

# **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ONLINE ARCHIVE OF GREEN REPORTS ON EXCAVATIONS IN AND AROUND THE LEGIONARY FORTRESS AT EXETER, 1971-1986**

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## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LEGIONARY FORTRESS AT EXETER**

The Roman conquest of Britain began in AD 43 with landings and campaigns in SE Britain. There are no clear historical records of when the military occupation of Devon and Cornwall began, but the archaeological evidence points to a date around the middle of the AD 50s. A network of forts and fortlets, almost all of them discovered since the 1970s, was established in Devon and Cornwall. At Exeter, a legionary fortress was established on a spur overlooking what was probably the lowest crossing point on the River Exe. The fortress had an area of about 16.6ha or 41 acres measured across its ramparts; it contained accommodation for the Second Augustan Legion (*legio II Augusta*) with a complement of about 5,000 men. During the last decade, a possible fort has been found immediately to the NE of the fortress and a large courtyard building to the NW; a large defended enclosure, possibly a works depot (or even an early town) has been excavated at St Loye's, 2.6km SE of the fortress on the road to Topsham, where a fort and other remains of military occupation have also been recognised recently. Fenced and ditched compounds SE of the fortress were explored from 1973 onwards, and reports on them are included in this online resource.

Exeter and Usk are the most extensively explored fortresses of the Neronian period (AD 54-68) in Britain. More is known of the plan at Exeter: the excavations at Usk have been mostly confined to a few large areas, whereas at Exeter there have also been numerous smaller excavations over the last seventy years which have allowed much of the fortress plan to be reconstructed in outline. Internationally, the Exeter fortress is of fundamental significance. Only at Vindonissa in Switzerland is there another fortress where so much is known of its plan during the Tiberian to early Flavian periods (AD 14-79). Another aspect of the military occupation at Exeter which is exceptional, even in an international context, is the number of satellite sites which surround the fortress. In the Neronian period, Exeter was one of the principal focuses of the Roman military administration in Britain.

## **THE PLAN OF THE LEGIONARY FORTRESS**

This online resource reproduces a booklet (Allan 2005) which is an invaluable introduction to what is known about the plan of the legionary fortress and its buildings and history. It includes (at p. 11) a conjectural plan of the fortress, the most recent distillation of numerous excavations and other observations analysed in great detail by the late C.G. Henderson over several decades (for earlier versions, see

Henderson 1988, 1991, 1996). The plan is based on metrical analysis and on parallels provided by later fortresses, particularly the short-lived fortress of Inchtuthil in Scotland, built a little over two decades later than Exeter, and the long-lived fortresses at Chester, built in the early AD 70s, and Caerleon, to which the Second Augustan Legion moved from Exeter in c. AD 75. Henderson's plan is undoubtedly the best that can be done with the available evidence and provides a model which can be tested against future discoveries.

There are some problems, however. The plan envisages 12 blocks each consisting of six barracks, whereas a full legion in the early Neronian period might only have required 10 x 6 barracks. It is also possible that the fortress faced NE (as originally suggested in Bidwell 1979, fig. 2), which would allow the *praetorium* to have been placed behind the *principia* as was usual. Although there was never a standard fortress plan, the date of the Exeter fortress might still have lain in the period before the regularity of planning seen at Inchtuthil, for example, had been achieved. These uncertainties by no means detract from the value of the Henderson model. They rather serve to underline the importance of Henderson's diligent approach in seizing every opportunity (and sometimes creating opportunities) to record even the smallest scrap of the fortress remains.

