

EBORACVM

The Village

Graham Clews

EBORACUM: THE VILLAGE

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**To Marie, who gamely plodded over hill and dale (literally),
helping explore nearly every Roman ruin in Northern England.**

Eboracvm, The Village

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Notes

Certain words or place names have been typed in italics;
please refer to
Appendix II or III, respectively, for modern definitions

See the Appendix IV, page 447, for the use of the
Roman numeral: VIII

Foreword

 A fact based historical novel often uses a number of unfamiliar names, both for people and places. The *Eboracum* trilogy is no exception; and at first these names may be hard to pick up on and follow. In the interest of historical accuracy they must be used, however, so the reader is asked to tough it out.

Where the 'double barrelled' names are found (or to put it another way, names of three syllables or more), these are the names of real people taken from the pages of history. The ones that are of two syllables or less (for the most part) are invented characters, though they do have Celtic and Roman origins. In order to help, a brief list of the "real" characters whose names appear in this book can be found below, along with a brief description of who they were.

As to historic place names, the first time the reader finds them they are printed in italics; the applicable modern name can be found in Appendix III.

Historic Characters:

Cartimandua: the ruler of the tribal area known as Brigantia, and a "client queen" of Rome (sometimes shortened in the book to Catey);

Quintus Petilius Cerialis (senator and general): Governor of Britannia from AD 71–74.

Velloctatus: second husband of Cartimandua, and former shield bearer to Venutius.

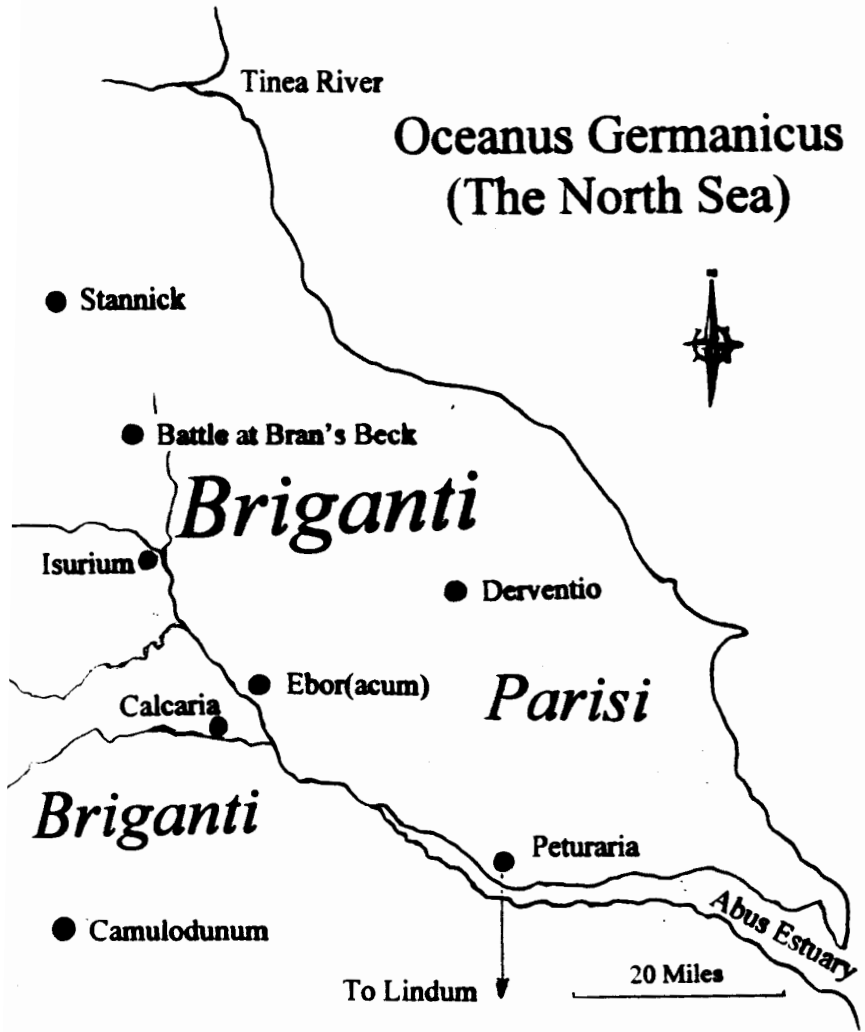
Venutius: first husband of Cartimandua, and likely a Brigantian king in his own right.

Titus Flavius Vespasian(us): Roman emperor from AD 69-79.

