

# Excavations in Goss Street, Chester, 1971

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In April of 1971 the western part of Messrs. S. Aston and Son Ltd., Watergate Street, was demolished in order that this section of their premises might be rebuilt. This area lies to the west of the *principia* of the Roman Fortress, and immediately north of the *via principalis*. It also lies close to the heart of the medieval city (cf. fig. 1). An excavation<sup>1</sup> was planned to cover the whole area, but when examined it was found that with the exception of one small part of the site, post-medieval cellars had destroyed all traces of Roman and medieval occupation. Previous work in the Goss Street area had been carried out by Webster and Richmond in 1948 and 1949,<sup>2</sup> and further work in 1969 and 1970 was directed by G. M. R. Davies.<sup>3</sup>

## SUMMARY

A further part of the north-south wall found by Richmond and Webster, and presumed to be part of the centurion's quarters of a barrack block (aligned north-south) was found running through both trenches. Since this wall lay at the east end of the trenches it was only possible to examine rooms to the west. Although there were no physical remains of a further dividing wall running east-west, it was clear that there had been a partition against the south side of trench II. This had been destroyed by a later pit, but part of the wall plaster survived. Whereas trench I was considerably disturbed, trench II showed three successive floors of *opus signinum*. Beneath the stone wall and associated levels were found remains of a timber building of a very similar plan; the only differences detected in these admittedly small trenches being the position of the partition walls.

The Roman layers were cut by medieval pits of late thirteenth or early fourteenth century date, one of which produced a fine bone comb.

Three pits, cut into the sandstone bedrock at the extreme eastern edge of the site, were investigated as far as safety permitted. No conclusions were possible as to their date and function.

<sup>1</sup> Financed by the Department of the Environment and the City of Chester. The author would like to thank the architects, W. Campbell and Son, Hanley, and especially Mr. Lawrence for his invaluable assistance and G.U.S. for permission to excavate. The drawings are by Peter Alehon and Dan Robinson not only repaired the bone-comb, but kindly read through this report. Mr. G. M. R. Davies was good enough to allow me access to his records and plans prior to publication. The drawings and finds of this excavation are housed in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, and I am grateful to the Curator, Mr. D. F. Petch, for his advice and support throughout the excavation.

<sup>2</sup> *C.A.S.* Vol. 38, 1951.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished.