#### THE ONLINE ARCHIVE OF GREEN REPORTS

The so-called Green Reports were named after the distinctive paper covers in which they were bound. They were compiled from ten to twenty years after the excavations were completed and represent Level III archives, broadly following the recommendations of the Frere and Cunliffe reports on post-excavation processes and subsequent guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment and English Heritage (for the development of these policies, see Jones *et al.* 2001). In most instances, they were based on preliminary phasing undertaken soon after the excavations were completed, which provided the basis for the chronologies used in *Roman Finds From Exeter* and a supplementary paper in the *Journal of Roman Pottery Studies* (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991; 1992). All the categories of finds were included from the 1971-80 excavations in the first of these publications. Only summaries of the pottery have been published for the subsequent excavations down to 1990. The Green Reports include the quantification and typology of all the pottery from the military levels (by P. Bidwell, N. Holbrook and G. Langman; samian identifications were by G. Dannell and mortaria identifications by K. Hartley). Much of the pottery of this period was displaced into later deposits and that material is not listed. Identifications of the coins from the military levels by N. Shiel are included in the reports. The glass, small finds, and ceramic and other building materials are not listed; they doubtless include much of significance. Also excluded are the scientific reports, though the animal bones from sites excavated in 1971-75 were the subject of a landmark study by M. Maltby (1979).

The Green Reports were to have been the basis of a comprehensive account of the legionary fortress by J. Salvatore and C.G. Henderson in the *Exeter Archaeological Reports* series. Unfortunately, by the mid-1990s the resources were not available to prepare this account. C.G. Henderson died in 2001 after a long illness during which he was able to complete other important studies of Exeter's archaeology. J. Salvatore had previously moved on to other employment in archaeology. Following a number of difficult years, in 2012 Exeter Archaeology (formerly the Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit) was closed down, some four decades after it was established. There is now no clear path towards the publication of a definitive account of the fortress excavations. As part of a larger project to audit and secure the digital archives of pre-1990 archaeological investigations in Exeter and to raise awareness of the results of those works, English Heritage has funded the online publication of the relevant Green Reports, which is intended to serve two main purposes. First, it presents much of the detailed structural evidence that served as a basis for previous accounts of the fortress (e.g. Bidwell 1980 and Henderson 1988) and its finds (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 1992). Secondly, it is an enormous resource for future research on the development of the fortress and its satellite sites.

This online publication, however, is not a substitute for a comprehensive account of the fortress where narratives of the structural sequences are integrated with evidence from artefact and scientific studies. The Exeter fortress is of international importance and is a key site in understanding how Britain was pacified in the early Roman period. Its full publication should be regarded as a priority for Romano-British studies and for frontier studies across the early Roman empire.

## USING THE ARCHIVE

All the reports have the same structure. After a number of preliminaries, Section 1 consists of a site narrative and conclusions which summarise the structures found and briefly assess how they fit into the plan and development of the fortress.

Section 2 sets out the detailed archaeological evidence. The contexts are arranged in groups which represent archaeological events, usually major elements – for example, defensive ditches or buildings – or distinct activities such as the deposition of levelling or demolition layers. Most groups are divided into sub-groups which describe different stages of an event, for example, the cut, silting and final filling of a ditch or alterations to structures or their partial or complete rebuildings.

The stratigraphical relationships of individual contexts, groups and sub-groups are shown in a series of **matrices**. The position of individual contexts and their groups can be found by using the **group/matrix** index; a separate listing gives the **context descriptions**. There are also two other indices: a **general context index** giving the context type and references to the overall plans, and an **archive section index** which lists the location of contexts on sections. In some of the shorter reports some of these indexes are combined.

Section 3 lists the pottery by context, giving weights and EREs (estimated rim equivalents) and with cross-references to vessels published in Holbrook and Bidwell 1991 and 1992. Then there are coin lists and occasionally a note on other finds. The final item is a photographic index.

All the complete reports are illustrated with a comprehensive range of plans, sections and photographs. The location of the sites in the modern topography of Exeter is always shown clearly. For their relationship to the fortress plan, it is necessary to refer to John Allan's *An Introduction to the Legionary Fortress at Exeter* (plan on p. 11 and the plan on the back cover); plans with keys to the locations of the sites also appear in Henderson 1988, fig. 5.3 and fig. 5.1 (*recte* 5.4) and Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, fig.1.

### THE CONTENTS OF THE ARCHIVE

The following table summarises the contents of the Green Reports (references to Allan Area F and Blocks 7, 11, etc. are to the fortress plan on p. 11 of Allan's booklet). Note that the reports on Valiant Soldier 1973-4 and 45-6 North Street 1974 are incomplete.