Author's Comment:

There is a certain amount of profane language in the book. Some people might find it coarse. If such words offend, then I apologize; I do not, however, make apology for their use. It is not gratuitous. The reader will find that such language is employed almost exclusively by the soldiers and warriors in the book, and then merely for emphasis. I spent sixteen years in the Canadian Armed Forces (Reserve) and, quite bluntly, this is the way soldiers talk. My research finds that soldiers and warriors two thousand years ago used to cuss with just as much colour. To use their actual words, however, (such as *cunno*, *futuo*, *verpa* etc.) would mean nothing, so modern equivalents have been substituted.

North East England (Yorkshire)



Prologue



"Sir!"

"What now?"

"There, down the road. I think it's the man himself..."

Gaius Sabinius Trebonius swore and stepped from the shelter of the leather tent module. A large puddle had pooled by the opening and he carefully hopped across; which was a pointless gesture, for his boots were soaked and his feet felt like iced granite. Shading his eyes against the drizzle, he squinted back at the sodden battlefield and cursed again. There could be no question: Cerialis! Two riders led a small troop of cavalry along the mud splattered road, each bearing a sodden standard. The general followed on a large grey horse, half hidden in a gaggle of red cloaks and crested helmets that could only belong to staff officers. The escort trailed behind—a full company—each man hunched in the saddle and doubtless shivering under the endless downpour.

"Form the men up, and do it fast," Gaius muttered, and glanced skyward. Thunderous black clouds scudded south on a gusting wind; and while the rain was no longer heavy, it lashed hard at the skin and stung the eyes. *Surely, sometime soon, the damn weather would change...*

His gaze returned to the road, and the carnage that lay beyond. A charnel stink hung in the air, a lingering fog that drifted across the battlefield on the smoke of a hundred sputtering pyres. Dark figures flitted in the dawn gloom, stripping the dead of salvage. The sharp

odour of death hung everywhere despite the rain and a battle less than two days old. At least the flies weren't swarming, Gaius supposed; and the stench wasn't thick enough to choke a man. *Though a hot sun would have been warm and dry...*

The clatter of running feet echoed from behind the tent as the centurio barked orders to form ranks, and Gaius turned back to the bridge. He paced over to the jagged opening torn in the middle and stared down at the current rushing below. The thick, plank decking had been ripped away as ordered, leaving a large gap. A brave man, riding an exceptionally fine horse, might clear it at a gallop; though few would be willing to place coin on his chances—or do it themselves. The milk-brown soup of the swollen *Nabalia* was a torrent that would swallow, in a trice, the fool who failed. Which was what headquarters intended, Gaius supposed, and sighed.

As an engineer, he found the order distasteful: take a perfectly good bridge and destroy the damned thing! It was a total waste, and not just for the damage done. In a day or two some poor bugger would doubtless be rebuilding the structure, and he'd willingly place coin on *that* as to who it would be!

Damn Civilis, and damn his craven refusal to meet face to face with the man who had beaten him...

"About ready, sir."

The centurio stood in front of the tent module, seemingly amused by the fluster of the general's unexpected appearance. The smug old bugger was called Rufus, Gaius recalled—*which was easy enough to remember—the name was the same as his own horse.*

"Is it him?"

"Yes, sir." Rufus offered a gap-toothed grin, framed by a helmet that dripped rain onto a *lorica* that wept streaks of rust. "Not many with him."

"Just himself is enough," Gaius muttered and turned impatiently back to the tent module. Near on ten years had passed since seeing service with the general, and the man likely wouldn't know him from a thousand other tribunes. *Not that he cared...*

Quintus Petilius Cerialis raised a hand to halt the small column of cavalry as it neared the bridge, and rode onto the deck accompanied

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by a single rider. Gaius blinked through rain soaked lashes: the second man was the Eighth Augusta's *primus*, who stopped short at the tent and dismounted. The general continued on and reined in a few paces short of the gaping hole, where he sat staring at the bloated river. Rufus moved cautiously forward and grasped the horse's bridle, his face showing concern at the animal's nervousness.

Cerialis seemed unperturbed, and for the moment Gaius stood motionless in the whipping wind studying the general's face. A decade had hardly changed the man. His mouth was drawn tight above a square, soldier's jaw that was thrust forward against the weather. The cheeks carried more flesh than he remembered, and were beginning to jowl. Oddly enough, the long, patrician nose showed the greatest change. It had been broken, and was shorter and flatter; it gave him the look of a fighter. Gaius wondered if the man's hair remained thick under his helmet. It had been black and curly a decade ago at Lindum, much as his was now. Perversely, he hoped the showy helmet covered nothing more than a balding dome.

"So what do you see, young Trebo?" Cerialis broke the silence without turning his gaze from the river. "Yourself in a few more years?"

Gaius winced at the name; he'd always hated it. *Young Trebo!* Yet it showed the man did remember. "Perhaps, sir."

"It's been a long time. What, a decade or so?"

