The *Notitia Dignitatum* in Britain

Britain's earliest place names are known mainly from these sources:

- Ptolemy's Geography – 129 names with latitude and longitude (+34 tribes);
- Antonine Itinerary (AI) – 110 names with route mileages;
- Ravenna Cosmography (RC) – 307 names listed geographically logically;
- *Notitia Dignitatum* (ND) – 54 names, with 46 Roman army units' names;
- a mixed bag of inscriptions, historical mentions, minor sources, etc.

ND's text can be read on various websites, including those of Ueda-Sarson, Vermaat, and RRRA, but watch out that they all contain minor proof-reading discrepancies. The best source may be the printed text of Rivet and Smith (1979, pages 216-225) who proceeded from the printed text of Seeck (1876) which is fully online. Haynes (2014) shows a map of the military district in northern England, with the locations usually suggested for ND names there, but watch out that some of those locations are wrong. Individual place names can be looked up via the *romaneranames* main menu.

A good framework for thinking about the geography of the ND in Britain is the hypothesis of Ward (1973). He argued that the Roman army made a final attempt to restore Imperial authority over Britain in AD 416-417, from which ND's list is what a modern army would call a Strength Return. Rivet and Smith described Ward's idea as "attractive", but they wanted further proof. Here goes.

ND supplies 46 names of forts (plus 5 provinces, 2 finance offices, and one unlocated army unit), of which over half can be located with reasonable confidence because they match names in other sources and/or seem to have survived into Anglo-Saxon times. Rivet and Smith (1979) guessed at the meanings and locations of the difficult names, but they were handicapped by prevailing dogma about the language(s) used to create ancient names. Now we can do better.

Phase one of the Roman *reconquista* (to borrow a Spanish word for the Ward hypothesis) was to re-establish links with important Channel ports, *Othona* (Bradwell), *Dubris* (Dover), and *Lemannis* (Lympne), putting London back in regular communication with the Continent and Rome. Phase two extended Imperial control to six more ports: *Branoduno* (Brancaster), *Gariannonor* (Burgh Castle and/or Caister), *Regulbio* (Reculver), *Rutupis* (Richborough), *Anderidos* (Pevensey), *Portum Adurni* (Portchester).

Ward's concept of military prioritisation neatly explains why these ports of the Saxon Shore are listed in two groups, both clockwise around the coast, rather than in one geographical sequence. Whether this coastline was under attack by Saxons, or settled by Saxons, has been much discussed. As explained by Skene (1862), the name "Saxon" covered a multitude of north-European peoples, including some who should be called Frisians. Likely explanations of the nine names do not implicate the forts in fighting. Five names look topographical, three (*Othona*, *Gariannonor*, *Adurni*) look commercial, and one is uncertain (*Branoduno*).

Phase three restored links with York, the base of the Duke of the Britains and *Praefectus legionis sextae*. Also with three sites just to the south of York, where two of the locations suggested by Rivet and Smith need to be overruled: *Praesidio* (Newton Kyme), *Dano* (Doncaster), and *Morbio* (Bawtry).

Phase four re-established control over key sites across northern England, in a zone that had probably suffered from attacks by Picts and Scots. The first name, *Arbeia*, most likely belongs at Piercebridge, where the main Roman road north crossed the river Tees – a location that outranks South Shields (a weak guess by Rivet and Smith on the basis of faulty logic). Next is *Dicti*, probably near Sunderland at the mouth of the river Wear. *Concangios* was almost certainly at Chester-le-Street, upstream on the Wear, by its tidal limit. Then *Lavatres* (Bowes Castle), *Verteris* (Brough Castle), and *Braboniaco*,(Kirkby Thore) have reasonably certain locations, extending Roman control to the west of the Pennines.