Date	Rept no.	Description
1971-1972	93.34	<b>Goldsmith Street.</b> Parts of two barracks in the NW part of the <i>retentura</i> arranged <i>per strigas</i> (Allan, Block 11) and two adjacent buildings (barracks?).
1972-1973	93.35	<b>Trichay Street.</b> Possible prehistoric round houses. <i>Fabrica</i> , parts of two barracks and possible officers' quarters with a separate house (?). See Allan Area F.
1972-1973	93.15	<b>196-7 High Street.</b> Several phases of one or more granaries represented by pile-driven posts, SE of Trichay Street.
1973	94.09	<b>Friar's Walk.</b> Three possible cremation pits and a well, 320m SE of the S corner of the fortress.
1973-1974	94.11	<b>Valiant Soldier.</b> Three timber buildings arranged around a courtyard, later (and earlier?) cremations. Part of the occupation SE of the fortress (cf. 94.10, below). Site narrative and plans missing.
1974	93.46	<b>[45-] 46 North Street.</b> <i>Via quintana</i> seen in section and possibly post-trench of barrack in Allan Block 1 and another building. The description in Section 2 is missing, as is that of a pit at 37 North Street excavated in 1971 which produced a bronze ladle.
1974	94.10	<b>Holloway Street.</b> Fenced compound and buildings SE of the fortress. Note on pit found further SE in 1978.
1974	94.02	<b>Southernhay Gardens.</b> A well, pit and traces of two buildings 230m SE of the E corner of the fortress.
1974-1975	92.36	<b>Rack Street.</b> Two defensive ditches at the S corner of the fortress.
1975	93.16	<b>198 High Street.</b> Trench for water-pipe and two possible branches NE of the granaries at 196-7 High Street.
1975	93.08	<b>228 High Street (Boots Cellar).</b> Traces of a large timber building NE

		of Allan Block 4, in the angle of the <i>via decumana</i> and <i>via sagularis</i> .
1975	92.40	<b>Mary Arches Street.</b> Post-trenches seen in section representing three phases, all apparently of timber military buildings; immediately SE of Allan Block 1.
1976-1977	92.38	<b>Preston Street.</b> Barrack of Allan Block 10 and fragment of another building.
1977-1978	92.39	<b>Mermaid Yard.</b> Fortress ditches, rampart, <i>intervallum</i> , <i>via sagularis</i> and traces of a barrack; Allan Block 10.
1977-1978	92.37	<b>Rack Street.</b> Defensive ditches of fortress just to the NE of the S corner, small ditch of (?) external corner, ditch flanking <i>via sagularis</i> .
1978	93.28	<b>North Gate.</b> External ditch at right angles to NW fortress defences, possibly draining defensive ditches.
1978	93.09	<b>Old Wool Market, [7-8] Queen Street (Marks and Spencer).</b> Street separating Allan Blocks 3 and 4 at SW end and traces of two barracks.
1980	93.07	<b>41-2 High Street.</b> SE side of <i>via decumana</i> bounding Allan Block 5; stone foundation interpreted as part of aqueduct supplying legionary baths.
1980	94.08	<b>Lucky Lane.</b> Pits about 230m SE of the S corner of the fortress.
1980-1981	92.33	<b>Bartholomew Street East.</b> Five buildings in the <i>praetentura</i> of the fortress, three of them barracks of Allan Block 7.
1981	92.35	<b>Friernhay Street.</b> Defensive ditches, timber-laced rampart with interval towers, <i>intervallum</i> buildings with ovens, <i>via sagularis</i> and possible barrack (Allan Block 8); ditch of external compound or annexe at Snayle Tower.
1982-1985	93.23	<b>Paul Street.</b> Defensive ditches of the fortress on the NW side near the N corner; road perhaps of this period beyond the ditches.
1983-1984	92.34	<b>St Nicholas Priory.</b> Fragments of two barracks of Allan Block 8.
1986	93.22	<b>Upper Paul Street.</b> Inner ditch of the fortress on NW side and at N corner.
1989-1990	91.09	<b>Lower Coombe Street.</b> Part of a large military compound or depot S of the fortress, extended and consolidated in the later military period by the construction of a ditch, bank and palisade.

