Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Britannia

Written by Graham Stewart

Published by Atlantic Books

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

BRITANNIA

First published in hardback in Great Britain in 2010 by Atlantic Books and Callisto, imprints of Atlantic Books Ltd.

This hardback edition published in Great Britain in 2011 by Atlantic Books.

Copyright © Graham Stewart, 2010

The moral right of Graham Stewart to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

The picture acknowledgements constitute an extension of this copyright page.

Every effort has been made to trace or contact all copyright holders. The publishers will be pleased to make good any omissions or rectify any mistakes brought to their attention at the earliest opportunity.

Lines from *Casino Royale* by Ian Fleming © 1953 Gildrose Productions Ltd.

Extract from *Life in the UK Test: Practice Questions* used with permission.
© 2007 Red Squirrel Publishing www.redsquirrelbooks.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 84354 998 7

Design and layout by www.carrstudio.co.uk
Printed in Great Britain

Atlantic Books
An imprint of Atlantic Books Ltd
Ormond House
26–27 Boswell Street
London
WC1N 3JZ

www.atlantic-books.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1647, Britain was slipping towards anarchy. Five years of civil war had left the Royalist forces broken and scattered. Although King Charles I was held captive, his enemies remained hesitant and unsure. Parliament was in disarray, its politicians reduced to making self-serving gestures having long since lost control of the revolution they had helped set in motion. Only one power in the land seemed capable of restoring order, but even the New Model Army, for all its battle-hardened prowess in war, was riven with dissent in the moment of its apparent victory. Belligerent and unpaid, it marched on the capital. On arrival, its commander-in-chief, Sir Thomas Fairfax, was appointed Constable of the Tower of London. As he was given a tour around the mighty fortified keep, a selection of its treasures was presented for his inspection. Eventually he was shown a fragile document that was already over 400 years old and not even written in English. Nonetheless, it was what the general had specifically requested to see. 'This is that,' he declared, gazing reverentially at the Magna Carta, 'which we have fought for, and by God's help we must maintain.'

Was the Civil War really a contest over an aged scrap of manuscript? Could the English, so often derided for their indifference to grand ideas, have made such a big issue out of a thirteenth-century set of dictates? In the search to find meaning out of the internecine conflict that gripped the British Isles in the 1640s, historians have identified many strands of discord – social, national, political, economic and religious. There is, however, no reason to assume that those who accompanied Sir Thomas Fairfax on his tour of the Tower looked at him strangely when he pronounced on the importance of Magna Carta. In assembling their case against the Crown, Parliamentarians had spent much of the previous twenty years searching out old documents that they believed provided the legal proof that their case was just and that arbitrary rule was alien to the ancient constitution.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Magna Carta still receives an occasional mention in the press and in Parliament, and most Britons are aware of its importance, even if they cannot exactly recall why. Actually, most of it was repealed in the nineteenth century and the provisions that remain tend to make the news only because they are perceived to be under threat. The Act of Union of 1707 is another national treasure that crops up in modern debate, principally because of a Scottish nationalist movement whose aim is to have it consigned to the dustbin of history. For all the opinions expressed about the Act of Union, how many people have seen it, or even have a mental picture of what it looks like? Much the same may be said of the Bill of Rights, whose 300th anniversary in 1989 was greeted with nationwide indifference.

The contrast with the United States of America could not be sharper. Daily, queues shuffle slowly and reverentially through the neoclassical portico of the National Archives in Washington, DC, for a glimpse of the documents that founded the nation. A high proportion of Americans not only know what their Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights look like, they even have a pretty good recollection of what they say. In fact, America's Founding Fathers did not hit upon all their deep philosophical ideas, albeit neatly wrapped up in a few choice expressions, in one blinding flash of original genius. For, like Sir Thomas Fairfax, they had an almost mystical reverence for the eloquent defence of rights, freedoms and equality before the law that had been scratched upon the historic parchments of the country they had left behind.