Phase five took control of forts on the estuaries of Cumbria, where *Maglone* was perhaps near Wigton (Old Carlisle Farm), inland from Moricambe Bay. Then *Magis* was near Workington (Burrow Walls) at the mouth of the Derwent. Then *Longovicio* has no certain location, but our best guess is that a Roman site has been lost near the mouth of the river Ehen, north of Sellafield.
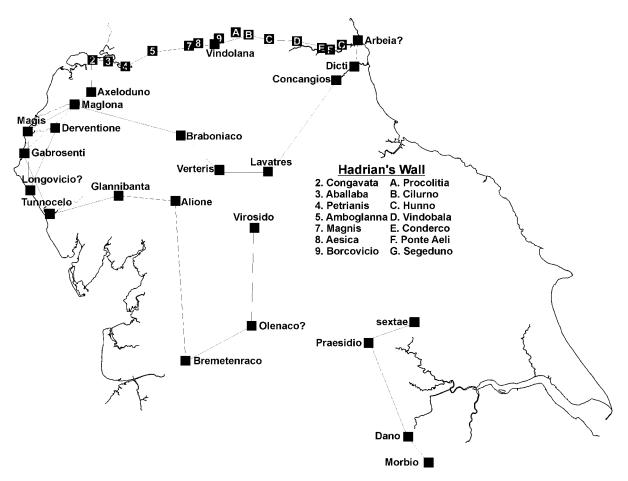
Derventione was the fort at Papcastle, on the Derwent. Rivet and Smith made bad guesses for these last two locations, which helped to throw other authors off track for the whole ND.

Phase six is a list of names *per lineam valli* running from east to west along Hadrian's Wall, mostly agreeing with other sources. The first name, *Segeduno*, is routinely claimed to belong at Wallsend, and to have given rise to the name *Serduno* in the Cosmography, but it would actually belong better at South Shields. Then, along the Wall, *Ponte Aeli* (Newcastle), *Conderco* (Benwell), *Vindobala* (Rudchester), *Hunno* (Halton Chesters), *Cilurno* (Chesters), *Procolitia* (Carrawburgh), *Borcovicio* (Housesteads), *Vindolana* (Housesteads), *Aesica* (Great Chesters), *Magnis* (Carvoran), *Amboglanna* (Castlesteads), *Petrianis* (Stanwix), *Aballaba* (Burgh-by-Sands), *Congavata* (Drumburgh), and *Axeloduno* (Bowness-on-Solway).

Ward envisaged many Roman garrisons, notably on Hadrian's Wall as gently festering in isolation during the Fall of the Western Roman Empire. Bands of barbarian robbers coming into Roman Britain would probably not have had the strength or the motivation to attack any proper Roman fort. Equally the garrisons might not have the numbers to pro-actively seek out the robbers. So the relief force would probably have concentrated on organisation – putting isolated garrisons back in communication with each other again and understanding where the barbarians went.

Phase seven heads seems to have turned to parts of Cumbria that would have been particularly exposed to attacks by Irish raiders (*Scotti*). *Gabrosenti* was almost certainly the coastal fort at Moresby, near Whitehaven; and *Tunnocelo* has been confidently identified with Ravenglass. Then inland, to *Glannibanta* (very probably Ambleside), *Alione* (probably Low Borrowbridge), *Bremetenraco* (definitely **Ribchester**), *Olenaco* (possibly Elslack), and *Virosido* (possibly Bainbridge).

Here is a map of our current thinking about the locations of ND names in the northern military district. In agreement with R&S, *Dictim* is near Sunderland and *Arbeia* is at South Shields. We are not yet brave enough to shift *Arbeia* to Piercebridge and *Segeduno* to South Shields, but matters change from month to month, and this map should be regarded as provisional and likely to change. Please look up individual names for the dilemmas involved.

Hadrian's Wall

2. Congavata   A. Procolitia
3. Aballaba   B. Cilurno
4. Petrianis   C. Hunno
5. Amboglanna   D. Vindobala
7. Magnis   E. Conderco
8. Aesica   F. Ponte Aeli
9. Borcovicio   G. Segeduno

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