



## THE ROMANS

### 7. LETTERS FROM VINDOLANDA

JULIA: I'm at Vindolanda in the north of England. It's a Roman fort and village near Hadrian's Wall.

In 1973 archaeologists found something astonishing here. It wasn't gold, or coins...but letters and notes written on thin bits of wood, which the Romans often used instead of paper. They were written by people who lived here nearly two thousand years ago, and what makes them unique are the details of everyday life written by the people at the time.

The letters include birthday party invitations, requests for money, and even homework! Reading letters and notes like these helps us to imagine the lives of the people living here. Like the archers who had come all the way from their home in sunny Syria to serve in the army in a cold and rainy Britain...

BARATES: We fought in many wars across Europa. We fought Boudica and the Iceni. We fought the Picts at the Antonine Wall. But this is the worst enemy of all...the rain. It's relentless. I prayed for the rain to stop, but to no avail. The local tribes don't like us much.

VOICE OFF SCREEN: Go back to Rome!

BARATES: I wish. I'm not even from Rome! I want a horse like the equitatae, but I just can't get the hang of horse-riding.

JULIA: One Roman invention that didn't stand the test of time were their saddles. There were no stirrups to put your feet in, so the riders weren't very steady.

BARATES: We're mostly auxiliary troops up here from across Europe, Syria and North Africa. We're paid less than the legionaries but we're no less brave or skilled. It's cold here, but there is one thing that warms my heart, Regina. She is from the local village, and my ray of sunshine, no matter what the weather.

JULIA: In fact, we know people from different parts of the Roman Empire met and married near Hadrian's wall from stone carvings found nearby. The tablets at Vindolanda also show that some Roman soldiers actually brought their wives and children with them to Britain. Just imagine what it must have been like leaving Rome to follow your husband to the far reaches of the Empire.

ADRIANA: Dear Aunty, ever since we left Rome for Britain, things haven't quite been the same. On the way to the fort, we stopped off to watch gladiators at the arena in York, but I am really not a fan.

ADRIANA: So what's that man doing with the net and the trident?

HUSBAND: That's the retiarius. He's trying to catch the man in the net.

ADRIANA: And who's the man in the funny fish helmet?

HUSBAND: That's the murmillo.

ADRIANA: Now we've arrived at the fort, he is out all the time, gets back late and is just exhausted.

Don't stand there dear. You'll get blood on the mosaic.

He says he's having a tough time, but I think he just misses the warm weather back home. Which reminds me, can you send some woollen socks?

Don't get me wrong, there are things to do here...there're board games. But once you've played ludus latrunculorum a hundred times, it loses its appeal! And you do meet lots of people from interesting places. There're Tungrians from Gaul, Asturians from Spain and Hamians from Syria!

It's nearly 17 December and you know what that means! Saturnalia festival! It is my favourite time of year where I can really let my hair down and party! I've bought all the presents and the decorations.

JULIA: Sound familiar? Many people think the Saturnalia festival and the tradition of giving presents at the end of December led to the way Christmas is celebrated.

ADRIANA: I'm not sure I like the custom of allowing slaves to say and do what they want for the week...

It's okay, I'll do it!