



Fig. 1. The hypocaust



Fig. 2. The flue

## V.—EXCAVATIONS AT EBCHESTER IN 1962-3<sup>1</sup>

*Alan Reed, Richard Harper and Wilfred Dodds*

During the summer of 1962 Mr. William Dodds, the owner of Mains Farm, Ebchester, while he was digging the foundations for a new green-house on his property, uncovered a wall which was curved and ran in below the foundations of a barn. This barn stands within the fort area, some 60 feet inside the north-east rampart and 80 feet south-east of the Newcastle to Shotley Bridge road. This road has long been identified with the *via principalis* of the fort.<sup>2</sup> Permission to excavate being freely given, work was carried out both outside and inside the barn (fig. 1).

### *Apsidal Room*

The complete curved wall was uncovered and was found to form an apse measuring 16' 6" across the inside diameter, the walls being 2' 2" thick and standing on average 3 feet high in five courses. At the north end of the apse wall was found a wall running north-east under the wall of the barn. The walls were well built of good dressed stone. None of the walls survive above the original floor level, the floor

<sup>1</sup> The excavations were carried out by a volunteer group led by Mr. Alan Reed, who in the autumn of 1963 invited Mr. Richard Harper to assist with the preparation of this report. It is desired to thank warmly Mr. William Dodds, the owner of the site, for his sympathetic co-operation and close interest in the work. For assistance in excavation Mr. Allen Batty, Mr. Eric Downes, Mrs. Spark, Mrs. Oliver, Miss M. Mitcheson and a contingent from Consett Grammar School led by Mr. Stewart Winskill are among those who are to be thanked. Thanks are also due to members of the Durham University Department of Archaeology for advice, especially Mr. Wilfred Dodds, who prepared the pottery report and drawings.

<sup>2</sup> Accounts of work done at the fort of Ebchester can be found in *The Archaeology of Roman Durham* (1938, unpublished thesis) by Dr. K. A. Steer and "The Roman Fort at Ebchester" by Dr. M. G. Jarrett in *AA<sup>4</sup> XXXVIII*.

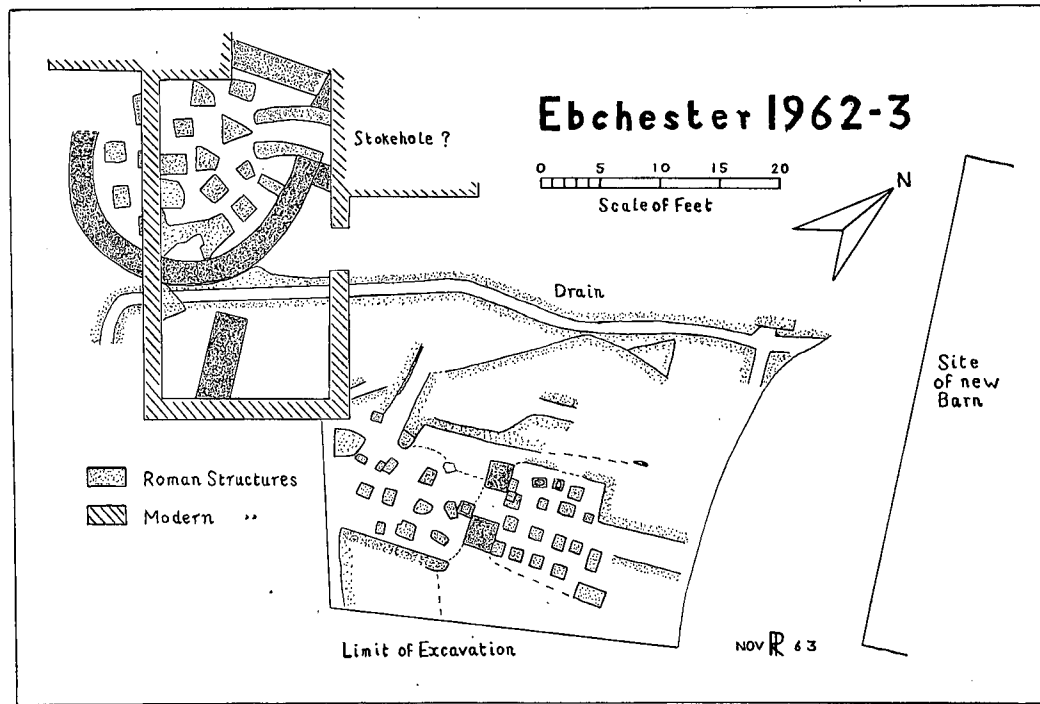


FIG. 1

having been used in places as foundation for the floor of the modern barn.

