNAMIC and UNTAC missions (1991-92). In 2006-07 he was deployed as an operations analyst in both Iraq and Afghanistan, working out of the Australian Joint Task Force HQ in Baghdad. He also served as the Australian Liaison Officer to the USMC-led headquarters and with other international assistance forces based in Thailand during the tsunami relief operation in 2004-05.

David's keen interest for military history is long-standing and widely varied. This includes being involved as a specialist technical adviser to the movies "*Breaker Morant*" and "*Gallipoli*" which were filmed in South Australia in the early 1980s where he was posted at the time. He has been regularly guiding as a battlefield historian since 2006. His specialty areas for WW1 tours are Gallipoli, France and Belgium. He also covers the Bombing of Darwin in 1942 and the Battle of Agincourt 1415. In 2017 he became a fully Accredited Member of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides (Badge No 81). He is a member of the Gallipoli Memorial Club, a member of the NSW Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table and is a committee member of the 18th Battalion Memorial Rifle Club at Hornsby. He is also a member of the Victoria Barracks Paddington Corps of Guides.

As well as being a battlefield guide, David is a published author and is the co-author of "*Fighting Nineteenth*" – *History of the 19th Infantry Battalion, AIF*", published in June 2011. As a result of this work, he has set up his own business AIF Research Services which assists families and other interested groups to track their First AIF ancestors. David is a lecturer in military history at WEA Sydney and also gives presentations to local historical societies on a variety of military history topics.