

SOME EVIDENCES OF THE DEFENCES OF ROMAN GLOUCESTER (GLEVUM).

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The total absence of any historical references to a Roman wall-circuit at Gloucester, or to the discovery of such here at any known period, in spite of the formerly well-preserved, and strictly typical military dimensions of the plan (510 by 430 yds. or an enclosure of 46 acres) seems to be properly accounted for only by the early and permanent quartering of the second legion, with its depôt not here, but at Caerleon, thirty miles westward, and by the fact that the likewise permanent military *trajectus* (ferry) was some 22 miles south-west below, while there was possibly a signal-station at Hempstead (Newark) but a mile and a half south-west, which point commanded far and wide over Severn. As Glevum became settled as a (probably civil) *colonia* only in A.D. 97-8, an entire generation later than the end of the Silurian troubles (c. A.D. 75), and it took on this typically Roman camp-form, it need not necessarily be supposed that any native fortified post was here converted into a camp. The Romans seldom destroyed native (or, at least, Dobunic) intrenchments—not even at Bath did they do this, nor at Silchester, nor Cirencester; but there has not survived to our day any trace of native British defences at Gloucester: only a well-preserved strictly Roman rectangular design, without walls. No trace of legionary evidence, such as stamped tiles or inscriptions, has been found here.

Down, however, to the days of Edward II we have evidence that there did survive somewhere adjoining Hare Street (Here Lane) and near the probate registry, an (?) earthwork, or other remains, known as *Croydon Castle*, which, with this Celtic root-name, may possibly have been related to pre-Roman work. All earthworks in Cotswold are called Castle. On the other hand, it was very close

to the Roman north gate; though it rose outside both that and the Fulbrook or moat. More cannot be said about this, but possibilities favour the notion that it was a tumulus or perhaps a surviving portion of the Roman *vallum*, which, for some unknown reason, had acquired this singular name.



FIG. 1. ROMAN GLOUCESTER : SITE AND SURROUNDINGS.

As to any other similar name-remembrances (such as Wall-brook) of a mighty masonried defensive wall handed down in an old local place-name or to be found in the exceptionally rich documentary resources of this historic city, there is but one that will demand a thought. Meanwhile, it may not be beside the mark to suggest that, *had* there survived until the eleventh century such typically

Roman wrecks of local greatness, the Conqueror's greatest strategist, earl William Fitz Osbern, would surely have incorporated them with the Norman walls which he was