The Founding Fathers of the United States borrowed liberally from Britain's archival heritage, even as they were trying to set themselves apart from Britain. Crucially, however, a fundamental difference divided the two English-speaking nations. The Americans – thereafter copied by most of the world – opted for a written constitution while the British persevered with their uncodified system of laws and precedents. Perhaps an absence of what are generally perceived as 'founding documents' has made modern Britons believe that their country's venerable statutes and charters are not especially relevant and that their only real appeal lies in their charming calligraphy.

Certainly, many of the documents collated in this book are a visual delight, but that is not why they are here. They cover a wide range of national endeavours, from law and politics, literature and science, inventions and city planning to sport, economics and religion. The principle guiding their selection is that they definitively shaped their age, and most of them still resonate today. For while we may not be

governed by a single constitutional document, we are governed by many, drawn from the better part of two millennia of history – and a representative sample of the greatest of them are collected and contextualized here.

What is more, the term 'governed' is meant not only in a narrow administrative sense. Our expressions have been shaped by the great translations of the Bible, by the works of Shakespeare and by the extraordinary compilation of words and meanings made by Dr Samuel Johnson. The influence of Adam Smith's treatise guides the way in which we do business. We may no longer travel on trains designed by George and Robert Stephenson, nor do we toil over one of Richard Arkwright's water frames, but we must make a trip (not by rail) to some exceptionally remote parts of Britain to avoid evidence of their influence in industrializing, moulding and uniting the country. All, once, had to be imagined and developed, using ink and paper and, as such, deserve recognition here.

Restricting the number of documents presented to one hundred is, intentionally, a tight discipline. No matter how carefully considered, the choice is ultimately based on personal opinion and therefore open to debate. One could easily fill the entire book with Acts of Parliament and still lament the lack of space available to include many more with a sound claim to fame. To do so, though, would be at the expense of presenting a reasonable spread of documents from across a wider range of national activity. Providing this range necessarily involves selecting some documents as representative of their theme. In this way, the 1832 Reform Act represents legislative measures towards greater democracy. The absence here of subsequent reform acts is not intended to diminish their importance, merely to recognize that they carried on a process that the 1832 Act started. Nor is this book just a compendium of 'firsts' – the *Rocket* was not the original steam train, nor the Spitfire the pioneer fighter plane, nor were the MCC's Laws the first rule book on cricket. Sometimes it is the document that best expresses an idea, rather than the one that takes the earliest crack at it, that makes the more persuasive case for inclusion. Ultimately, this is a book about documents that have made Britain what it is today, a national focus that must automatically shut out concepts that, while conceived by Britons, are not primarily or exclusively rooted in British society. British inventions that have shaped the world really need a book of their own. An attempt to do them all justice here would only blur the purpose of the compilation.

This is an attempt to tell the history of Britain through its seminal documents. It is not, of course, the whole story, any more than the history of a nation can be told purely through the lives of its monarchs, or the tales of its writers, or the

body-counts from its battlefields. There are, therefore, limits to this approach. For instance, serfdom withered and died during the Middle Ages. It was not abolished by any single statute. Sometimes it is the absence of a document that changed the course of British history. The freedom of the press was not created by the stroke of a legislative diktat. Rather, it began to take shape after Parliament's failure to renew the Licensing Act in 1694. Thereafter, press censorship was primarily regulated by the libel laws (although, famously, in the theatre, the Lord Chamberlain endeavoured to keep a lid on smut and sedition between 1737 and 1968). Nonetheless, for a nation that prides itself on its empiricism and 'muddling through' attitude, it is striking how elemental some statues have proved.

