

## Late Roman Army - Nick Marshall April 23

With speaker illness prompting a change of programme, April's meeting saw a return visit by historian Nick Marshall. This time he brought us some of his intriguing collection of replica Roman military kit to illustrate a talk on the '*Late Roman Army*.' The 'Late' Roman period in Britain roughly covering the 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The kit represented items carried by a typical Roman soldier during a period when the Roman Empire still encompassed most of the Mediterranean lands. Rather than in purpose-built barracks and camps most soldiers in the field army at this stage were billeted within the houses of local communities. The majority of *Late* Roman army units were based in the north of England-around Hadrian's wall, the Yorkshire coast as well as along the south-east coast. During this time there were still over 25,000 troops based in Britain. The grave excavation of a Roman soldier found in Leicester in 2017 has added more insight into the Roman occupation of Leicester. This grave dates from c.380 A.D. roughly the same period as the Trojan mosaic (c.380-390 A.D.) found in Rutland a few years previously. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century a substantial contingent of Roman soldiers were being moved around Europe to fight barbarians and Huns advancing westwards.

Nick showed us some items soldiers wore; trousers (German origin) footed, woven decorated tunics (Persian style), belts and buckles, torques (neck medals), fringed cloaks, a Hungarian (Pernolian) cap. He also mentioned that Emperor Diocletian had listed British products being exported from Britain around this time; chiefly hunting dogs, felt raincoat.

He explained that Roman soldiers marched and fought in groups of 8 (called files). They might wear greaves (hinged metal leg armour), helmets (6 pieces of steel stitched together with padded liners), Mail (iron) shirts (weighing 23lbs+) and scale armour made from bronze. When marching they would be expected to carry curved rectangular shields with semi-spherical boss centres to protect the hand.

Nick was keen to demonstrate some of the hand weapons the romans used including bows/arrows, staff slings, crossbows (firing arrows not bolts), hastas (spears), Sparthas (swords), Securis (axe), Plumbata (throwing arrows), francisca (a combat/throwing weapon from whence comes the name:France) and strings of caltrop spikes.. We are now looking forward to May's meeting which is a talk on the Lancaster Bomber by Patrick Geary which has been moved to May 15<sup>th</sup> to avoid the coronation weekend.

Mark Temple