

1972

## EXETER EXCAVATIONS 1971-72

The town from which the present day Exeter has evolved was established about 70AD and covered an area of about 93 acres. The outline of this Roman town is still preserved by the line of the city walls, erected about the year 200. This line of defences, though much patched and repaired, still isolates the old city from the rest of Exeter and for over 1500 years after their construction they determined the spatial limits of the growth of the city. It is no longer possible to discern the regular layout of the Roman town of Isca, for like all our ancient cities successive generations of occupiers have moulded their environment to meet their own needs. The grandiose buildings of the Roman town outlived their usefulness and were either destroyed or allowed to decay and so with the passage of time other buildings were broken down to make way for the new. The destruction of old buildings for redevelopment is not peculiar to the 20th century, but today the pace of redevelopment is greater than ever before; not only are buildings destroyed but foundations are cut deeper and the destruction of the hidden archaeological record of the growth and life of a city is totally destroyed.

Over the next ten years Exeter faces a new period of change with road works and redevelopment schemes, and to ensure this will not mean total destruction of the city's archaeological material, the City Council established a field unit to carry out excavations ahead of the general work. Since the Spring of 1971 work has been in progress on two major areas in the city and the programme sees their completion by the late Autumn of this year. Though the work is not yet completed we still gained a vast amount of information about the life of the city.

### GUILDHALL EXCAVATIONS

The earliest occupation of the site took the form of long parallel timber buildings dated to about 50 AD. They are almost certainly military structures though their actual use is as yet undetermined. They undergo alterations, possibly as timbers decay in the wet ground and on their final destruction the main sleeper beams were taken out of the ground and the trenches in which they had lain were filled with clay. The buildings may go on in use until the later part of the 1st century by which time the occupants would be civilians living in the newly established town, for the military garrison had certainly been moved to Gloucester by 70 AD.

A more formal type of occupation appears on the site early in the 2nd century and continues through to late in the 4th century. Fairly spacious Roman town houses appear, one of which was provided with a centrally heated room. Only the foundations survive but from them it is possible to plan the buildings and differentiate the different phase of occupation and the changes and modifications which take place.

By the end of the Roman period the city appears to be again shrinking and the town houses fall into disuse. A new type of occupation in the form of ditched enclosure appears. This may well in fact date to a period when Britain no longer forms part of the Roman Empire.

The next major phase of occupation begins in the 12th-13th centuries when once again the town is expanding and areas nearer the city walls are being recolonised. From this time up to a few years ago the site continued to be fairly densely occupied by shops and houses. Regrettably the continual rebuilding which has taken place has removed most of the traces of the mediaeval structures but the enormous waste pits associated with them have survived. From them have come vast quantities of pottery, glass, leather, and wood which have provided us with invaluable information about the material side of life on Mediaeval Exeter. The pottery included products from France and reflect the sea trade between the city and others abroad. The cess pits produce information about the foodstuffs being consumed by the citizens of Exeter. The bones of fish and fowl, the seed of fruits and the shells of sea creatures help to build a picture of another aspect of Mediaeval life.

### CATHEDRAL CLOSE EXCAVATIONS

The site was first occupied in the Claudian period (45-50 AD) by a very large stone building of which only a portion has yet been revealed. From the size of the foundations and the quality of workmanship we are dealing, obviously, with an extremely high standard of military structure.



The building includes a series of heated rooms and therefore probably represents the bath house serving the military garrisons in Exeter.

Though the military forces were transferred to Gloucester about 70 AD, this did not mean the abandonment or demolition of the bath house. In fact it appears to have been taken over and modified by the newly established town of Isca.

Alterations include the construction of narrow shop-like structures fronting onto the main road and the laying out of a large courtyard. Within the main building the alterations indicate that it was no longer functioning as a bath house ie. the heating system was broken down; and a new large internal wall and approach flight of stairs were added, so altering the interior layout of the building. The main layout remains much unchanged to the end of the Roman occupation with only minor modifications taking place in the ancillary buildings.

Through lack of dating material it is extremely difficult to offer any conclusive date for the final destruction of the Roman buildings, though a series of fairly large and substantial structures appear possibly in the 5th century. It is likely in fact that the site would continue to be used after the end of direct Roman rule and hopefully more information on this important, though obscure, period in the city's life may come to light in the next few months.

The final occupation of the area took the form of an extensive cemetery which probably in its earliest form was associated with the monastery established somewhere in the Close area in the 7th century. The use of the burial ground continued up to the 17th century and it will be possible from the skeletal material to produce a detailed picture of the changes which took place in the population of Exeter over a period of 1,000 years.