Finally, it is important to recognize that, despite centuries' worth of destructive wars, fires, deliberate desecration, ignorance and absent-mindedness, we are still in possession of so much of our archival inheritance. Not all nations are equally blessed. Britain's good fortune in this respect owes much to the actions of a few individuals. For instance, many of the most important manuscripts to have survived from Anglo-Saxon England might have been lost following the dissolution of the monasteries and the political traumas of the early seventeenth century, had they not been collected and preserved by two men. One of them was Matthew Parker (1504–75), archbishop of Canterbury, who bequeathed his manuscript library to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The other was the seventeenth-century MP, Sir Robert Cotton (1571–1631).

Having failed to interest the state in establishing an academy 'for the study of antiquity and history', Cotton began buying as many historic documents as he could afford for the library that he built for Cotton House, his four-storey home adjoining the House of Commons. Politicians as well as antiquarians were given free rein to examine his collection, finding numerous historical precedents with which to challenge the increasingly arbitrary rule of King Charles I. Cognizant of the danger contained in the manuscripts, the king had the library impounded and Cotton briefly imprisoned. Upon his release, he was denied access to his own collection and was still petitioning for readmission when he died, in May 1631, apparently of grief at his library's fate. Seemingly, Charles I – as much as Sir Thomas Fairfax – was fully aware of the potency of old documents.

Yet Cotton's irreplaceable collection – which included not just Magna Carta but also the Lindisfarne Gospels, *Beowulf* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* – remained intact. In 1701 his grandson, fearful of what might happen when his 'two illiterate' grandchildren inherited it, sold it to the nation. It was the first time that an Act of

Parliament secured books and manuscripts for the benefit of the public. Cotton's collection is now in the safe care of the British Library. Truly, we owe a profound debt of gratitude not just to Cotton and Parker but to all those men and women in private houses, churches, libraries, universities and museums who across the centuries dedicated themselves to preserving manuscripts for posterity, often when others struggled to see the point. It is thanks to their efforts that we can examine the documents that shaped a nation.

I

THE DARK AGES



1ST CENTURY A.D.
THE VINDOLANDA TABLETS



ROMAN EXPERIENCES OF LIFE IN BRITANNIA

Britannia was a province of the Roman Empire from the first to the fifth century AD, as long a period as separates the English Civil War from the present day. Yet what do we really know about this long period of Roman rule? Thankfully, accounts such as that by the great historian Tacitus (c. AD 55–120) have survived. For all their contemporary propaganda and rhetorical passages coloured with artistic licence, they tell us much about how Britain was conquered. However, what happened there during the following 300 years has been more a matter for archaeologists.

It is primarily from the remains of its desecrated monuments and hidden treasure that a picture of Roman Britain has emerged. This is because after the Roman legions departed in AD 410, a 'Dark Age' descended during which neglect, adaptation and outright destruction did so much to erase testimonies from the land that Romans thought of as the end of the known world.

Intricate floor mosaics and indoor plumbing provide evidence of domestic comfort in the villas of the wealthy and the influential (by comparison, such plumbing was beyond the grasp of even an eighteenth-century British aristocrat). The remains of forts and cities offer a sense of Rome's ambitious military and civic planning. The network of roads provided an infrastructure so valuable that, resurfaced, parts of it still connect the country nineteen centuries later.

Following Julius Caesar's abortive expeditions in 55 and 54 BC, in AD 43 the emperor Claudius launched an invasion of the province that the Romans had named Britannia. Although their grip was briefly imperilled during the rebellion of Queen Boudicca of the Iceni tribe in AD 60–61, the invaders clung on and proceeded to consolidate their hold, either by pitting their military might against the hostile British tribes or by bribing the biddable ones into collaboration. Leaving Ireland well alone, the legionaries moved into southern Wales and pushed up into northern Scotland, where their general, Agricola, defeated the Caledonian tribes in

AD 84. Thereafter, the Romans fell back to a tighter west–east defensive line roughly between the River Clyde and the Firth of Forth. However, after the emperor Hadrian visited Britain in AD 122, that boundary was redrawn to the south by the construction of his great seventy-three-mile wall running from the Solway Firth to the Tyne. This northern perimeter of Roman rule has furnished some of the most important insights into the lives of the conquerors.