Within the apse were pillars built of stone forming a hypocaust system (Plate XI, 1). They were less well built than the outside wall and stood about 3 feet high. Towards the south, part of the stone flagged floor remained with slabs 3" thick, topped with a 3" layer of mortar flooring. The hypocaust is interesting for the completeness of the fittings so far exposed. It has not yet been possible to excavate the stoke-hole, of which the wall running north-east from the apse presumably formed the south side, but the floor level in the modern building covering it is such that it may be expected to be well preserved. Leading from the stoke-hole on the east side of the apse is a flue with walls two feet apart projecting some four feet into the apse (Plate XI, 2). The bottom of the flue was lined with 3" of clay over a layer of small pebbles. At the mouth of the flue was a triangular pillar so placed that the hot air issuing from the flue was deflected into two streams. The southerly stream was then turned back towards the wall of the apse and led along it, the flow round the apse being unimpeded as the floor was supported on stones keyed into the inside face of the wall. The other stream seems to have been led over against a partition wall on the north side. This wall ran from the north corner of the room, beyond the flue, butting against the continuation of the apse wall just before it disappeared, destroyed by the modern building to the north, whose floor was at a lower level.

During the excavation of the *débris* between the hypocaust pillars a number of pieces of painted wall plaster were found. Green, red and white pigments were noted, but not enough remained to establish a pattern. Broken roof-tile and pottery was also found in this *débris*. As was to be expected, a sooty burnt layer covered all the floor of the hypocaust. Most of the pottery was in the entrance to the flue. It must have got into the flue after the hypocaust system went out of use as it was not burnt. The group as a whole

suggests a late third century date thus offering a terminus for the life of the hypocaust.

Running south-west to north-east immediately behind the apse a drain was found. It was built of partly dressed stone, was 1' 8" deep and, on average, 10" wide. The bottom of the drain was lined with stone slabs which appeared to have been laid before the sides were built up. The drain seemed to be contemporary with the apsidal room, the slab covers for the drain, some of which, inside the barn, were still in place, being level with the floor of the apsidal room. It was unfortunately not possible to establish whether there had been an outlet from the back of the apse to the drain as the apse wall was robbed down too far at the critical point. Outside the barn on the west side the drain was traced curving in from the south, then on the east side was found running north-east with curves, presumably to take it round the stoke-hole, for some 35 feet until it debouched into a larger drain running north-west along the line of the rampart.

The building of which this room is a part, standing by the *via principalis* of the fort, may well have been the Commandant's House. If so, this room was probably the *caldarium* or *sudatorium* of the bath suite which was usually attached to a Commandant's house. We may draw comparisons with the double apse of the Commandant's House at Chesters, the Bath House under St. Sampson's Square, York<sup>3</sup> and the bath suite in a private house, IV 4, at Verulamium.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Two rooms with a hypocaust system*

Excavation took place in the summer of 1963 in an area, adjoining that described above, to the south-east of the barn of Mains Farm. The area involved was about 30 feet square. In it were found the remains of two rooms, both hypocausted, referred to as the east and west rooms respectively. The

<sup>3</sup> *Eburacum*, p. 42, fig. 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Verulamium*, p. 100, Pl. XXXI.

outside walls of the building had suffered badly from stone robbing. All that remained was a few feet of the western end of the north and south walls, and even there only some inside facing stones standing one course high. A piece of wall at the south end of the barn behind the apsidal room may be the west wall but has not yet been shown to be part of the west room.

The east room had lost all its outside walls, only cobble foundations remaining. There was however a series of hypocaust pillars, some standing to a height of 18". The east room had pillars of brick and the west of stone. Dividing the two rooms were two stone piers about 2' 6" square and 2 feet apart, on an approximately north-south alignment similar to that of the apsidal room. They were set on a foundation of cobbles. These piers could well have carried a small arch below floor level, allowing the hot air to circulate in the hypocaust.

