

As if 2020 hadn't hurt us enough already, on Saturday 19th December, we lost one of the greatest Roman scholars, Professor Anthony Birley. The sad news of his passing at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle was announced in a statement released by the Vindolanda Trust on Monday 21st December (see [here](#)).

Anthony Birley was a British ancient historian, archaeologist and eminent scholar. He was born in Chesterholm on 8th October 1937 to Margaret Isabel (Goodlet) and historian and archaeologist [Eric Birley](#) who was particularly associated with the excavation of the forts of Hadrian's Wall, notably at Vindolanda. In 1929 Eric Birley bought the fort at Chesterholm-Vindoland where Anthony (named after Anthony Hedley, antiquary and former owner of Chesterholm) and his elder brother [Robin](#) (named after [Robin Collingwood](#), Birley's great influence) began to excavate the site. Anthony was educated at Clifton College in Bristol (1950 to 1955) where he learnt Latin and Greek, and at Magdalen College in Oxford (1956 to 1963) where he gained a first-class degree in Classics.



Anthony Birley.

Image courtesy of The Vindolanda Trust.

Anthony Birley became the main pupil of Sir Ronald Syme under who he completed his classical studies in Oxford with the dissertation *The Roman High Command from the death of Hadrian to the death of Caracalla with particular attention to the Danubian Wars of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus*. Birley then became professor of Ancient History at the University of Manchester

(1974–1990) and University of Düsseldorf (1990–2002). He was also an Honorary Professor in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Durham.

He also became a Trustee of the [Vindolanda Trust](#) when it started in 1970 and served until 2016, for the final twenty years as Chair. His brother, the late Robin Birley who passed away in 2018, was involved in the discovery of the Vindolanda writing tablets in 1973. Robin's son, [Dr Andrew Birley](#), is now chief executive officer of the trust and director of the Vindolanda excavations.