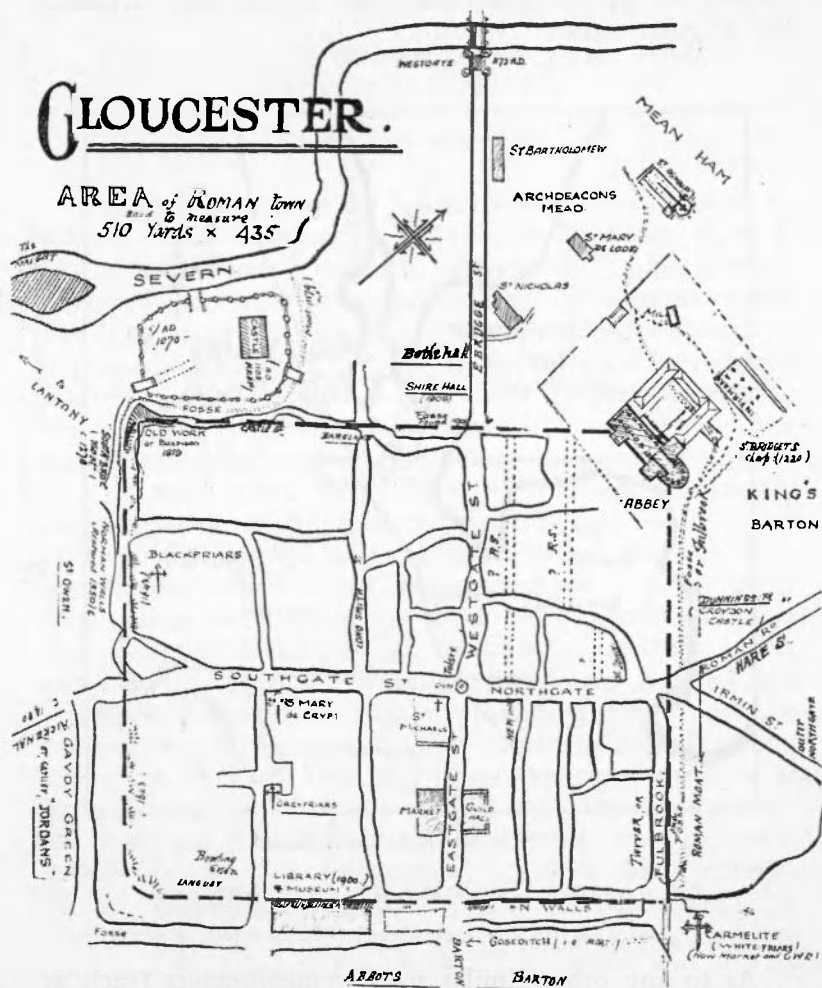


FIG. 2. PLAN OF GLOUCESTER, SHOWING AREA OF ROMAN TOWN.

commanded to raise, and would not have erected the royal castle outside their lines towards the river Severn, nor merely have used the Roman fosse for them, as we are sure

that he did. But, further (and earlier by far than A.D. 1070), are we to suppose that the Mercian kings would have laid out their abbey of St. Peter right upon the north angle of the Roman wall, overlapping both that and the fosse-line, and have raised their own palace (or *aula regis*), outside it entirely? And, further, would Alfred's daughter, Ethelfleda, and her strenuous husband, have built their own precious priory of St. Oswald (c. A.D. 900) right outside that same north-west Roman angle of the town? Gloucester is never once mentioned as a walled town in Saxon times; although the Roman-British *vallum* and fosse, no doubt, in a derelict condition, remained pretty evident.

All these circumstances relating to the riverside of the town most exposed to attack from the west seem clearly to point to the non-existence, at least in those ninth and tenth-century days, of such solid military defences as a great bastioned Roman wall, a wall such as was possessed by Caerleon, by Caerwent, and by Silchester. On the other hand, some few real evidences may be said lately to have come to light for our consideration, precisely on the same west side of Gloucester on what defences, if not a wall, the Roman town actually possessed.

For, until 1819, there survived at the south-west angle of Gloucester, just where the Norman 'south-gate' wall ended, a considerable mound known throughout Norman days as 'Old-castle.' It was utilised by the Norman kings for the barbican, or look-out tower to their adjacent castle (perhaps it was only of timber-construction). In 1643 Corbet¹ describes it remaining as a firm and lofty work; and Dorney relates that cannon were placed upon it during the siege in that year. In Kip's, and in other early eighteenth-century views of Gloucester, it duly appears with water flowing on both sides of it, disclosing therefore two ditches, and perhaps that meant a former double fosse. While this might conceivably have been of Celtic make, probabilities will seem to be against that. It is best represented in a water-colour by one Robins (c. 1760) which I have not yet been able to reproduce. The water derived from the neighbouring *Sudbroc*.

In 1818-19, owing to work connected with the

¹ He also mentions earth-banks situated at rear of the south gate walls:
i.e. further survivals of the *vallum*.

Gloucester and Berkeley canal, the fate of this mound became sealed. Mr. Counsel, a well-known local antiquarian writer, in a letter to his friend, Fosbroke, the historian of Gloucester, tells him '*It is now being removed. The workmen have found several Roman coins, one of them, a Valens, is in my possession.*' Fosbroke himself remarks of its size, '*It was much larger formerly than now, as appears by Kip's Plan, taken before 1712, and commanding an extensive view.*' It is curious that he jumps to the conclusion that it was both a British and an Anglo-Saxon fortress, identifies it with Ethelweard's 'Arx Gloucestriae,' while it never occurred to him that it was simply the south-west angle of the Roman *vallum* !

Having come to this view of the matter, and in August 1909, hearing that some 300 yards further north, and in line with it (beside Berkeley Street, formerly Castle Street, where the old town-house in Gloucester of the Berkeleys perhaps once stood), the Shire hall was to be enlarged by an eastern extension, to be built over the site right up to both Berkeley Street and to Westgate, I put myself into communication with the surveyor of the work (the late Mr. Robert Phillips), and also with the clerk of the works.

