

CHESTER: EXCAVATIONS IN THE PRINCESS STREET/ HUNTER STREET AREA, 1978-1982. A FIRST REPORT ON DISCOVERIES OF THE ROMAN PERIOD

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In 1978 it became clear that a new Bus Exchange and County Library were to be built between Princess Street and Hunter Street, on both sides of the former Hunter's Walk, and Chester City Council approved a programme of archaeological excavation. As a result, from preliminary soundings near the former Hunter Street School late in 1978 to the last minute recording of features of archaeological interest during the reconstruction of Hunter Street near the Odeon Cinema in the summer of 1982, the Excavations Section of the Grosvenor Museum conducted a very large scale, phased excavation in all parts of the area to be redeveloped.¹ The objective was to retrieve and put on record, prior to its destruction, as much as possible of Chester's archaeological heritage in an area which was known to have been close to the heart of the Roman fortress.

The excavation generated a considerable public interest which reached its highest level in the summer of 1981 when, on a single day, over a thousand people were shown around the work then in progress. Many people expressed surprise that the system should still permit what they considered to be the destruction of their archaeological heritage, and the need for some form of permanent display of the Roman buildings was frequently mentioned.

Unfortunately, the remains on this particular site had almost entirely been reduced to their foundations through stone robbing in antiquity and would not therefore have justified the inevitably enormous expenditure. To their credit, however, the Local Authorities appreciated the need to mark out permanently

¹ Mr. S. Ward directed the first phase of excavation on the site of Hunter Street School (H) and in Taylor's Garage off the former Hunter's Walk (North of N) in 1979. He also directed the second phase of work on the former Taxi Rank in Princess Street (N) and in the Methodist Church off the former Hunter's Walk in 1980. The author directed the third and final phase in the area to the South of the Masonic Hall (C), on the site of Hunter Street School and the former City Council's staff car park in Princess Street (H), in the former Hunter's Walk (K), in Princess Street near the Town Hall (P) and near the Odeon Cinema in Hunter Street (R) in 1981 to 1982.

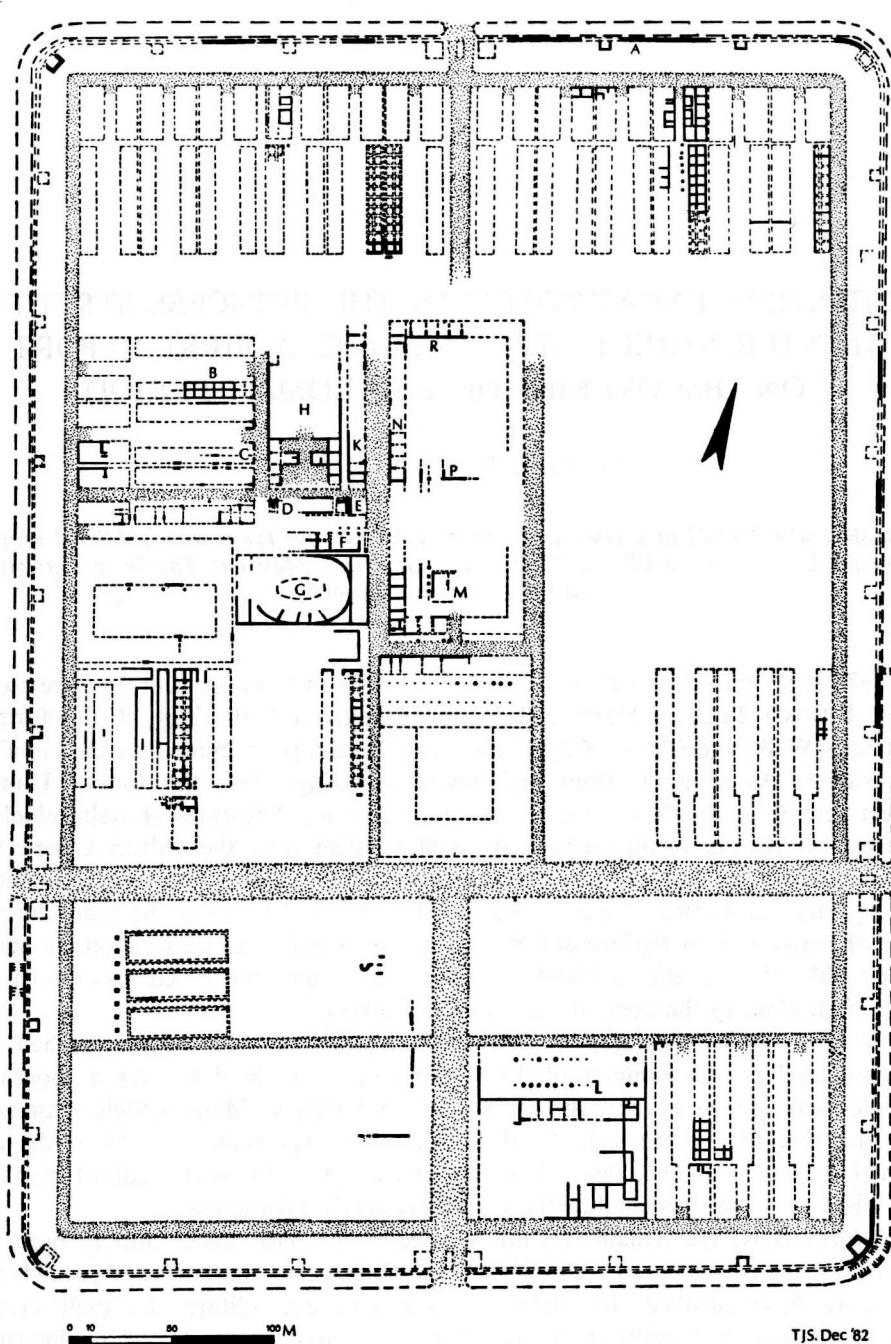


Fig. 1 — Chester: Plan of the legionary fortress in the early third century.

