

V: The Town and Port of Roman Chester

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The Town

veterani et cives Romani et consistentes ad canabas legionis XX valeriae victricis

As well as being an important military base Deva was also a significant civilian centre and a major port. Like any military unit, the legion installed at Chester was accompanied by a considerable number of civilian ‘hangers on’. Once thought by modern writers to be simply camp followers whose presence was barely tolerated by the military authorities, research in recent years has shown that certain classes of civilians were not merely allowed to settle beside camps and forts but, because of their close links with the army, were positively encouraged to do so, with land and facilities being set aside for their use. Many such civilians were engaged in commerce, such as sutlers (*Iixae*), traders (*negotiatores*) and merchants (*mercatores*) who made their living by supplying the soldiers with a wide range of commodities and luxuries. On occasion, such men also supplied army units with specific goods in volume on a contractual basis. There were also those who set up establishments which provided the diversions and entertainments of greatest appeal to the ordinary soldier in his off-duty hours, namely taverns, brothels and gambling dens. Another group which comprised a sizeable proportion of the civilian community consisted of the common-law wives of troops (until the reforms of the early third century serving soldiers could not contract legal marriages) and their children. Also, every year about 300 men of Legion XX reached the end of their term of service. Although some would have moved away from Chester, either to settle in another part of Britain (the hinterland of Wroxeter or perhaps the prosperous south-east) or even to return to their ancestral homelands abroad, others set up home in the extramural settlement beside the fortress (*canabae legionis*), legitimised their previously informal unions and raised their sons as future recruits for the legion.

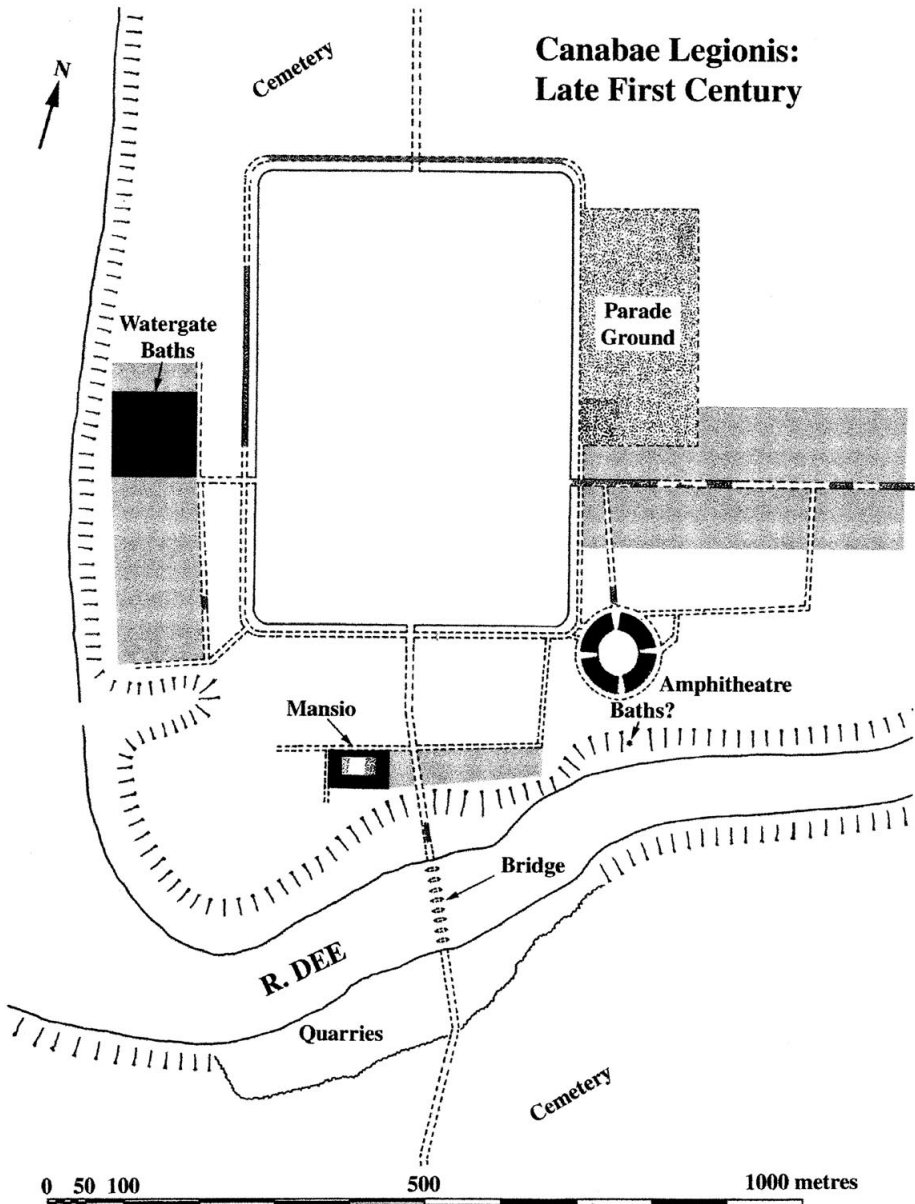
Already quite substantial within a few years, settlements of this type soon grew to a town-like size, and inscriptions from *canabae* elsewhere show that they possessed their own council and appointed officials, copying those in formally constituted towns and cities, to see to the running of their everyday affairs. Inscriptions from a number of sites record public actions or communal dedications made by such communities, in which the various constituent elements of the population are mentioned thus: *veterani et cives Romani et consistentes ad canabas legionis*, meaning ‘veterans and Roman citizens and others gathered together at the *canabae* of the legion ...’.