Upon the demolition of the old houses between Berkeley Street and the Shire hall, a stone wall, still many feet high, and many centuries old, became at once exposed adjoining the side of the Shire hall. The poor character of the masonry did not prevent many people fancying that it was the dreamed-of Roman wall. When its base became visible, a number of large flagstones upon which it rested (some of blue lias) began to appear. These proved presently to have been part of a narrow street at a quasi-Roman level (14 feet in depth) and running parallel to Berkeley Street and at right angles to the neighbouring Westgate Street. The width was between eight and nine feet. It was met with again twenty-five feet south-west of the site. This street proved, upon lifting the stones, to have been laid over rammed gravel which extended beyond the paving, sloping down into some very soft ground. The surveyor thus wrote me before I yet perceived the nature of the lower soil there: '*It is very soft between this road and Berkeley Street, as if it was part of the ditch.*' That is precisely what the writer took it to represent. But a more

striking finding was now in store. When some of the flag-stones were removed we found beneath them a group of no less than eleven holes, averaging from three to four or five inches wide, comprised within a space of 3 ft. 6 ins. by 2 ft. 9 ins., and there were others on each side extending beyond these. The holes were followed by us down to three, and some to five feet in depth; and, in bisection they proved to be perfectly smooth inside, having large dents projecting from them with wood fibre (? oak) adhering to the sides: while some still contained blackened remains of wood at their bases. In addition, though many were vertical, these stakes, were some of them, laid slant-wise.

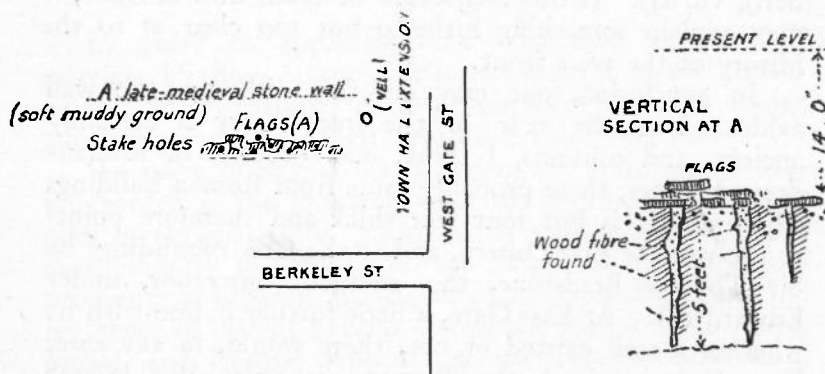


FIG. 3. PLAN AND TRACES OF ROMAN 'VALLUM' AT GLOUCESTER.

Consequently, no doubt was left that, whatever might further be met with, we had apparently gotten hold of the real construction of a Roman *vallum* that probably may have been crested with a palisade along its summit. Upon going down to examine the excavation at the part nearest the edge of Berkeley Street I detected at a similar depth from the present surface a fresh slope of rammed and pebbled gravel, rising eastward, but we could not reach the crest to see if it also contained similar stake-holes. This seemed to offer evidence pointing to a double *vallum*, and recalled the fact that the digging at Caerwent has also discovered two palisades, dating from days before it can ever have possessed the eight-foot wall that still in part

survives. Consequently, if Glevum has possessed a similar great wall, remains of it should long ago have been met with, and precisely when the present Shire hall was erected. But as this latter was built in 1816 by Robert Smirke, R.A., and neither Fosbroke nor Mr. Counsel (much interested persons) heard of the discovery of any such wall, we may take it that it does not exist there : nor has it been discovered anywhere else along College Street. It is further, perhaps, legitimate to suggest that the *vitium fundamenti* of the western tower to the Abbey church, which Giraldus tells us was the cause of its collapse (c. 1171), really was due to the watery and concealed ancient fosse which must have turned north-east hard by it (cf. Giraldus Camb. (Rolls Ser.), vii, 64). If this conjecture be taken into account, it may explain something hitherto not too clear as to the history of the west front.

In conclusion, one may say that although the wall evidenced at the rear of the free library is certainly ancient, and contains, I think, many courses of Roman-dressed stones, these probably came from Roman buildings adjacent. It is but four feet thick and therefore points to the work of Fitz Osbern, and to the later rebuildings by Sir Thomas Bradstone, the energetic governor, under Edward III. At East Gate, a little further in line with it, whether a wall existed or not, there would, in any case, have long survived the Roman east gate double-arch structures. Yet no proper Roman massiveness has been discovered there either. The wall is but 4 ft. 6 ins. or even 5 ft. 6 ins. thick, corresponding much more nearly with things medieval, and moreover, we know that the oft-repaired medieval wall stood there until almost modern times and the civil wars.

Consequently, I think we may maintain, with some reason, that Glevum, a non-military *colonia*, having had no cause for anxiety from enemies, being in fact, a most favourably positioned settlement,¹ there arose no occasion for other fortifications than those which we have shewn she possessed : namely, *vallum* and fosse, and the river Severn.

¹ The Forest of Dean was most probably imperial demesne, as mining-land.