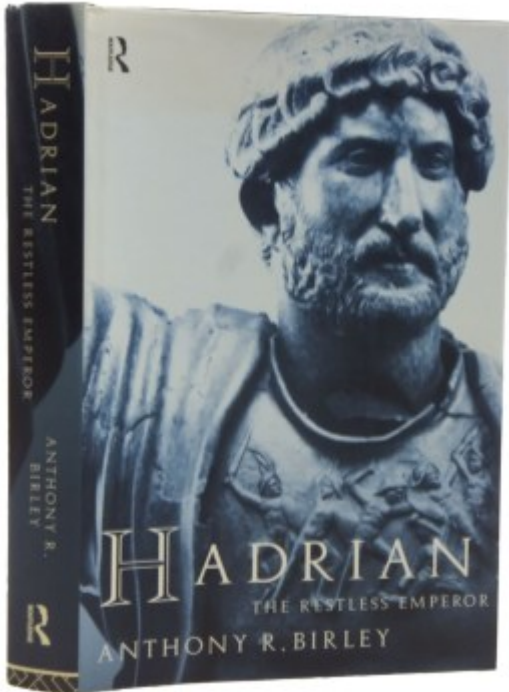




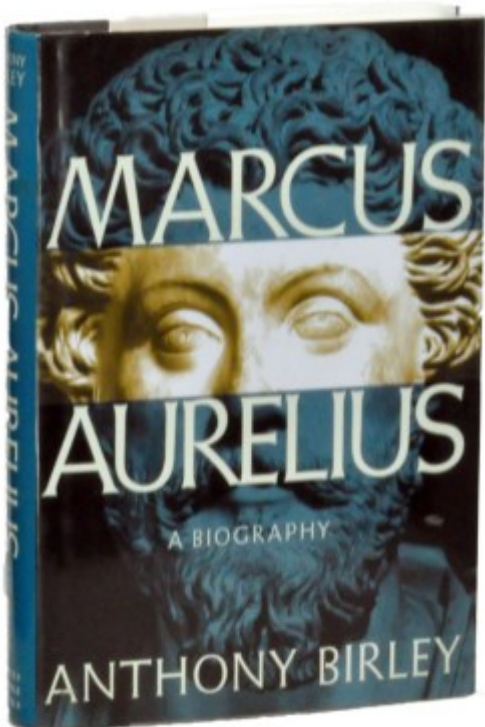


Vindolanda

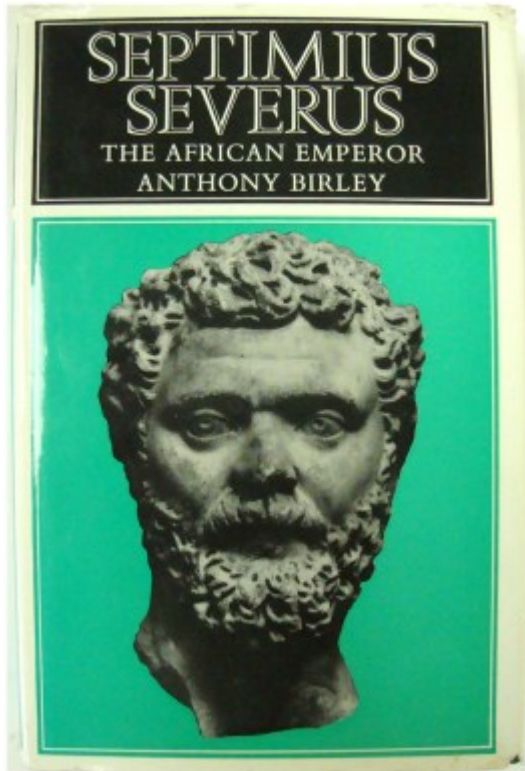
Anthony Birley was the author of many publications and articles on Roman Britain and wrote a series of imperial biographies, one of which would lead me on a fascinating historical journey in the footsteps of Hadrian. His biography of Hadrian is the most comprehensive account of Hadrian's life and reign based on inscriptional and literary evidence as well as academic research. In examining both his private and public life, Birley's biography of Hadrian touches on his building program, the Jewish war and his personal relationships.



Hadrian. The Restless Emperor



Marcus Aurelius



Septimius Severus the African Emperor

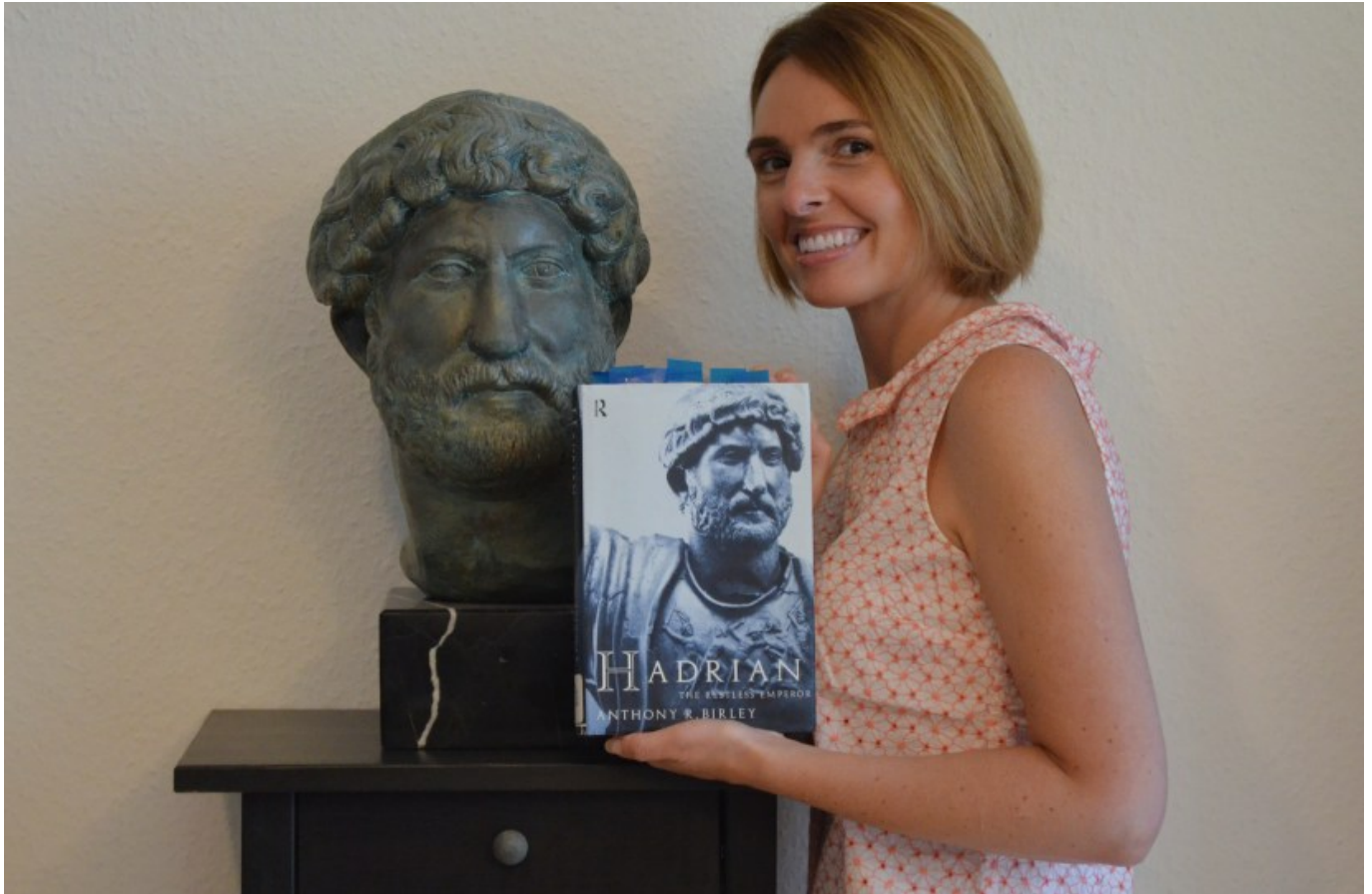
Birley recently appeared in a Spanish documentary “Adriano – Metamorphosis” filmed on the occasion of the exhibition held in Seville (see [here](#)) to commemorate the 1900th anniversary of Hadrian’s accession.