Ironically, the really poignant narratives are not the testaments intended to endure but rather those consciously dumped in the rubbish pit. During the 1970s, discarded writing tablets began to be unearthed from the site of the Roman fort of Vindolanda, west of Hexham. These were, for the most part, ink inscriptions written on the smooth surfaces of thin leaves of wood, between one and three millimetres thick and postcard-sized. Although they are charred or broken fragments the damp environment has, remarkably, helped preserve them over the better part of two millennia. The earliest appear to date from around AD 90, when Vindolanda was already a fort but before Hadrian's defensive wall system was built nearby.

Many of the writing tablets, now held in the British Museum, are examples of Roman army bureaucracy: receipts for provisions and other commercial transactions, inventories, work assignments, requests for leave and appeals for clemency. From one report, we learn that the fort was garrisoned by soldiers of the First Cohort of Tungrians. The nominal strength was 752 men, but many of them were in fact posted elsewhere. At other times, it was garrisoned by the Ninth Cohort of Batavians. The Tungrians came from the area

The Romans in Britain

55 BC Julius Caesar launches the first Roman expedition to Britain, landing near Deal.

54 BC Julius Caesar's second expedition to Britain.

AD 43 The emperor Claudius orders a full-scale invasion of Britain.

AD 47–50 Londinium (London) founded.

AD 51 Revolt by the British chieftain Caratacus is crushed and Caratacus is paraded through Rome.

AD 61 Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni, revolts and sacks Colchester, London and St Albans before being defeated.

AD 84 The Battle of Mons Graupius during the invasion of Caledonia (Scotland) by Agricola, governor of Britannia.

AD 122 Work begins on the construction of Hadrian's Wall.

AD 142 The Antonine Wall is constructed between the Forth and the Clyde. It is abandoned by AD 164.

AD 216 Roman Britain is administratively divided into two: Britannia Superior (the South) and Britannia Inferior (the North).

AD *c.*270 Construction begins of the 'Saxon Shore' of coastal forts to repel Germanic pirates.

AD 306 Constantine is proclaimed Roman emperor at York.

AD 369 Mounting numbers of attacks by Picts and Irish-Scots are repelled by the Roman general Theodosius.

AD 396 The Roman general Stilicho assumes authority in Britain and organizes a defence against attacks by Picts, Irish and Saxons.

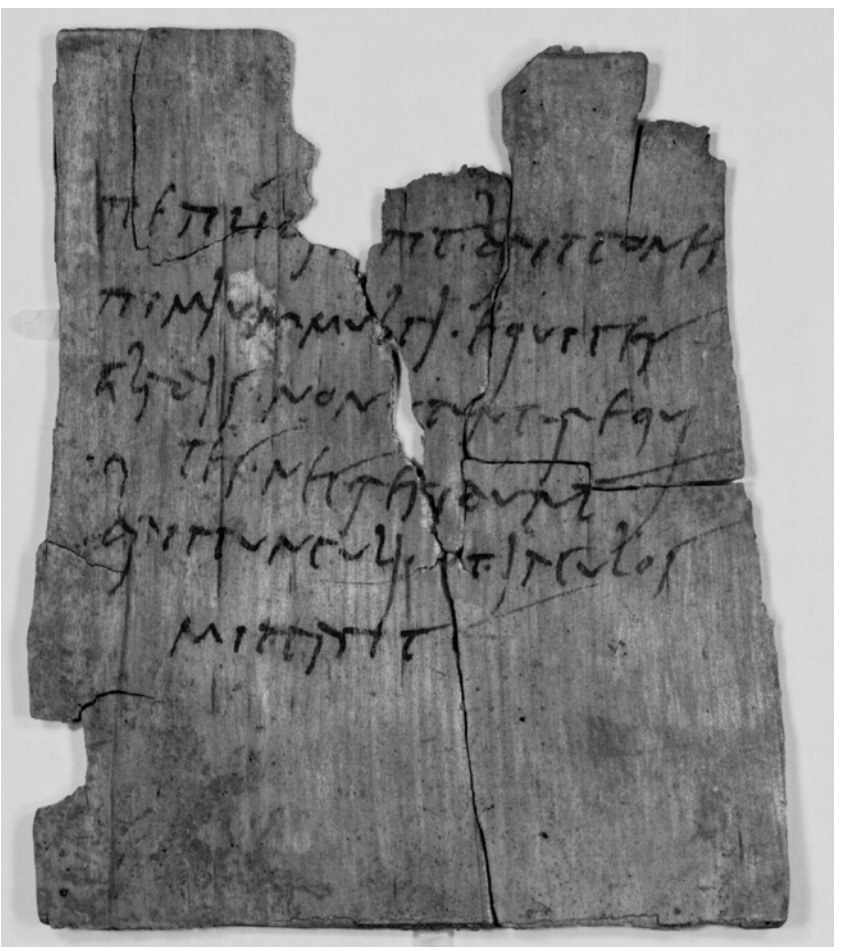
AD 402 The Sixth Victrix Legion is withdrawn from Britain.