"About that. When the Iceni woman..." Gaius began then broke off, choosing another track. "The province of Britannia. *Lindum.*"

"Hah! The Iceni woman! Trebonius, you have the tact of a wart-hog." Cerialis's mouth twisted in a cold, humourless smile and he finally turned to look at Gaius. "You find it difficult to speak her name? I don't, and with far more reason. Boudicca! The fey bitch whipped my backside halfway across the province. Yours too, I might add. We're both lucky to be alive. Not many who where there can say that, hey?"

Gaius nodded but said nothing. The failure was long in his past: a battle lost, and nothing more. There was no gain in scratching old wounds. He'd been a tribune in the Ninth Hispana back then, barely in his twenties. Two thousand men were lost, and not all of them dead when Cerialis fled the field with what remained of the legion's small cavalry contingent. Gaius flushed, despite the cold. There had been no

choice, of course. The Ninth was overwhelmed and ill prepared: strung out in column of march, and struck hard, with no warning.

Yet there should have been.

And who was to blame?

General Quintus Petilius Cerialis!

Gaius sighed. The general had survived the slaughter tainted by the stink of failure; but in the end, he had not been badly burned. When you have the connections...

"By the way, congratulations."

The general's praise caught Gaius by surprise. "Sir?"

"A silver spear and a gold standard. Not bad. Not bad at all."

"The wrong place at the right time," Gaius murmured, at first flattered and making light of decorations earned over a decade of campaigning. Then, as his mind turned the words over, he realized the general must have made inquiries. Was this meeting no accident? That could spell good fortune—or, conversely, nothing but trouble.

"No such thing as the wrong place, Trebonius," Cerialis murmured, his eyes once more on the gap in the bridge. "Destiny and fortune are forged by a man and his gods. Don't make light of them."

Gaius muttered agreement: *though a good dose of influence doesn't hurt, either*. Then he smiled to himself. Perhaps the older man was correct. What else was influence other than a man's good fortune? And where else did good fortune—or luck—come from, but the gods? Cerialis had been blessed with more luck than a grey-haired gladiator. On more than one of his bumbled campaigns, the general had damned near snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Yet each time he'd been saved by the gods; perhaps the same gods who had given him Emperor Vespasian's daughter as wife. Then Gaius frowned. Perhaps fortune did not always smile. The woman had died last year...

As if sensing Gaius's thoughts, Cerialis chuckled. "Of course, who you know *does* count a peck more than a poor man's prayer. A senator here, a consul there; and an occasional emperor don't hurt, either." He turned in his saddle and grinned at Gaius, a glint in his dark eyes. "There can be advantage in knowing the right people, young Trebo."

Gaius couldn't stop the look of dismay that crossed his features. The comment was rife with inference. He glanced cautiously at Cerialis,

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and the general roared with laughter.

"Don't worry, Trebo, I'm not asking you to hoist your *pteruges*. What I have in mind is of mutual advantage." The general slid from the horse and removed his helmet, hanging it on the saddle's cross-pommel. *The bugger had a thick mop of curly, iron-grey hair!*

"Sir? The horse?" Rufus was left holding the bridle, clearly unsure what to do with animal.

"Have him held back of the tent module, son," Cerialis said, and pulled his damp cloak around his shoulders for whatever warmth it might offer.

Gaius smiled at the general's choice of words: '*son!*' The centurio had to be in his mid forties, and it was questionable as to which one was the older. Rufus smiled too as he led the horse from the bridge. The slow clop of the animal's hooves rang loud on the planking as Gaius returned to his musing. Was Cerialis here to look over the preparations for a making a truce; or had he come to speak with Gaius Sabinus Trebonius? *Dammit, he hadn't seen the man for ten years; yet here he was, and making enquiries...*

"I asked the primus who'd been tasked for this foolishness," Cerialis gestured vaguely toward the jagged gap, his tone friendly enough, "and he mentioned your name. I thought it might be you. How did you get mixed with this mongrel legion?."

"I happened to be at *Ravenna* when it was being raised." Gaius smiled ruefully, recalling the chaos of a year ago. Troops were desperately needed all across the empire as yet another general made a bid for the purple. A new legion, The Second Adiutrix, was being raised from the fleet at *Ravenna*. He was returning from *Judaea* on leave, and had the misfortune to be part of a small flotilla diverted north to *Ravenna*. "They were short of experienced officers, and so..."

"We're always short of experienced officers," Cerialis grumbled, and glanced sharply at Gaius. "How long since you've been home?"

"I don't know," he shrugged, as if indifferent. "About two years? Two and a half?"

"Hmm." For a moment Cerialis was thoughtful, then he grinned. "Miss the wife?"

"*Helvia?*" Gaius grinned back, and gave an honest answer. "Not

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