In the east room, besides the brick pillars, there were two re-used parts of small stone pillars of oval section, such as may have been used to divide the windows of the clerestory of, for example, the cross-hall of a headquarters building. There was one other stone pillar. On these pillars there had been a stone slab floor, with a layer of mortar over it, similar to that in the apsidal room. Towards the south some of the pillars incorporated re-used roofing tiles, three of which bore the stamp of the Fourth Cohort of Breuci (fig. 2).<sup>5</sup> In the rubble between the pillars were pieces of a number of box tiles of two sizes, 12 × 10 × 6" and 9 × 5 × 5", and broken roof tiles. At the east end was a flue. This too was brick built, 2 feet wide and so far cleared for a distance of six feet. That there were two periods of use in this room was demonstrated by the presence of two layers of sooty material separated in some places by a thin spread of mortar.

The stone pillars in the west room were very roughly built and not sited in any particular pattern. There was one brick pillar. At the north-west corner was another struc-

<sup>5</sup> See below, appendix on inscriptions.



FIG. 2 (4)

ture which resembled a flue. Its bottom was lined with cobbles. On leaving the building it dipped sharply towards the drain described above. The sides of this feature stood three courses high and it was traced for six feet. Another small drain came out from under the east corner of the barn and appeared to have crossed this flue. A curving line of stones in line with this drain may represent the south side of its easterly continuation. In the débris filling the west room was found the glass vessel described below. The hypocaust floor of this room showed two periods of use and stratification similar to the east room.

The nature of this building and the re-used material in it suggest that it should be assigned to a fourth century date.

The exposed part of the site was filled in for the winter, but further excavation is planned to seek information on earlier occupation.

#### INSCRIPTIONS *Richard Harper*

I. Three stamped tiles (fig. 2). Cohors III Breucorum is recorded on a British diploma of 17th July 122<sup>6</sup> when it was stationed at Slack, near to which many tiles were found at the Grimshaw tile kiln.<sup>7</sup> It was possibly then stationed at Bowes under Hadrian.<sup>8</sup> It has previously been attested at Ebchester on a third century dedicatory inscription.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> XVI 69.

<sup>7</sup> VII 1231 = *EE* VII 1127 and *AE* 1958 no. 116 = *JRS* XLVII 233 and I. A. Richmond, *Huddersfield in Roman Times* (1925) 57-9, with illustrations.

<sup>8</sup> VII 275.

<sup>9</sup> VII 458.

A fragment of stamped tile previously found at Ebchester<sup>10</sup> was read col H I BR and variously interpreted, most recently as Cohors I Bracaraugustanorum.<sup>11</sup> In view of this find of tiles one must doubt the accuracy of the original reading of the fragment, now lost, and suggest that it will have read coh i III BR (eucorum), thus following the opinion held, on less evidence, by Cichorius<sup>12</sup> followed by Steer.<sup>13</sup>

II. A further note is called for on an inscription (fig. 3) found in an adjoining garden wall in 1962 by Mr. William Dodds. It has been published by Mr. R. P. Wright in *JRS* LIII p. 161 no. 7 as follows:

“Lower part of a buff sandstone altar, 16½ by 15 by 9 in., with part of the moulding on the right side of the base preserved; the mouldings on the left side and front have been dressed off, and the back is broken. . . . It reads: GVSTI SAM[MIVS / VICTOR CENT[VRIO / LEGION VI[CT VS] The initial word suggests that this may have been a dedication NVMINI AV] / GVSTI, ‘to the Deity of the Emperor’. If so, it may have been preceded by some other deity.”

It was unusual to divide such a word as *Augusti* between two lines or to juxtapose it with the name of the dedicator. Now, rather than just the moulding being missing from the left side, the whole stone appears to have been cut down. If so, it would be possible to restore AV before GVSTI in line 1. This would allow an abbreviated *nomen* such as FL. or IVL. to be restored before the *cognomen* VICTOR in line 2, thus leaving the restoration of the SA etc. in the previous line open to conjecture. The A carries very heavy serifs, such that it may almost be thought to be a ligature of A and E. Also the final fragment of a letter in line one is hardly sufficient from which to restore M with certainty. It could represent a B ligatured to the A or another S. No substitute restoration can be offered at the moment but it is hoped that the illustration will stimulate further thought on the matter.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *Roman Wall*<sup>3</sup> 346=Lap. Sep. 670=VII 1229.

<sup>11</sup> Jarrett, *op. cit.* 197-8.

<sup>12</sup> P-W *RE* s.v. *cohors*.

<sup>13</sup> *op. cit.* 368, no. 66.