KEY:

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| A — North Wall, 1982 | K — Narrow building (stores/wagons/stables?) (Old Hunter's Walk), 1981-82 |
| B — Barracks (Freemasons' Hall, Hunter Street), 1914 | M — Building identified as <i>Praetorium</i> (Old Market Hall site), 1968 |
| C — Barracks (Bus Exchange site), 1981-82 | N — Western side of large building (Taylor's Garage and Princess Street Taxi Rank), 1980 |
| D — Possible Granary, 1939 | P — Internal walls of large building (Princess Street), 1982 |
| E — Watertank base, 1968 | R — Northern end of large building (Hunter Street), 1982 |
| F — Workshops and stores, 1968 | M, N, P and R = Large magazine or hospital |
| G — Elliptical Building, 1939 and 1969 | |
| H — Large building with walled compound (Bus Exchange site), 1979 and 1981-82 | |

the sites of the Roman buildings in the new road surfaces, and this has now been done. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that Chester will rise adequately to the occasion when next something worthy of preservation is revealed, even if at the proverbial 'last minute', and that the wholesale destruction of well preserved Roman buildings which took place in the 1960's will not be repeated.

Although public awareness of the recent excavations was considerable the area covered was large and at the time of excavation it was, therefore, very difficult for the layman, and sometimes for the experienced archaeologist as well, to appreciate the layout of the Roman and other structures exposed. To make matters worse, the true significance of the discoveries only became evident in the closing stages of the project in 1982, by which time formal excavation had long since come to a halt. However, such have been the general interest and archaeological importance of the results, it has been considered essential to publish a summary of the findings at the earliest possible moment.

Finally, one further introductory comment needs to be made. Although it has been decided to concentrate in this report upon the Roman discoveries made in the area it is important to remember that this excavation, as with so many others in Chester in recent years, has also produced remains of later periods such as tantalising glimpses of Saxon and Scandinavian Chester, perfectly preserved timbers from medieval pits, medieval corn drying, sixteenth century glass, seventeenth century apothecaries and eighteenth century malting. Their omission from this article has to do with problems of time and space and has nothing to do with value judgements about their relative importance.

The context of the site in the Roman fortress (Fig. 1)

The plan of the legionary fortress shows the position of the latest discoveries (C, H, K, N, P, R) in relation to other known Roman buildings in the area.² Professor Newstead excavated what appeared to resemble parts of the mens' quarters of two barrack blocks in 1909 and 1914 on the site of the Freemasons' Hall in Hunter Street (B) and this gave a strong hint of the nature of the occupation in the western part of the area (Newstead, 1928a, 61-79; Plate VII). This was confirmed by Mr. D. F. Petch's discovery of parts of two barrack blocks a short distance to the West in 1965 (*J.R.S.*, 56, 1966, 200).

Excluding the barrack lines across the *retentura* (northern end of the fortress), the nature of occupation in the area to the North of Hunter Street remains largely a matter of speculation. However, Newstead did recover some information from the Odeon Cinema site in 1939 (North of R) suggesting buildings and a road on an East-West alignment (Newstead, 1939, 49-63; Plates XII and XIII). Further

² For an appreciation of changes which have taken place in the understanding of the layout of this part of the legionary fortress compare the fortress plan published in 1978 (Strickland and Davey, 1978) with that published in this *Journal* in 1980 (Strickland, 1980) and the one most recently published in 1981 (Strickland, 1981).

to the West, immediately to the South of No. 6, King's Buildings, Newstead was able, in 1921, to establish the existence of Roman deposits but failed to discover the remains of any buildings (Newstead, 1928b, 81-92).

Rather more is known about the area to the South of Princess Street. In 1939, Newstead discovered what he considered to be part of a granary building (D) and, what he called 'a theatre-like building' (Newstead and Droop, 1940). More of the plan of the latter (G) was revealed in the excavations carried out by Liverpool University in 1969 (Eames, 1969) and it has since come to be known as the Elliptical Building.³ At the same time, in the area between it and Princess Street Mr. D. F. Petch recovered more detailed information concerning the foundations and base of a possible watertank (E) and a stores building and workshop (F) (e.g. Petch, 1978, 20-21). On the site of the Old Market Hall from 1968 to 1970 Mr. Petch recovered the northern end of the *principia* (headquarters building) and the southern end of what he considered might have been the *praetorium* (legionary commander's residence) although he thought that the latter might alternatively have been a stores building or even the *valetudinarium* (hospital) (M) (e.g. Petch, 1978, 17-20).

Little was known about the area to the North of Princess Street and between Northgate Street and the former Hunter's Walk until the recent excavations, although it had been known for many years that at least one Roman building of a substantial character had existed to the North of the Town Hall since part of a hypocaust and other architectural fragments had been found there (e.g. Watkin, 1886, 129-30).

Discoveries made 1978-1982

It will be clear that, although something was known about the surrounding areas (particularly on the South side), nothing was known about the area excavated between 1978 and 1982. It is no exaggeration to say that the recent discoveries have not only had a considerable impact on our understanding of the fortress layout in the area but some of them have highlighted the need to make a serious reappraisal of the history of Roman Chester in general and even to reconsider the functions previously assigned (admittedly tentatively) to at least one of the major buildings of the fortress (*praetorium*). Such was the scale of the recent operation, that it has been found to be convenient to subdivide description of the site into sections roughly corresponding to the *insulae* (blocks) in which the area was laid out in the Roman period and to restrict interpretation to that finally pertaining to each *insula* at the closing stages of work in 1982 (see Plate 2).

³ For a more detailed, but still tentative, appraisal of this building see that published in 1981 (Strickland, 1981, 416-17).



Plate 1 — Area C, showing (A) third century sandstone gutter and road surface, and (B) second and third century barrack walling alongside.



Plate 2 — Area C, alongside Princess Street, showing collapsed third century barrack roofing.



Plate 3 — Excavation in the northern part of Area H in 1981, showing (A) second century sandstone track, and (B) late second century storage or latrine pit, (C) length of wall which subdivided the walled compound of the stores depot in the early fourth century, and (D) area of final excavation of the southern part of the stores depot (Plate 4).