AD 407 The remaining legion, the Second Augusta, is withdrawn from Britain.

AD 410 The emperor Honorius confirms the Roman departure from Britain.

around the River Meuse and the Batavians from the mouth of the Rhine and the Scheldt, which makes these Roman soldiers, in modern-day terms, Germans and Dutch.

Such documents provide a sense of where Vindolanda's troops came from, how they were organized and even what they were eating. However, they also provide many more personal details. The extent of literacy is evident from the fact that some of the letters are written by – rather than about – slaves. There are the familiar gripes and expressions of lofty condescension voiced by occupying forces down the centuries. Their relations are either being tapped for useful presents or badgered to send money to cover accrued debts. They are also chided for not writing more often. There is the grim reality of being posted far from home. One soldier refers



The writing on this tablet from Vindolanda, dating from c. AD 97–103, reads in translation: 'the Britons are unprotected by armour. There are very many cavalry. The cavalry do not use swords nor do the wretched Brits mount in order to throw javelins.'

to the natives, the Brittones, by a derisory nickname, Brittunculi, which, roughly translated, means 'Wretched Brits'.

It was not just at javelin distance that Roman soldiers could expect interaction with the natives. Even after Hadrian's Wall was constructed as a heavily fortified barrier, it was also a customs post for cross-border trade, suggesting continuing dealings with those who lived on the far side. Nonetheless, any attempt by Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius, to re-establish the Clyde–Forth frontier along the turf ramparts of his Antonine Wall had been abandoned by AD 164, not much more than twenty years after its construction.

Thereafter, while Roman civilization appeared entrenched in the English South and the Midlands, the evidence suggests there were recurring revolts in the North. This necessitated the maintenance of a Roman army in Britain so powerful that it became a destabilizing force in imperial politics, nominating its own – often rival – claimants as rulers. It was, for instance, at York that Constantine was proclaimed emperor in AD 306.

The breakdown of direct authority from Rome was matched by the deteriorating situation elsewhere along the fringes of imperial territories. Troops that ought to have remained in Britain were transferred to the continent, both as part of the internecine struggle for political supremacy between rival power-brokers and in increasingly desperate efforts to hold back the Barbarian onslaught along the empire's contracting Germanic frontiers.

In Britain, Rome's enemies seized their chance. Picts attacked from the north while the defences of the southern English coast were probed by Saxon pirates. Nevertheless, Britannia was still essentially an imperial province when, in AD 410, the Visigoths sacked Rome. In that year an appeal was sent from Britannia to the emperor Honorius requesting help. From Ravenna, where his court had removed itself, Honorius replied that he no longer had any soldiers to spare and that, consequently, Britannia would have to fend for herself. Although he may have meant it as a temporary expedient, the decision ensured the collapse of Roman Britain.