Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138)

Born in AD 76, Hadrian became emperor in AD 117 and ruled the Roman Empire for the next 21 years. He is considered to have been an extremely effective emperor. Hadrian carried out administrative reforms, as well as extensive building programmes taking place throughout the empire under his reign.

Unlike previous emperors, Hadrian was a keen traveller, and conducted a full tour of the provinces of the empire, which meant that he was away from Rome for years at a time. He had no desire to expand the empire, as earlier emperors had done, and decided instead to consolidate the frontiers. In fact, these had not changed much over the previous 50 years, although it did involve abandoning some of the territory only recently conquered by the previous emperor, Trajan. In many places, rivers and deserts were used to form the frontiers, but in others he built walls and other forms of linear barriers. The remains of the frontiers he established can still be seen today on the Rhine and Danube River, in Africa and in Britain.

Hadrian visited Britain in AD 122 as part of his tour round the empire, and construction of the Wall started soon afterwards. Hadrian had an interest in architecture and may even have had a hand in designing it, but he never saw the completed wall.

Replica head of the Emperor Hadrian