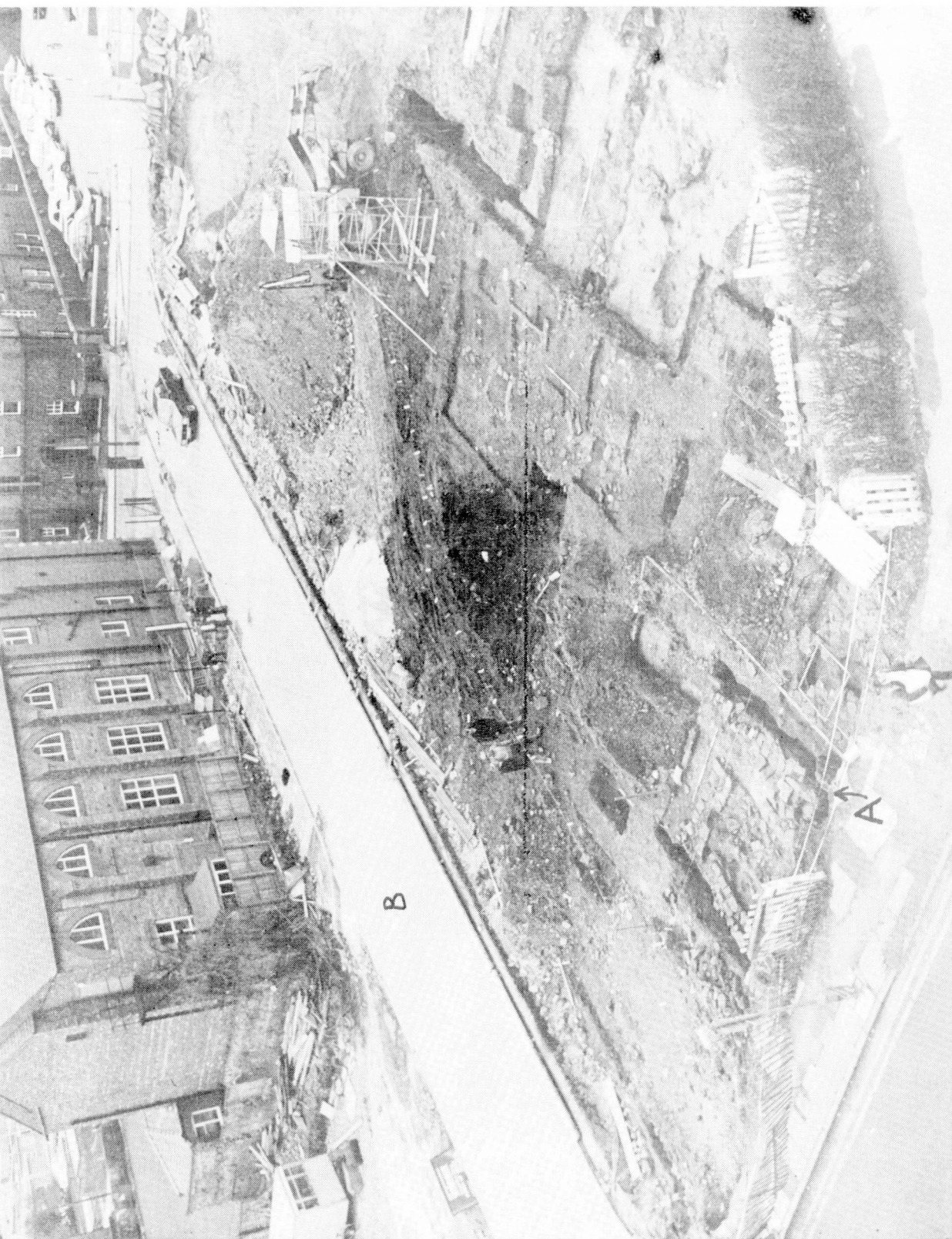


Plate 4 — The closing stages of excavation in the southern part of Area H, alongside Princess Street, early in 1982; showing (A) paved entrance between forecourt and courtyard of the third century stores depot, and (B) the new Hunter's Walk on the line of the Roman street which ran between the stores depot and the barracks to the West.



Plate 5 — The southern part of Area H, alongside Princess Street, showing (A) remains of a door threshold and step, (B) level of interior floor, and (C) adjacent courtyard surface in eastern part of third century stores depot.



Plate 6 — Area N (former taxi rank in Princess Street), 1980, showing (A) western side and internal partitions of the possible *valetudinarium*, (B) offsets for third century raised timber flooring, (C) rough fourth century flooring, and (D) site of fourth century doorway.

The Barracks (Fig. 1; B and C)

The excavation confirmed the existence of a series of barrack blocks aligned *per strigas* (East-West) on the western part of the site.⁴ These barracks were initially of the usual post in slot construction, as is found so often elsewhere in the fortress (e.g. McPeake *et al*, 1980, 16-18) and there is every reason to suppose that they were built in the late first century and represent part of the accommodation for a cohort of *Legio II Adiutrix*.

They were completely rebuilt, probably in the early years of the second century. The layout of the barrack lines remained exactly the same, with the foundations of the new walls residing directly on the sites of the earlier timber slots. The new foundations consisted of loosely packed sandstone rubble with poor quality mortar bonding, and carried at least two courses of dressed sandstone masonry. Where the masonry had not obviously been removed or severely damaged by later activity (e.g. stone robbing) it survived consistently to a level a little above the surrounding external surfaces. Although this evidence is by no means conclusive, it suggests that these walls were merely sills on which timber framed superstructures resided, a little above ground level and inevitable dampness. It is clear that these barracks were completed and occupied since a considerable quantity of roofing tile (*tegulae* and *imbrices*) was found in the associated demolition deposits, and timber lined latrine pits had been constructed and used in the ends of the two verandahs examined.

In the early third century the barracks were completely rebuilt. With the exception of minor alterations to the verandahs, including the abolition of the latrines, the layout remained the same, and thus the rebuilding cannot be ascribed to a need to redesign the barrack accommodation. It is possible that the whole operation was found to be necessary because the buildings were in a delapidated condition, conceivably as a result of a partial, if not total, abandonment of the barracks for some time previously. Evidently, the timber framed superstructures of the second century barracks were dismantled down to the stone sills. Several more courses of dressed masonry were then added to the latter in order to raise the new timber framed superstructures to a level a little above that of the new road surfaces and gutter which were laid alongside the eastern ends of the buildings. In this period, a neatly cut, rectangular post emplacement in the wall sill marking the eastern end of Newstead's barrack (B) provided corroborative evidence for the timber framed superstructure hypothesis. During rebuilding, the earlier roofing tiles appear to have been stripped off for use elsewhere and were replaced with flags of micaceous sandstone and occasional North Welsh slates.