The existence of suburbs around the Chester fortress has long been known, but it is only in comparatively recent years that their extent, character and history have begun to be clarified to any degree (Ill V.1). To the east of the fortress, evidence which has accumulated in a piecemeal fashion over many years points to intensive development fronting both sides of the main road (perpetuated by modern Foregate Street) and consisting for the most part of small rectangular buildings positioned end-on to the road. These conform to the well-known 'strip building' category of Roman structures which predominated in the commercial quarters of Roman towns and cities and which consisted of a shop at the front, a store or workshop behind and residential apartments at the rear and/or above. The earliest buildings, as one might expect, were timber and were replaced in the early years of the second century by more substantial structures partly or wholly constructed of stone. Although the evidence indicates street-frontage development stretching out from the fortress east gate for some considerable distance, the discovery of extensive rubbish dumps in the City Road/Dee Lane area suggests that the built-up area did not extend any further than about 300 m.

To the north of the road, immediately outside the east gate, lay the legionary parade ground or *campus*, partially explored in 1966. While the general impression of the remainder of the backland areas behind the street frontage is one of open ground used for industrial activities, possibly including the manufacture of pottery and glass as well as metal-working, excavation of a site in Priory Place in 1989 by Simon Ward demonstrated that side streets with their own intensive street-frontage development also existed, at least in the southern half of this area. This side street lay about 200 m out from the fortress defences and two stone strip buildings, each approximately 8 m wide and 25 m long, were found fronting its east side about 110 m south of Foregate Street. Erected around AD 120, they would seem to represent expansion into the backland zone. Traces of at least two other side streets have been found closer in to the fortress, although evidence of accompanying buildings was less conclusive.

Early excavations and observations noted sections of ditches of differing size and profile at various points in the eastern suburbs, but their purpose remains obscure. One such, following an east-west alignment to the south of Foregate Street, was apparently already obsolete by the close of the first century and may have belonged to a construction camp associated with the building of the fortress. At least one other was of much later date and may conceivably have belonged to a system of defences erected around the eastern *canabae* in the later Roman period.