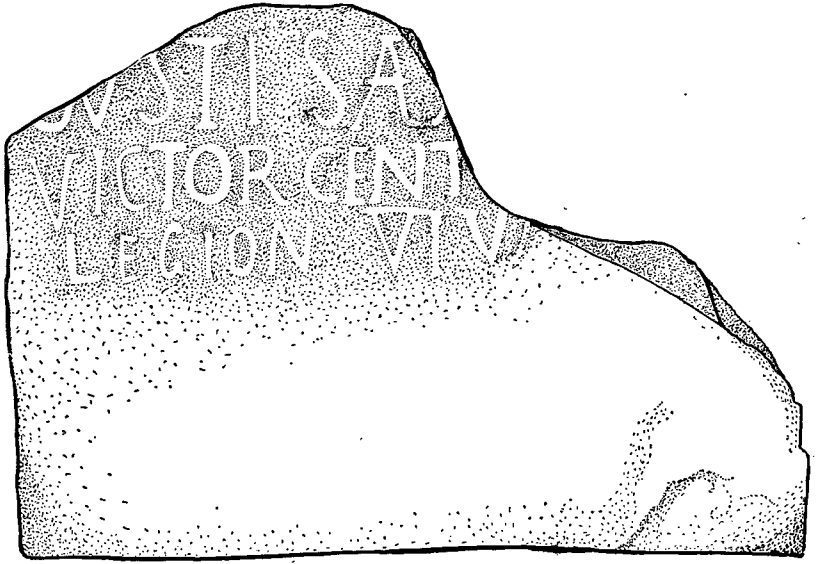


FIG. 3 (4)

POTTERY AND OTHER SMALL FINDS *Wilfred Dodds*  
Numbers in brackets refer to figures 4-6

*Samian*

In the cobble make-up of the hypocaust floor in the apse. One fragment Dr. 27.

In the lower sooty layer in the east room outside. One fragment Dr. 29, 1st C. (1).

In the comparable layer in the west room. One fragment Dr. 18/31.

In the cobble make-up between the two sooty layers in the west room. Four fragments Dr. 37, S. Gaulish. Three of the fragments could well belong to a single vessel. (2-5). One fragment Dr. 18. One fragment Dr. 27.

Unstratified. One fragment Curle 15.

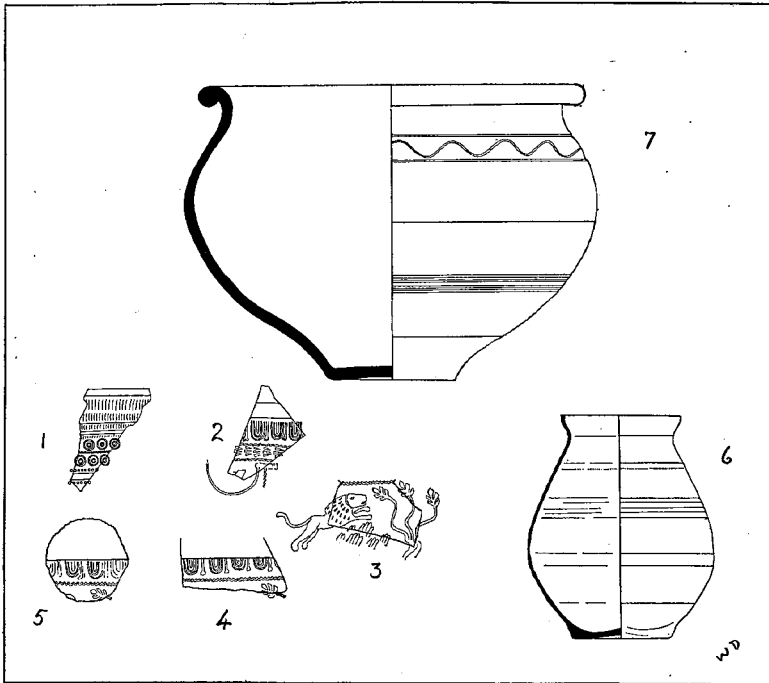


FIG. 4 (4)

*Glass*

Unstratified. Beaker of almost colourless material, pear-shaped and decorated with zones of parallel milling. A near prototype is *Verulamium*, fig. 29, no. 27. A perfect parallel exists (unpublished) in the Royal Museum, Edinburgh (1921-115). The example most distant from the prototype in a short developing series. ? 3rd C. (6).

*Coarse pottery*

In the upper sooty layer in the west room outside. Wide mouth jar or bowl in fine hard dark grey fabric. Roll rim. Narrow foot. A band of sinuous decoration on matt background below the neck. Five alternate bands of black

burnished and matt to the base. The vessel appears to be unique in its sophistication, no parallels having been found as yet. The black burnished technique would seem to indicate a tentative date of 2nd-3rd C. (7).