Some time after the middle of the third century, but well before the mid fourth century, the early third century barrack roofing appears to have come down and

⁴ During the course of a watching brief on the laying of a main in Princess Street (C) Mr. Petch also recorded a series of what are almost certainly the internal partition walls of a barrack block aligned *per strigas*. These were seen again in 1981.

been scattered across parts of the site. That this was not the result of a programme of systematic demolition is suggested by the number of complete sandstone flags and slates left on the ground, which surely would not have been the case if the roofing had been carefully stripped. Furthermore, it was obvious that the area had neither been cleared nor levelled up with rubble such as happened on some other barrack sites in Chester (e.g. McPeake *et al*, 1980, 19). It seems likely, therefore, that these particular barracks had been abandoned and had eventually collapsed (possibly aided by the removal of some reusable building materials). That these events took place sometime in the period centring on A.D. 300 might be surmised from the body of evidence from many other sites in Chester (e.g. Strickland, 1981, 432-34). However, there are two direct pieces of evidence which confirm this approximate dating.

In the first place, the North-South road along the eastern end of the barrack lines could be seen to have been re-paved after the ruination of the barracks, since part of it sealed the sandstone roofing debris. That this paving was laid down no later than the early fourth century is suggested by the discovery of two coins of the Emperor Magnentius (350-353) on a part of this road surface which had clearly been in use for some time before the coins were deposited there. The fact that the barrack roofing material was allowed to remain in the roadway before it was re-surfaced suggests that the road may have gone out of use for a time in the late third to early fourth century.

Secondly, fragmentary traces of re-occupation of the site of one of the barracks directly sealed a slightly worn coin of the Emperor Constantius (346-350). Beneath this was a layer of dark humus, approximately 0.10 m thick, which had accumulated over the barrack roofing debris and which had the appearance of having resulted from a period of abandonment. Clearly, therefore the barrack roofing had come down some considerable time before the mid fourth century.

What the re-occupation which has just been mentioned amounted to, is impossible to say. The late walling consisted of re-used building stone with no evident foundation but, most interestingly, may well have incorporated a part of one of the wall sills of the earlier barrack there. Until such evidence as there may be has been considered much more deeply, it remains impossible to assign even an approximate date to this development.

The area to the East of the Barracks (Fig. 1; H)

From initial occupation in the 70's down to the closing years of the second century there existed a very large open space (approximately forty two metres East-West by at least sixty two metres North-South) to the East of the barracks. Whether or not this large area was originally laid out to accommodate a building similar to the one which was eventually erected there is impossible to determine. The existence of such an open space so close to the centre of the legionary fortress, where one assumes building space would have been at a premium, remains

puzzling. However, whether or not it was intended to accommodate a large building, it is clear that the soldiers occupying the adjacent barracks from the late first century to the early second century were making use of this area for rubbish disposal. This was done in a more or less controlled fashion since it was confined to a large number of small pits (each one evidently dug to take small quantities of rubbish including food refuse and, in some cases, discarded *lorica* fittings) which were sealed with sand immediately after use.⁵ Probably, in the very early years of the second century the whole area was covered with a thin layer of sandstone brash, no doubt part of a tidying up operation, possibly in preparation for the construction of a building. However, for some unknown reason, there then began the large scale tipping of metalworking debris throughout the area. That this refuse was brought onto the site from the South, and probably, *inter alia*, from the workshops near the Elliptical Building (F) (e.g. Petch, 1978, 20), is suggested from the fact that the resulting deposit thinned out in a northerly direction away from these workshops.

Well into the second century a new attempt was made to facilitate access to and across the open space, which by then had degenerated into what was, in effect, a tip, by the laying down of a North-South track consisting of a roughly cambered spread of sandstone quarry waste. At the same time a timber framed building was constructed alongside the eastern edge of the track on the southern part of the site. As usual, this was of post in slot construction but was well appointed, with *opus signinum* (concrete) floors and painted plaster walls. That this building was at least partly residential is suggested by the quantity of cooking debris (mussel shells) found in it. Despite these alterations to the site, metalworking debris continued to be tipped both on the track and in that part of the open space which still remained to the North of the building.

Considerable evidence is accumulating from different parts of the fortress to suggest that Chester acquired a decidedly run down appearance by the middle of the second century, which is perhaps most easily explained by the partial, if not total, absence of *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* in Northern Britain in this period (e.g. Strickland, 1981, 418-19). The postulated delapidation of the barracks to the West of the open space in this period further supports this idea. On the other hand, the accumulation of large quantities of metalworking debris in the space alongside these barracks attests continued occupation and large scale industrial activity in the vicinity. It may be that, in this period, Chester had been reduced in status to a rearward depot in which, *inter alia*, certain types of military equipment were manufactured for supplying to the military units in Northern Britain.

Towards the end of the second century a very large rectangular pit, at least fifteen metres long by five metres wide and two metres deep, was dug in the north eastern part of the open space. It was cut well into the sandstone bedrock,

⁵ The small size of these pits and their contents suggests that the soldiers in the adjacent barracks were cooking their own food in this period.

some of which appears to have been scattered across the adjacent areas and also on the sandstone track alongside. The pit was constructed with vertical sides and horizontal base, and with emplacements for massive vertical timbers, c. 0.25m square set at regular intervals along its sides. The superstructure was of timber and fairly substantial. No evidence for pit lining, either timber or of some other material, was recovered. Although it is clear that the structure was completed, there were no deposits to indicate if or how it had been used: as a latrine or for some type of storage? Soon after construction the timbers were removed and the pit was filled in with rubble and other disposable materials from the vicinity.

In the early third century, and quite conceivably at the same time as the rebuilding of the adjacent barracks, the site of the big pit was levelled and the timber framed building beside the track was demolished. The whole of the open space was then cleared and a very large building, approximately thirty five metres wide by at least seventy two metres long, was constructed. It is interesting to note that construction of the Elliptical Building (G), which had been started and left incomplete sometime before, was brought to completion in the early third century (at the time of excavation it was suggested that the original plans had remained on file (Eames, 1969)) and there is evidence for similar developments elsewhere (e.g. Strickland, 1981, 423-27). It is tempting, therefore, to conjecture that the building which now occupied the open space had also originally been intended for the site on which it was finally built. The fact that the building was clearly designed to fit exactly into the available space could be held to support this conjecture but the close fit may be coincidental since it is quite possible that the new building merely used fully what happened to be a convenient available site.