In their statement, The Vindolanda Trust describes Anthony Birley as “a man who was so generous with his knowledge and personal time to everyone he met”.

Anthony Birley leaves a tremendously important bibliographic legacy for generations of students and scholars. I never had the chance to meet him, and it saddens me to think that he won't be among us for the forthcoming Hadrian's Wall 1900th Anniversary Festival in 2022. However, his work will continue to guide me for many years as I am only three years into my [Hadrian 1900 project](#). His biography of Hadrian will undoubtedly remain my bedside book for the next 18 years.

Thank you Professor Birley, I am forever in your debt. May you rest in peace.



Anthony Birley's publications on Hadrian and Hadrian's Wall:

- *Hadrian's Wall an illustrated guide*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) (1963).
- *Hadrian: the Restless Emperor*, London: Routledge, (1997)
- *Hadrian and Greek Senators*. Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik, 116, 209-245. (1997)
- *Hadrian's Travels in The Representation and perception of Roman imperial power*. Leiden, The Netherlands (2002)

Anthony Birley's other publications:

- *Imperial Rome* with drawings by the artist. Alan Sorrell London: Lutterworth Press (1970)
- *Life in Roman Britain* (1972)
- *Lives of the Later Caesars* (1976)
- *The Fasti of Roman Britain*, Clarendon Press (1981)

- *The African Emperors: Septimius Severus* (1988)
- *Roman Papers*, vol. 6, by Ronald Syme, edited by A. R. Birley (Clarendon Press 1991)
- *The People of Roman Britain* (1992)
- *Marcus Aurelius: a Biography*, London: Routledge, (1993)
- *Anatolica - Studies in Strabo*, by Ronald Syme, edited by A. R. Birley (Oxford: OUP 1995)
- *Vindolanda Research Reports* (new series) 6 vols. (1996)
- *Onomasticon to the Younger Pliny*, Clarendon Press (2000)
- *Garrison Life at Vindolanda: a Band of Brothers*, Stroud: Tempus, (2002)
- *Septimius Severus: the African Emperor*, London: Routledge, (2004)
- *The Roman Government of Britain* (2005)
- *Agricola and Germany* (2009)

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