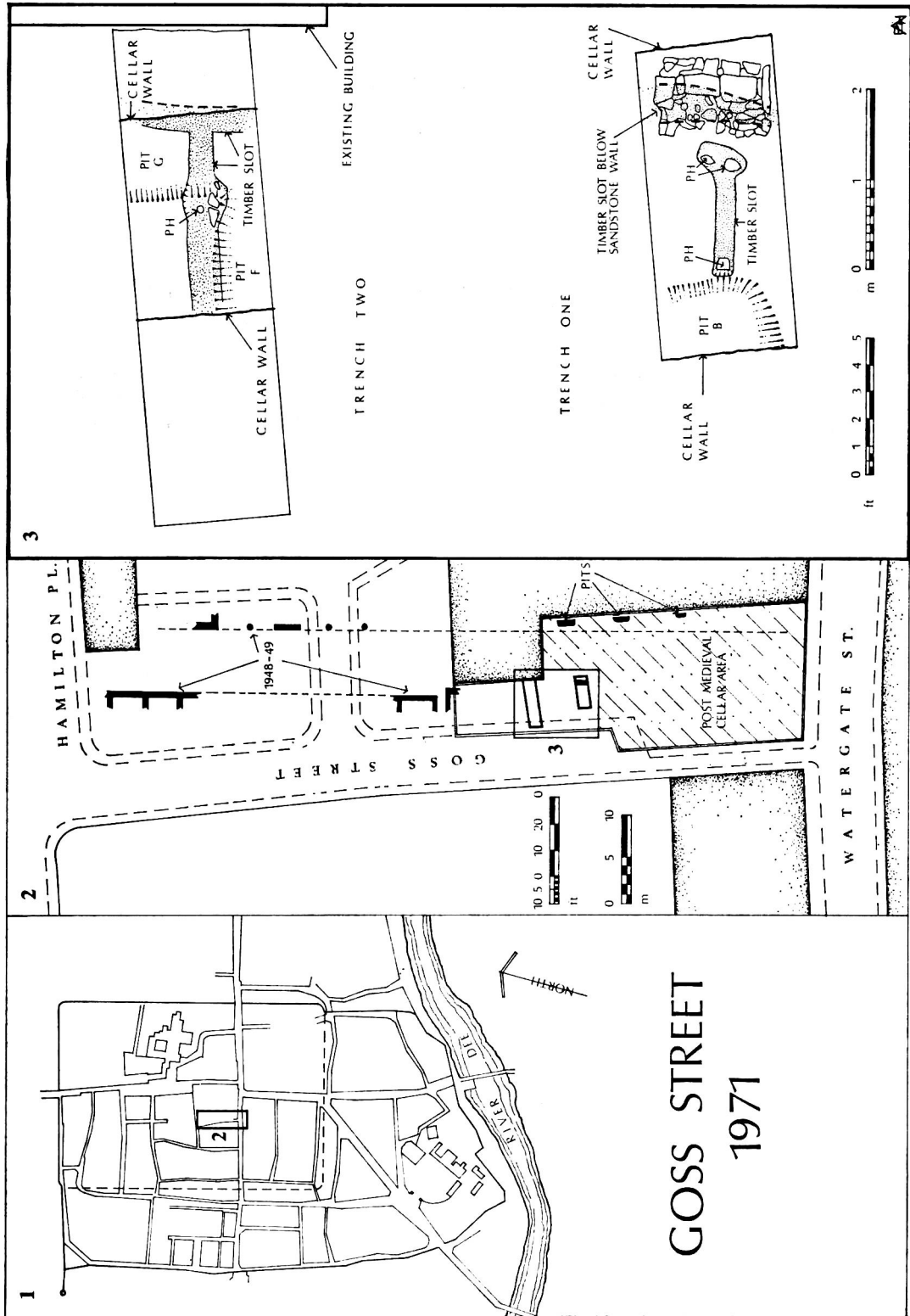


Fig. 1

## EXCAVATIONS

**Trench I.** After the initial timber phase represented by a slot aligned north-south, and one aligned east-west with a gap of 0.305 m. (1 ft.) between the two, there were signs of rebuilding in timber with a consequent slight shift in position of some of the slots.

The structure of the north-south wall overlying the timber slot appeared to be of two distinct periods; the lower section consisted of sandstone blocks set in clay with an average width of 0.660 m. (2 ft. 2 ins.) based upon a foundation of broken sandstone, while the upper section consisted of roughly squared sandstone blocks set in mortar. This part of the wall was much less substantial with a width of one stone (approximately 0.305 m. or 1 ft.). It is possible that the lower section was an extremely overgenerous footing, but unfortunately there was no linking stratigraphy to decide this point. On balance it seems more likely that this was a wall in its own right.

**Trench II.** The single timber phase was represented by a north-south slot joined in the centre of the trench by one running east-west. As in Trench I, there were traces of at least one vertical post in the east-west slot. The later stone wall was completely removed by a medieval rubbish pit, as was the southern part of the trench. Subsequent to the timber phase, an initial levelling up with broken sandstone and sandstone brash was covered by an *opus signinum* floor which in its turn was succeeded by two further floors of the same material. Seated vertically on the earliest floor at its southern extremity was a fillet of wall plaster laid against mortar. This has been re-rendered on two further occasions by mortar faced with plaster; within the limitations of the excavation it would appear that all these facings had been applied during the life of the earliest floor. These vertical surfaces clearly indicated the presence of a partition which had been completely removed by a medieval pit. The latest *opus signinum* floor has a 0.102 m. (4 ins.) beading at its junction with the vertical plaster. This was curved on its top surface presumably to prevent damage to the plaster, and to facilitate cleaning. Overlying these was a floor made of broken tiles set in clay and on top of this was an approximately 0.229 m. (9 ins.) thick layer of broken tile, fragments of *opus signinum*, decayed plaster and earth, which implied a drastic change in use for this area of the fortress. On balance the composition of this layer suggests that this building had been abandoned. At this point Medieval levels began; it is, therefore, impossible to say whether this abandonment was final. No dating material came from these levels.

## THE FINDS

### Pit G.

(a) Bone comb made in five sections and held between two side pieces of bone with twelve rivets. The side pieces have incised ring and dot decoration and