The new building was of very substantial construction, being set on sandstone rubble foundations a little under two metres deep and one metre wide, carefully bonded at different levels with layers of puddled clay, from which may also be inferred a superstructure of some considerable weight. Unfortunately, almost the whole of the walling had been reduced through stone robbing in the post Roman period to little more than foundations. Nevertheless, much can be recovered from the evidence of the building plan, the character of the foundations and from minor details such as internal surfaces and entrance thresholds where these survived.

The plan suggests that the building was entered from the South and that a gap of some five to six metres, probably the width of an East-West road, separated it from the granary (D), watertank and stores building (E) previously discovered to the South. The southern part of the building consisted of a roughly paved forecourt, lined on its eastern and western sides with wings each comprising two rooms. Movement northward from the forecourt was restricted to a heavily paved doorway and entrance passage, a little under five metres wide, in the centre of an East-West range of rooms across the entire width of this part of the building. The entrance may have been arched or roofed over (after all, the size of the foundations does point to the existence of at least a first floor to the building if not more) and it was clear that the rooms on either side were entered up low flights of

steps immediately inside the doorway on both sides and not directly from the forecourt as might have been supposed. It is also possible that the very small rooms on each side of the entrance are stairwells for access to the upper floors.

The central doorway and passage opened northwards onto a small inner courtyard with a paved surface and inward facing rooms on its eastern and western sides, in addition to those on the southern side already described. In one place on the eastern side an entry threshold, doorway and a short flight of steps up to it from the courtyard surface survived particularly clearly, and there was some less well preserved evidence for another on the southern side, to the East of the central entrance to the courtyard. Both these thresholds showed that the internal floors of the rooms surrounding the courtyard were approximately 0.40m higher than the adjacent external surfaces. In one instance a stone door sill, presumably at internal floor level, was very clear and much worn. The wall offsets in this part of the building were almost exactly level with the door sill, which strongly suggests that the former were designed to support raised timber flooring level with the sills. A large quantity of roofing tile came from the area of the eastern rooms (very little, however, came from the courtyard) and from amongst this debris came several examples of early third century legionary tile stamps (*LEG. XX. VV. ANTO*). The scarcity of tiles from the courtyard area and the heavy metalling there suggests that it was not roofed over.

The courtyard was bounded on the North side by a substantial and largely free standing wall, in the centre of which was another doorway (directly opposite the entrance through the central wing to the South) opening onto a very large walled compound approximately thirty three metres wide by over forty five metres long. Into this compound the courtyard metalling extended in a fan shaped area in front of the doorway, whereas the surface throughout the rest of it consisted of roughly laid sandstone brash.

For the present it is impossible to determine where the northern end of this building lay since it extended into an area North of Hunter Street to which access for archaeological excavation was impractical. However, the known layout of this part of the fortress suggests one of two possibilities: either the building ended in line with the northern end of the building to the East (N, P and R), which would make it approximately eighty five metres long on its North-South axis, or it extended almost as far as the barracks in the *retentura* which would give a length of approximately one hundred and ten metres. Either alternative would provide sufficient space for a further number of rooms on the North side of the walled compound at least as imposing as the layout on the South side, but the second alternative gives space for something much greater still.

No conclusive evidence was recovered for the function served by this building in the third century. However, the complete absence of metalworking debris, hearths or furnaces rules out this kind of activity. Moreover, none of the kind of fittings (e.g. painted wall plaster, hypocausts) normally indicative of superior quality residential quarters was found and this strongly suggests that the building

was utilitarian. If one assumes that rather more of the building existed to the North, as suggested above, one might perhaps consider the building as cavalry quarters. Little is known about the accommodation provided for legionary cavalry and it is therefore difficult to cite convincing examples. It is possible that the building could have served such a purpose, but only if stabling was provided at the northern end since there was no evidence for it elsewhere. With such an interpretation the walled compound could be explained as a riding gymnasium or exercise yard very similar to those widely used by the British Army until the Second World War. The rooms to the South would have been living quarters for the troopers. Apart from the apparent total absence of cavalry equipment from this area that part of the plan of the building which is known does not readily lend itself to this particular function. After all, a simpler plan than the one recovered would suit this purpose far better.

If the walled compound had been used for legionary foot drill or perhaps even as a wagon park, one would surely have expected a more substantial surface than the one found. Here again, the curious plan of the southern part of the building could not easily be explained. It therefore remains to consider the only satisfactory alternative remaining, storage.

It is not difficult to imagine the rooms around the forecourt and courtyard being given over to the storage of smaller, and more valuable, items with their attendant administration, and the walled compound being used for storage of bulky items such as timber, doorframes, wagon wheels, tiles, piping, window glass etc. and the whole provided with the necessary degree of security. The author's conviction that this is the correct interpretation is strengthened by the close similarity in many ways between the elements into which this Roman building can be subdivided (forecourt, courtyard, rooms, compound, security) and those of the present day City Council's stores depot in Bumper's Lane. Until some new evidence comes to light, either from Chester or from another legionary fortress, the most likely interpretation of the building's function is therefore that of a stores depot of some kind.

In the early fourth century the southern part of the building underwent various minor alterations. Some new internal partitions were inserted and the courtyard was resurfaced but there is no evidence to indicate that this part of the building had acquired a new function, although this remains a possibility. The discovery of pits in the southern part of the walled compound containing quantities of discarded building debris suggests that rubble derived from the alterations was being deliberately buried in the interests of tidiness.⁶

The general appearance and use of the walled compound changed radically in this period since it was divided into smaller units by the insertion of an East-West wall consisting of re-used building blocks (possibly from the now abandoned and

⁶ A coin dated to early in the reign of the Emperor Constantine (308-337) was found in one of these pits.

ruinous barracks nearby) with no proper foundations at all. This became the southern wall of a long strip building, or series of lean to sheds, with timber framed superstructures and slate roofing. The finds from contexts associated with the later use of this building include some evidence for specialised metalworking since gold working crucibles were found in a rubbish pit alongside. It is possible that this gold working consisted partly of melting down gold coinage, for a gold *solidus* of the Emperor Magnentius (350-353) was found nearby.⁷ The evidence of other coins sealed by later demolition material shows that the strip building (or sheds) was demolished, or fell down, sometime after the late fourth century but it was impossible to determine exactly when this happened.