M.Griffiths  
Director: Archaeological  
Field Unit

WINTER EXCAVATIONS EXETER 1971-72

GUILDHALL

We have now concluded the programme of work for the 1971/72 Season on the Guildhall and are in the process of returning the area to car-parking.

The results have confirmed and emphasised the complexity and importance of the area for an understanding of the growth and development of the city. Despite the lack of mediaeval structures due to terracing it should be possible to produce a plan of the occupation zones based on the distribution of pits and associated features.

The Roman material has confirmed the existence on the site of multi-phase timber buildings of an early 1st century date. These buildings from their size and observed plan, suggest military structures, which have undergone a series of rebuilds. The similarity between this and of results obtained at Gloucester, the first recognised fortress of the II Legion, suggest that this site will cast extremely important light on the earliest phases of military occupation in the south west.

The civil buildings illustrate a relatively wealthy occupation of the area, as one room has been revealed which contained a hypocaust. The work during the winter, though carried out under difficult conditions, has illustrated the fact that much information can be obtained at a time of year which many feel is unsuitable for archaeological excavations, e.g. recognition and excavation of the complex multi-phase timber structures has been made much easier in the wet winter conditions. The results may not look too pretty to the naked eye, but the information is more accurate than can often be obtained in dry summer conditions.

MARY MAJOR

The trial excavations on the Cathedral Close have gone ahead as planned and confirmed the large scale nature of the Roman building revealed in last season's work. A trial trench to the north of the War Memorial has produced a wall line which appears to be a continuation of the one found by the steps giving a length of over 30 metres in a north-westerly direction. The extensive nature of the deposits associated with the Roman occupation has also been confirmed so that it appears that we may have even better stratified deposits in the War Memorial garden area.

The most important aspect of the trial work has been that it has revealed the immense problem which will have to be faced dealing with the grave yard which covers the whole of the area to be tackled by the forthcoming excavation programme e.g. in an area of only 24 square metres approximately 200 articulated skeletons have been excavated. Only the lowest level seems worthy of intensive effort as this includes a further series of late Saxon graves, one of which is a charcoal burial, this time distinctly in the form of a 'boat'. The continual use of the area as a grave yard up to the 17th century means that very little archaeological information can be gleaned from the burials. This mass of burials is going to present a major problem in terms of disposal.



As with the Guildhall, despite adverse weather conditions it has been possible to continue work so that only an equal amount of time has been lost as one expects during the course of the usual summer season. A second trial trench to determine the extent of the building in a north-easterly direction is in the course of excavation at present, though hampered by the problem of live electricity and gas services. This will be completed before the meeting of the 17th and at that time I hope to give a more comprehensive report including plans of the results so far.

#### OTHER WORK

The fact that work has continued over the winter months has meant that it has been possible to keep a relatively comprehensive watching brief on other work being carried out in the town by contractors - excavations in the city wall area for building purposes and the relaying of major water services. Equally it has been possible to carry out a comprehensive survey of No.38 North Street due for demolition as part of the Guildhall redevelopment scheme. As this will form one of the areas to be excavated in the forthcoming season of work this should prove of extreme assistance in our understanding of the development of the North Street frontage.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Department of the Environment, the University of Exeter, the Society for Roman Studies and the Northcott Charitable Trust for their grants which enabled the work to continue through this winter period, and to the City Council for their continued assistance and co-operation.

M. Griffiths  
Director :  
City of Exeter Archaeological Field Unit

EXPENDITURE

GENERAL

Salary of City Field Archaeologist etc.  
Salary of University Lecturer seconded to excavations, plus part services of University Technician  
Equipment, premises etc.  
Minor rescue excavations

£  
1,800  
  
950  
2,200  
700  
5,650

GUILDHALL area excavations

(six acres: approx. 1,600 sq.m.)  
Labour (mainly subsistence expenses of volunteers  
Machinery, materials  
Temporary reinstatement etc.,

3,900  
750  
1,000  
5,650

St. Mary Major area excavations  
CATHEDRAL CLOSE

Labour (as above)  
Machinery, materials etc. paid from excavation funds  
Machinery, materials etc. paid by Dean and Chapter