In the rubble filling the apsidal hypocaust, mainly from the flue.

Wide mouth jar or bowl in fine hard grey self fabric with developed roll rim. Incised line on the shoulder, below which is a zone of sinuous decoration on a matt background. No exact parallel but perhaps related to Gillam type 187/190. (8).

Castor or colour-coated beaker. Gillam type 55. Polished blue-black finish with white painted decoration between two zones of rouletting. A perfect parallel exists in Guilden Morden, Cambs., *Ant. J.* VI Pl. 32. (9).

A fragment of a similar vessel with a rather greenish cast to the finish and a double white lattice design between double zones of rouletting. 3rd C.

Wide mouth jar or bowl in hard lead grey self fabric with developed roll rim and a band of zig-zag decoration around the girth. Rather like a shape prototype of a carinated bowl. (10).

Wide mouth jar or bowl in hard fine light blue-grey fabric with parallel burnishing on the body and double wide zig-zag on the neck. Late Celtic prototypes. (11).

"Flange rim" cooking pot. Hard grey self fabric with small grits. Rim section best paralleled by Gillam type 231; there is, however, no connection between the two. Taking the fabric into consideration the vessel seems to be a variant of Gillam type 157 and thus can tentatively be assigned to a date of A.D. 290-320. (12).

Black burnished cooking pot in the usual hard dark grey fabric, some fragments burnt to a "first century red". No exact Gillam parallel, late 3rd C. (13).

Four cooking pots in hard grey self fabric with small grits, a slightly rough surface and lipped rim. Marked regular corrugations on the inside. Gillam type 157. Rim

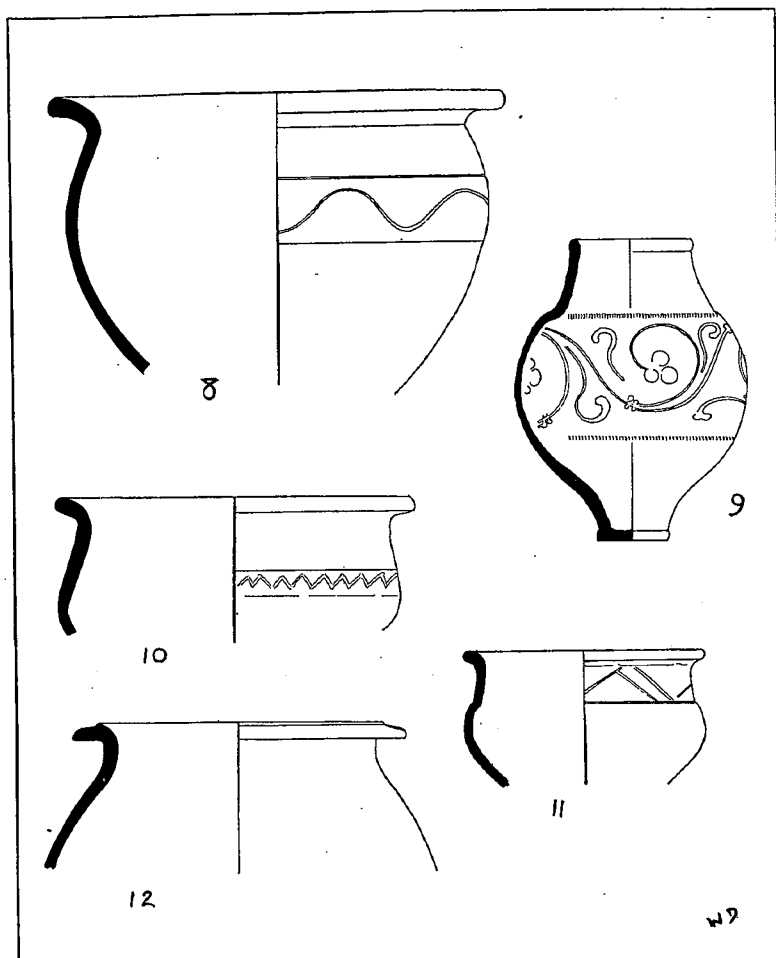


FIG. 5 (1)

sections are all varieties of a single type. A.D. 290-320. (14-17).

In the cobble make-up between the two sooty layers in the west room. Rim fragment of flagon in self buff fabric. Gillam type 2. A.D. 70-110.