In the later fourth century, and for a considerable but indeterminable time afterwards, a deposit of dark earth accumulated in the compound. In addition to a quantity of late fourth century material this deposit contained a large quantity of discarded animal bones and appears to have been the product of dumping of organic refuse over a very long time, probably well beyond the end of the fourth century. The fact that this deposit was allowed to accumulate at all indicates that the use of the compound had degenerated far below the comparative tidiness of the early fourth century until it was merely used as a conveniently central open space for the disposal of rubbish. Perhaps more importantly, this also attests continued occupation nearby.

A considerable quantity of Roman building rubble, some of it evidently used to make rough and patchy paving, later covered the area. The rubble probably represents a period during which the whole area was being scoured for re-usable building stone. However, the paving seems to have been restricted to the area of the compound, which may imply that the compound walls were standing, at least in part, and that the compound was paved for some, as yet, unknown purpose in the Dark Ages. It is probable that paving and rubble represent two distinct phases of use of the site, confused together through the inadequacies of the available dating evidence. Be that as it may, in the area South of the compound there were plentiful signs of stone robbing (e.g. wall robbing trenches) and it was as a result of this activity that the large Roman building, originally constructed in the third century, was finally reduced to little more than its foundations. There is evidence to suggest that this development occurred no earlier than the tenth or eleventh centuries.⁸

The long narrow building (Fig. 1; K)

From the late first century to the fourth century there existed a long narrow building, approximately eight metres wide and at least eighty five metres long on a North-South axis, immediately to the East of the open space and, from the early

⁷ On the demise of Magnentius at the Battle of Mursa in 353 his coinage would have ceased to be legal currency and would have been withdrawn from circulation.

⁸ A tenth to eleventh century bronze brooch of Norse design was recovered from a disturbed area of this paving.

third century, adjacent to the eastern side of the big building described above. The narrow building was separated from the eastern wall of the latter by a narrow gap or pathway, a little over two metres wide. This building was originally of post in slot construction and was rebuilt, probably in the early second century, on sandstone rubble and puddled clay foundations, the shallowness of which suggests a comparatively light, and probably single storeyed, superstructure. From the five examples found it is clear that the building had East-West internal partitions at more or less regular intervals of approximately five metres. No clear evidence for its later history was forthcoming but, as with the buildings to the West, this one was gradually stripped of reuseable materials after the Roman period.

This building is clearly of a different design from a conventional legionary barrack block⁹ and is not in the normal position for such a building (e.g. the legionary fortresses at *Novaesium* (Neuss) and *Inchtuthil*). However, it is clear that many legionary fortresses (e.g. *Inchtuthil*, *Isca*, *Noviomagus*, *Vetera*, *Novaesium* and *Vindonissa*) were provided with similar buildings fronting, as this one does, onto the more important streets (e.g. Von Petrikovits, 1975, Tafeln 1a, 3a, 4a, 5a, 6a, 8a) and the problem is to assign functions to them in the absence of any more specific evidence than plan and location. Nevertheless, the way in which these buildings always open onto major streets indicates that, whatever their function was, ease of access and egress was an integral aspect of it. Taken together with building plan (regular compartments about five metres wide) this suggests either stabling, the parking of wagons and other wheeled equipment, or the housing of stores liable to be needed regularly and often at short notice. It seems likely, therefore, that the narrow building (K) was designed for one or a combination of these uses.

The large building behind the Principia (Fig. 1; M, N, P and R)

Until the recent excavations produced evidence to the contrary it was generally assumed that the discoveries made by Mr. Petch on the site of the Old Market Hall from 1967 to 1970 (M) were very probably the south western part of the *praetorium* (legionary commander's residence). At that time this interpretation seemed to be the most likely one, partly on account of the position of the building immediately behind the *principia* (headquarters building), a position sometimes chosen for *praetoria* in legionary fortresses (e.g. *Isca*, *Novaesium*, *Carnuntum*) (Petch, 1968, 1), but mainly on what were then considered to be very close similarities of plan between this building and the one found in the equivalent position at *Novaesium* (Neuss) and also interpreted as a *praetorium* (Petch, 1968, 3). It also proved possible to project an East-West width of 64.60m for the building at Chester by relating it to the known width of the *principia*, on the very reasonable assump-

⁹ For the difference in plan compare this narrow building (K) with the barracks further to the West (B and C).

tion that the central North-South axes of both *praetorium* and *principia* were on the same line (Petch, 1970-71, 16-17), an assumption which remains valid regardless of the functions of the two particular buildings concerned. The North-South dimension of the building was considered to be in the order of seventy metres, which placed the projected position of its northern wall not far to the South of Princess Street, beneath the Town Hall (e.g. Petch, 1978, 18). Although it seemed to him to be more likely that this building was the *praetorium* Mr. Petch noted that the recovery of two medical inscriptions from the site, in 1851 and 1968 (*R.I.B.*, 461 and Nutton, 1968 respectively), must inevitably lead to the conjecture that it might have been the *valetudinarium* (hospital), but he felt that his projected plan of the building was not sufficiently similar to some other *valetudinaria* (e.g. *Novaesium*) to make this very likely (Petch, 1968, 5, note 10). He pointed out that neither of the medical inscriptions need originally have come from this building since one, and probably both of them, were re-used in fourth century contexts. Mr. Nutton, on the other hand, pointed out that the kind of people who set up these inscriptions may well have been doctors on the personal staff of the legionary commander, residing with him, and not necessarily on the legion's formal establishment at all (Nutton, 1968, 12-13). This would explain the discovery of such inscriptions in the *praetorium* and not, for instance, in the *valetudinarium* (*ibid.*, 12-13). Nevertheless, Mr. Petch noted that the excavated portion of the building exhibited 'none of the refinements one might expect to find' in a *praetorium*, and he considered, therefore, that the legionary commander's residential quarters must have lain elsewhere, in the unexcavated part of the building beneath the Town Hall. The roughly flagged floors and wide doorways in some of the rooms also raised the possibility that at least parts of the building were used as stores or workshops (e.g. Petch, 1978, 19). On balance, however, both Petch and Nutton opted for the '*praetorium*' hypothesis, but with reservations.

