

# An Eye for the Past at DOVER MUSEUM

7 October until 26 November

SHEILA R. COPE

THIS EXHIBITION comprised archaeological reconstructions, mainly paintings in gouache, by Peter Connolly. Since 1975 he has written and illustrated more than ten books on subjects relating to Greek and Romans. It was fascinating to recognise originals of posters which appear in the Museum corridor and which also inspired exhibits in the White Cliffs Experience.

Peter's work is exact and detailed, relying on evidence provided by latest archaeological research across Europe. Intense earth-colours of amber, turquoise and green, characterisation of individuals and excellent sense of perspective raised these pictures far above conventional text-book illustrations. Each stood alone.

Since many materials do not normally survive the centuries, Peter has also taken a leading part in making modern replicas of ancient equipment to establish its practicality. For example, there was a "Roman army" saddle of wood and leather. Horses were the size of large ponies and riders vaulted on to them as stirrups had not been invented.

Romans were imitators, especially in military matters. Here were illustrated Roman soldiers in phalanx copied from the Macedonians and wearing armour and using weapons based on those originated by the Celts. Legionaries (Roman citizens, well paid and on fixed-term contracts) provided the

professional backbone of the army; that *was* a new concept. Forts and camps such as the one at Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall were always constructed to a set pattern and each man knew his specific task. Although military training was unrelenting – three marches a month, fully equipped and covering thirty-six kilometres in five hours – most soldiers spent more time on construction work or other skills than on fighting. When Roman armies were defeated it was usually because their normal strategies could not be applied. Nor did they shrink from genocide as they sought to break the morale of the Dacians in A.D.101.

Many scenes taken from civilian life were included: a Celt buried with his dismantled chariot, a dinner party held in a room with plastered walls not unlike our own Painted House and picture-panels such as those of the Samnite House at Herculaneum. Daily activities in Pompeii were also brought back to life together with nightmarish reminders of Medusa and Cyclops.

But if in primary school you wondered how it felt to be a Greek soldier cooped up inside the wooden horse, think again. The Trojans pulled down part of their city walls to admit what they thought was a tribute to Athena, goddess of the temple, and *then* the Greeks returned, poured in through the gap and sacked Troy.

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