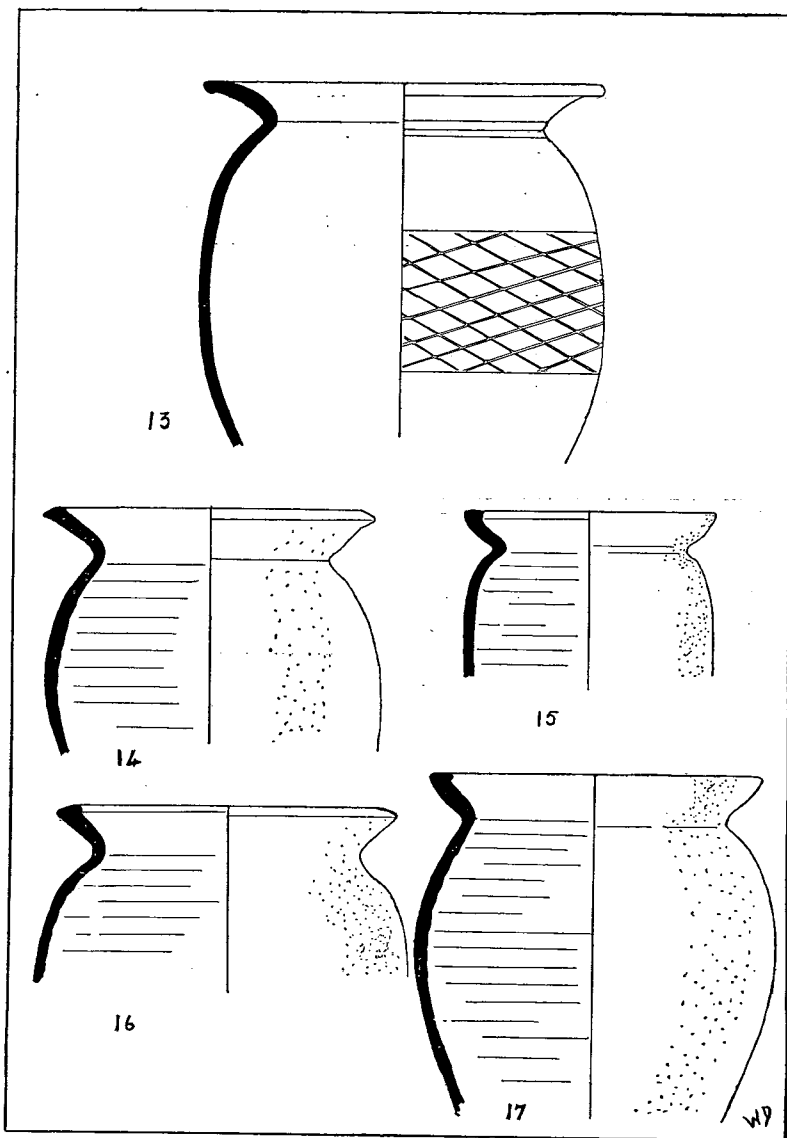


FIG. 6 (1/2)

In the main drain behind the apsidal building. Wall fragment of a large storage jar of hard grey self fabric and globular shape. Two bands of incised zig-zag decoration between plain borders on shoulder, alternate bands of burnished and matt further down. Cf. Elmswell, fig. 11-13, for decoration only, and Malton, unpublished. A typical Crambeck, and later, form of decoration.

Black burnished platter. Similar rim section to, but slightly higher than, Gillam type 329. A.D. 190-340.

Platter, hard grey fabric, vertical sides. Intersecting arcs on sides and inter-connected loops on outside of base. Gillam type 329, as above.

In small drain outside. Hook rim mortarium. Self red fabric with white quartz and blue grits. 2nd C. type. Paralleled Caerleon 1926, p. 56, fig. 34-5 and fig. 27-9.

### *Iron*

Three-sided arrow head with tang fitting. Of an eastern type developed from a bronze prototype, cf. B.M. Introduced by auxiliaries from the Middle East. Parallels at Newstead, Housesteads, Carlisle, Corbridge, York, London, Godmanchester etc. Still in use up to a recent date, cf. Indian Mutiny trophies, Royal United Services Museum, and quiver and arrows from Afghan campaign, Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

### *Antler*

Base of cast antler of Red Deer (*Cervus Elephas*) left side, modern type, sawn off immediately above the second tine, which is broken and worn down, brow tine sawn off close to the beam.