The first hint that assumptions concerning the plan, and hence the true character, of this building would need considerable alteration came in 1978 with the discovery within the former George Taylor's Garage, off the old Hunter's Walk, of the western wall of a building on exactly the same line, and apparently exhibiting the same structural sequence, as that of the western wall of the supposed '*praetorium*'. In due course, more of this building was discovered further to the South on the site of the former Taxi Rank in Princess Street in 1980 (N). It was the results of this latter phase of excavation which, more than anything else, led to the conjecture that the building found there and the '*praetorium*' were in fact different parts of a single, rather large building at least one hundred and ten metres long (e.g. Grew, 1981, 331-33). This idea was largely based on the discovery of a range of rooms whose building plan and structural phases corresponded very closely to those noted earlier on the Old Market Hall site. Subsequently, the reconstruction in April 1982 of that part of Princess Street which runs adjacent to the Town Hall presented a fine, but brief, opportunity to recover more of the plan of the building (P), which seemed to confirm that not only the peripheries of

the buildings on the two sites (M and N) but also the internal layout were very similar (P). There then began to emerge a picture of a very large building with inward facing ranges of rooms and porticos around its periphery and with separate internal structures more or less centrally placed. However, it was not until discoveries were made during the reconstruction of the eastern section of Hunter Street (near the Odeon Cinema) in July 1982 that conclusive evidence for the overall North-South length of the building was recovered (R). Here, part of an East-West range of southward facing rooms, which extended into, and probably across Northgate Street, was seen. That this was its northern end was suggested by the continuation southwards of the walls on the western side, the line of which corresponded exactly with those found earlier (M, N, P). In this respect, Newstead's discovery of, *inter alia*, a substantially built drain on an East-West alignment on the site of the Odeon Cinema (Newstead, 1939) turned out to be most fortunate.¹⁰ The drain is very reminiscent of the one found on the southern side of the *via sagularis* at Abbey Green (McPeake *et al*, 1980, Fig. 3:2, 19) and, as with the latter, probably marks approximately the South side of an East-West road skirting the end of the large building to its South. This makes it possible to project, with a fair degree of confidence, the line of the northern external wall of the building (i.e. North of R) and thus to project a length for the building of something close to one hundred and fifty metres. However, it still seems reasonable to assume that the width (East-West) of the building was 64.60m since this figure was based not on the function of the building but on the evidence of its plan and position in relation to the central North-South axis of the fortress.

It may be considered that until all the gaps between the various portions of this building have been filled in by archaeological excavation it will remain a possibility that there are at least two distinct buildings behind the *principia* at Chester.¹¹ After all, it may be said that correspondences in building line prove nothing and there are, besides, parts of the plans of many fortress buildings, excluding *praetoria* and *valetudinaria*, of which the present evidence from Chester could be said to be reminiscent. This being so, the layout of the buildings and road system to the West (E, F and K) suggest only one alternative possibility and that is that the building traditionally interpreted as the *praetorium* is almost exactly square after all, and that another building of somewhat similar dimensions was situated behind it. Whilst it is admitted that final proof of the correctness of either hypothesis is lacking, acceptance of the 'two different buildings' option

¹⁰ Newstead found a length of walling to the South of the drain which may have been an internal partition for the large building to the South, but equally well this may not have been of Roman date since a number of similar walls of medieval or later date were seen in the immediate vicinity in 1982. He also found traces of *opus signinum* (Roman concrete) floors some distance to the North of the drain and these point to the existence of at least one well appointed Roman building immediately to the North of the postulated road.

¹¹ If these questions are ever to be answered at all, it is now likely that they can only be resolved on the East side of Northgate Street and in the vicinity of the Abbey Gateway.

would amount to a denial of the various remarkable correspondences not only of building line but also of internal building plan and structural phases between the 'praetorium' discovered on the site of the Old Market Hall (M) and the building or buildings recently discovered in Princess Street (N and P) and Hunter Street (R). For the time being then, it is perhaps best to work on the conjecture that behind the *principia* at Chester there existed a very large building approximately sixty five metres wide by approximately one hundred and fifty metres long.

In considering the function, or functions, served by this enormous building it will be helpful first to summarise the current interpretation of its history and structural phases based on the most recent discoveries in the Princess Street/former Hunter's Walk/Hunter Street area (N, P and R). It is now clear that throughout the Roman period a substantially metalled, fairly wide (over eleven metres in some places) and no doubt important street ran North-South between the *insula* behind the *principia* and the *insula* to its West. This street may well have continued further southwards, although somewhat narrower, down the western side of the *principia* itself until its assumed junction with the *via principalis*.¹²

On the site later occupied by the building to the rear of the *principia* (particularly N) there was some slight but inconclusive evidence for a timber structure (not necessarily for a similar building to the one later built there) and finds from the earliest road surface alongside suggest that this was late first to early second century in date. Not long afterwards, wall foundations of cobbles set in clay were laid down for what can be assumed to have been the first 'stone' phase of the building to the rear of the *principia*. It is possible that construction work was halted prior to completion and it may represent part of what Mr. Petch has considered to be a possibly abortive first stone phase on the Old Market Hall site (Petch, 1968, 4-5). The apparent similarity of construction between the foundations and those of parts of the centrally placed internal structures (P) suggests that some of the latter may also have been part of the original stone layout of the building but in this particular case the recovery of information was necessarily so rapid (in advance of the reconstruction of Princess Street near the Town Hall) that this conclusion must remain a tentative one for the time being.

Some time after the middle of the second century the building was rebuilt, or finished, down to and including the insertion of completely new foundations of sandstone rubble with cappings of puddled clay, and with an adjacent eaves drip gully along the western, external, side of the building. That this was found to be necessary lends support to the idea that the original foundations had been incomplete but may equally well represent a process of raising the wall footings above the level of the adjacent street, which by now had been resurfaced. It may well be, however, that this new construction work is part of the pattern emerging in various

¹² A short distance to the East of the present day junction of Goss Street with Watergate Street.

parts of the legionary fortress and is more evidence for the re-garrisoning of Chester in strength on the withdrawal of *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* from Northern Britain in c. 160 (e.g. Strickland, 1981, 418).