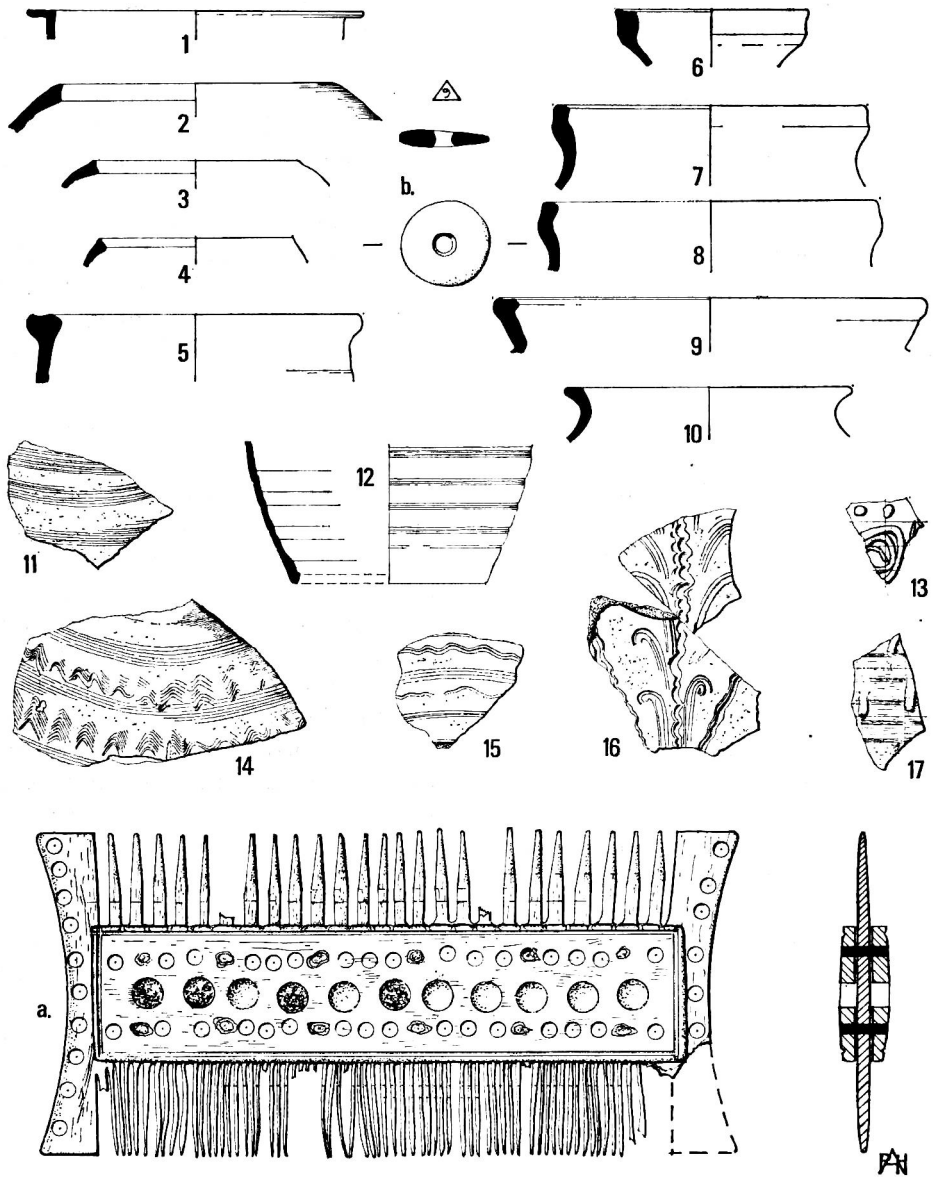


Fig. 2. Finds in Goss Street excavations, 1971. 1-17 and b quarter size; a actual size

there are traces of bronze studs set along the centre of these which have no function.

(b) Spindle whorl made from a pebble of slate.

### The Pottery

The Roman layers produced only one sherd and this was not from a meaningful context.

1. Rim sherd—typical Holt fabric, possibly of the period 90–120 A.D.

There were two discernible medieval pit groups:

### Pit F.

Fragment of handle or spout: buff fabric, dappled green glaze, (not illustrated).

10. Rim sherd: orange fabric, no glaze.

17. Body sherd: hard grey fabric, dark green glaze, incised horizontal lines, traces of applied vertical decoration.

### Pit G.

2. Rim sherd: grey/buff fabric, unglazed.

3. Rim sherd: orange fabric, grey/brown glaze.

4. Rim sherd: orange fabric, green/brown glaze.

5. Rim sherd: grey fabric, green glaze.

6. Rim sherd: cream/white fabric, orange/brown glaze.

7. Rim sherd: orange fabric, orange glaze.

8. Rim sherd: orange fabric, traces of orange glaze.

9. Rim sherd: buff fabric, unglazed.

11. Body sherd: buff grey fabric, green glaze with incised decoration.

12. Body sherd: thin hard smooth cream fabric, pale green glaze fading towards base (imported thirteenth century French jug.)

13. Body sherd: orange fabric, yellow glaze with applied decoration.

14. Body sherd: grey fabric, green/orange glaze with incised wavy lines between incised horizontal lines (Ashton kiln).

15. Body sherd: grey fabric, dark green glaze with incised wavy lines between incised horizontal lines.

16. Body sherd: pink/grey fabric, green glaze with incised decoration.