5,650  
850  
350  
6,850  
£18,150

18150  
1950  
17200

INCOME

Exeter City Council  
(NOT including professional and technical services  
Department of the Environment (Ancient Monuments Inspectorate)  
University of Exeter  
Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral  
Northcott Charitable Trust  
Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (N.B. This is the first grant ever made by the Society in support of excavations in its 100 years of existence)

£  
5,850  
5,250  
3,450  
350  
500  
  
100  
£9,650

Short fall on 1971-72 Financial Year

15,500  
£2,650

1971-72 6x £9,650 72.73.  
73. 74 74 - 73

EXPENDITURE

GENERAL

Salary etc. of City Field Archaeologist  
Equipment, Premises etc.  
Minor rescue excavations

£  
1,950  
600  
700  
3,250

GUILDHALL area excavations  
(Completion of area in advance of re-development  
- approx. 1800 sq. m.)

Labour, subsistence etc.  
Machinery, mechanical excavation etc.  
Reinstatement, and safety etc.  
Equipment, Materials, Conservation of finds etc.

5,030  
310  
600  
1,100  
7,040

St. Mary Major area excavations  
CATHEDRAL CLOSE  
(approx. 1600 sq. m. - largely of deep excavation)

Labour, subsistence etc.  
Machinery, mechanical excavation etc.  
Equipment, materials, conservation of finds etc.

5,890  
1,100  
1,230  
8,220

Total anticipated expenditure

£18,510

INCOME

Exeter City Council - (not yet determined  
but probably) approx.  
(not including professional and technical  
services)

£  
6,000

Department of the Environment: not yet  
(Ancient Monuments determined say,  
Inspectorate)

4,000

University of Exeter amount not yet determined  
but "much more limited  
support than in 1971  
because of commitments"

10,000

Total anticipated income

Short fall on 1972-73 Financial Year

8,510

Grant - aid sought at present time

Total anticipated deficit 1971-72  
financial year 2,650  
1972-73  
financial year 8,510

£11,160



# REPORT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD UNIT DIRECTOR

TO

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

JUNE 12th, 1972

## CATHEDRAL CLOSE

Work has continued on the site and confirmed the extensive and substantial nature of the principal building. Removal of the wartime water tank was a relatively long process due to its solid construction but this area is now nearly completed, and the burial deposits, including further charcoal type inhumations, have been cleared. It is not intended to investigate the stratified pre-burial deposits until the excavation reaches its projected limits but the removal of intrusive features has shown that a further complex of internal rooms of the 1st century military building have been preserved by the levelling and backfilling in the 70's AD. It would appear that in the interior of the building most of the deposits will be of this later 1st century date and the problems of excavation will be a question of mechanics rather than complexities of interpretation. On the exterior, however, it is evident that considerable deposits exist which may well throw further light on the development of the site and its final breakdown. In the area of the road from Broadgate to the West Front of the Cathedral, a number of industrial type pits cut into the Roman deposits have come to light, associated with which have been several fragments of pottery which appear to be of a very debased Roman coarse ware (in fact similar coarse ware has been produced from some of the graves). At present this trial area in the road is standing idle for safety reasons until the road is closed and the excavation extended to its final scale.

## GUILDHALL AREA

Work has continued on the area bounded by Waterbeer Street, Pancras Lane, Trickhay Street and the projection of Parliament Street. The whole of the Waterbeer Street frontage has been destroyed by large cellars constructed in the late 19th century so that no structures survive. Fortunately the lower portions of many pits, wells and cess pits have survived so that it will be possible to continue to build up a picture of the large fluctuations in the occupation pattern of this area also two large sleeper trenches of the first phase timber buildings have also been revealed below the cellar floor so that it will be possible to complete at least the outline picture of this phase of occupation.

By the 1st June it was already becoming obvious that the excavation of these timber structures was going to be difficult and slow in dry summer months.

The demolition of the late mediaeval house, number 38 North Street, is now complete and it is hoped to begin work on this area as soon as possible. Unfortunately, work on the site of St. Kerrians Church will be delayed until the burials have been removed in accordance with the statutory procedures and this will probably mean a start sometime in August. (Despite the delay in starting due to the uncertainty about the financial provisions which are now hopefully resolved) it is intended to complete the whole programme of work before the end of September.

Thanks must be expressed to many individuals and organisations for their continued support and encouragement, for no matter how utopian the financial provisions it is impossible to carry out the work successfully without the vital atmosphere of goodwill. I would especially like to thank Messrs. Knapp, Builders, who have provided us with a number of huts and a caravan so that for the first time in twelve months we now have adequate working facilities on site.

M. Griffiths