The building was again systematically rebuilt, but evidently to the same essential design, in the early third century. On this occasion, however, the work did not include the total replacement of the pre-existing wall footings but simply the reduction of walling to a consistent level of approximately 0.75m above that of the external street surface, a fact which once again points to the removal and replacement of a timber framed superstructure. However, the technique now adopted entailed, in part, the addition of two extra courses of dressed masonry so designed as to provide decent offsets, very probably for raised timber flooring. Once again, the extremely regular level to which the top of this masonry survived suggests the construction of a new timber framed superstructure although it must be said that the foundations and wall footings were sufficiently substantial and well enough built to support a superstructure of stone.

In the early fourth century a number of alterations to the building were carried out. Noteworthy among these was the replacement of the roofing tiles with micaceous sandstone flags and North Wales slates. It is possible that the earlier roofing material was systematically stripped for use elsewhere and was replaced with poorer quality materials. Perhaps the *tegulae* and *imbrices* had by then been rendered scarce and more highly prized owing to a somewhat earlier cessation in their manufacture. If so, this roofing alteration may point to a change, and even a reduction, in the status of this building. Other alterations, which are consistent with this idea, included the replacement of the third century raised timber flooring with substantial but comparatively rough floors of rubble and, here and there, re-used architectural fragments, the insertion of poor quality hearths in some of the rooms and the insertion of a new doorway in the western side of the building, opening onto the adjacent street. These alterations are, in some ways, reminiscent of those noted further to the South on the Old Market Hall site and it is tempting, in particular, to relate the creation of the new doorway to the narrowing of others elsewhere in the building (e.g. Petch, 1968, 4-5). Although the basic form of the building survived it is possible that all these alterations were necessitated by a change in the nature of occupation. It is also possible that the original building was now subdivided into smaller units and the hearths suggest that, at this date, occupation was at least partly residential.

The building continued to be occupied, albeit in altered form, well into the fourth century, if not later, but the evidence was not sufficient to put a closer date on the latest occupation. However, although there was no evidence to suggest that the building had been systematically demolished in the Roman period it is clear that it had been reduced to its stone wall sills, probably through random removal of re-usable building materials, by sometime in the tenth or eleventh centuries, when a large wooden building was constructed across the line of its

western wall and, incidentally, across the site of the adjacent North-South street as well.

In the absence of any conclusive evidence it is difficult to assign a function, however tentatively, to this building in the second and third centuries since there are several possible alternatives. However, if the current interpretation of its overall size and plan is now essentially correct it suggests that it was too large and of the wrong design to be the *praetorium*. That building must be looked for in a different position, possibly to the East of the *principia*, (e.g. the fortress at *Vetera*) or elsewhere.¹³ On the other hand, as already shown, there remains the possibility, albeit a slight one, that the Princess Street discoveries relate to a separate building behind a *praetorium* of a size close to that originally suggested by Mr. Petch (approximately sixty five metres square). Such a separate building, approximately sixty five metres wide by eighty five metres long (North-South), could have been a courtyard type stores building or workshop of some kind, or perhaps even quarters for *immunes* (orderlies etc., on the headquarters staff) as at *Novaesium* for example (Von Petrikovits, 1975, Tafel 6a, 16), but known building plans of the last mentioned do not tally at all closely with the recent discoveries at Chester.

The recovery of two medical inscriptions from the area behind the *principia* at Chester strongly suggests that this large building was the *valetudinarium*. Once again, however, these inscriptions need not help us at all if the individuals responsible for having them erected were on the personal staff of the legate, as Mr. Nutton has suggested (Nutton, 1968, 12). Nevertheless, the emerging plan of this building (inward facing ranges of rooms and porticos with separate centrally placed structures) is beginning to appear reminiscent of *valetudinaria* in some other fortresses (e.g. Inchtuthil, *Novaesium* and *Bonna*: Von Petrikovits, 1975, Bild 27, 1, 7, and 8 respectively). Although, as yet, nowhere is there a building identified as a *valetudinarium* to be found located immediately behind a *principia* the locations of major buildings in legionary fortresses are so variable that this need not be significant. The size and proportions of the building do not greatly matter either, since these also show some considerable variation in *valetudinaria* elsewhere; general distinctions being between those which are approximately square in plan (e.g. *Carnuntum*, *Vindonissa*, *Isca* and *Vetera*) and those which are markedly rectangular with their entrances at one end (e.g. Inchtuthil, *Novaesium*, *Bonna* and *Ločica*). The dimensions suggested for the building at Chester make it somewhat larger than the other 'rectangular' *valetudinaria*; but that at *Bonna* (Bonn) is approximately eighty five by one hundred and twenty five metres (Von Petrikovits, 1975, Bild, 27, 8) and that at *Ločica* is seventy by approximately one hundred and twenty five metres (*ibid.*, Bild 27, 10), neither of which is very much smaller. It is therefore very possible that this enormous building is the *valetudinarium*, but there remain certain other alternatives worth mentioning.

¹³ Another possible location for the *praetorium* is in the area now occupied by the Cathedral but there are no known parallels for this in other fortresses.

It is possible that it was a very large courtyard type workshop not dissimilar in plan from several found in other fortresses (e.g. *Noviomagus*, *Novaesium* and *Bonna*). A large building in the equivalent position behind the *principia* at the legionary fortress of *Vetere* is identified as a workshop although its plan is not at all reminiscent of the building at Chester (Von Petrikovits, 1975, Tafel 5a, 8). Finally, another alternative to the '*valetudinarium*' hypothesis is that the building may have been a large stores depot or magazine, in some respects very similar in plan, although not in proportions, to the enormous but unfinished Severan courtyard building situated to the East of the granaries at Corbridge. However, the function of the latter also remains uncertain (Collingwood, 1978, 94-5).

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¹⁴ The plan of the legionary fortress has been redrawn, updated and otherwise slightly altered to take account of discoveries made since 1972 and in particular those made recently in the Princess Street area. However, with these exceptions, much of the rest of it is based on the plan produced by Mr. D. F. Petch in 1969 (Nash-Williams, 1969, Fig. 15).

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