The Green Reports do not record all the excavations and observations made between 1971 and 1990. The legionary baths have been fully published (Bidwell 1979, incorporating discoveries down to 1977). Amongst other minor excavations not included in the Green Reports is Bartholomew Street West (1974) where slight traces of a kiln producing stamped mortaria and flagons were found within the annexe or compound on the SW side of the fortress (Bidwell 1980, 41). The only excavation after 1986 which was the subject of a Green Report was that at Lower Coombe Street.

#### THE CONTEXT OF THE GREEN REPORTS

The first comprehensive summaries of the fortress, including the evidence of excavations before 1971, were published by Bidwell (1979, 1980). They were largely

superseded by Henderson's (1988) account. His detailed analysis of the metrological planning of the fortress followed a few years later (Henderson 1991). *Roman Finds From Exeter* (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991) includes a detailed survey of the dating evidence, mainly pottery and coins, for the foundation and abandonment of the fortress (for additional material, see Holbrook and Bidwell 1992). For a report on waterlogged deposits in the fortress ditch at Friernhay Street (1981), see Straker *et al.* 1984; cremation burials SE of the fortress have been published by Salvatore (2001).

The historical setting of the Exeter fortress and the conquest of SW England was widely discussed in the 1970s and 1980s (see in particular Maxfield 1987).

#### LATER EXCAVATIONS AND DISCOVERIES

Most of the excavations which have been carried out in the last decade will be published in a special issue of the *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society*. They consist mainly of the new sites outside the fortress which are mentioned in the first section of this Introduction.

From the mid-1980s to the end of the 1990s, exploration of the fortress continued, though on a smaller scale than in the previous fifteen years. These excavations are not included in the Green Report series, but site summaries are held in the Exeter City Historic Environment Records. They are listed below:

1987-88: at **Catherine Street**, on the NE side of the fortress immediately NE of the street between Allan Blocks 5 and 6, the ditches, rampart and an interval tower were excavated; beyond the ditches was a perimeter road (*Britannia* 19 (1998), 473; 20 (1999), 313-4). In the 1998 report two 1st-century cremations NW of the fortress are noted.

1988: at **Friernhay Street** a trench was cut across the SW fortress defences; at the **Acorn roundabout**, close to the 1974 Valiant Soldier site, three further buildings were found (*Britannia* 20 (1989), 314).

1993: at **Paradise Place** a ditch was seen which marked the SW side of the compound or annexe first seen at the Snayle Tower (see Friernhay Street 1981) (*Britannia* 25 (1994), 286).

1994: in **The Close** sewer access pits contacted post-trenches possibly of barracks in Allan Block 6; in **Mint Lane** there were further post-trenches of the barracks first seen in 1983-4 at St Nicholas Prory (*Britannia* 26 (1995), 367).

1995: at **2 Broadgate** two walls were seen on the NW side of the legionary baths near their N corner; at **141 Fore Street** a probable drainage ditch on the NW side of an external road leading to the *porta praetoria*.

1998: at **The Cloisters**, post-trenches were seen in the area of Allan Block 12 and immediately to its SW (*Britannia* 30 (1999), 367).

In addition, from 1995 onwards there were various excavations in the Smythen Street/Market Street/Preston Street areas (e.g. *Britannia* 27 (1996), 435, fig. 17); the area includes part of Allan Block 10 and the area to its NE. The most extensive excavations were in 2001-2 and there is a comprehensive report for the client (*Exeter Archaeology Report 02.90*) which includes assessments of the finds. Some progress was made towards full publication.

Equally important were excavations on the site of the South Gate of the Roman town, which revealed an earlier road leading from the fortress to the compounds to its SE. They were fully published by Henderson (2001).

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