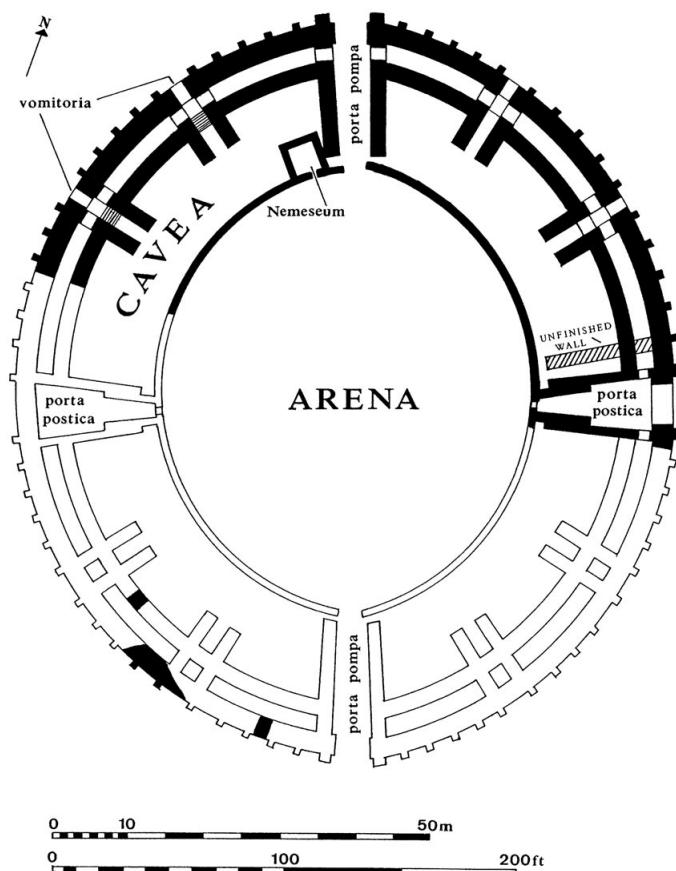
Moving round to the area south of the fortress, the land opposite the south-east angle was occupied largely by the military amphitheatre (*ludus*). Discovered in 1929, its northern half was excavated in the 1960s, followed by consolidation works to enable its remains to be displayed (Ill V.2). The earliest *ludus*, built soon after the foundation of the fortress, was of timber and measured 67 x c 75 m overall. This was soon replaced by a much larger stone structure measuring 87.2 x c 95.7 m, which had a seating capacity more than twice that of its predecessor. Since purchasing Dee House, which overlies the other half of the amphitheatre, in the mid-1990s Chester City Council has been exploring ways of achieving the exposure of further portions of this impressive structure, the largest known military



III V.1 Extent of *canabae legionis* c AD 100: plan. (Scale 1/10 000). Solid black = known buildings; shading = general extent of built-up area)

amphitheatre in Britain. Mechanical sounding of a site south of the amphitheatre in 1989 encountered a substantial structure of brick and concrete set on a terrace beside the Dee, an ideal spot for the location of a bath building serving visitors to the amphitheatre.

The area south of the fortress was bisected by the road (now Lower Bridge Street) which ran down to the bridge across the Dee. To either side of this road, a zone stretching 150 m out from the defences appears to have been kept deliberately free of any major structures, although some evidence for industrial activity has been recovered. Further south, however, beyond the line of present-day Castle Street and Duke Street, evidence recovered during the last twenty years proves the existence of a number of substantial, well appointed buildings occupying prime sites along the edge of the sandstone plateau overlooking the river. The discovery in the nineteenth century of a finely constructed wall at the eastern extremity of the area beside the City Walls has been supplemented in the 1990s by the exposure in evaluation trenches south of Duke Street of other elements of solid masonry structures further west, including one with an apsidal room. West of Lower Bridge Street, excavations in 1976 exposed part of a large courtyard building with a long and com-



III V.2 Stone legiary amphitheatre c AD 100: plan. (Scale 1/1000)



III V.3 *Mansio* c AD 180: plan. (Scale 1/1250). (Copyright Chester City Council)

plicated history. Tentatively identified as a *mansio* — lodgings principally for government employees travelling on official business — the earliest phase of this building, in timber, was erected shortly after the establishment of the fortress and for a time was linked directly with the south gate of the latter by a dedicated trackway.

The initial *mansio* was destroyed by fire. Two further phases of timber building followed, both of which extended farther to the east than the original. The last of these was demolished c AD 120, and work began on the construction of a stone replacement laid out to a new design. This was soon abandoned, however, and after an interval a new stone *mansio* was erected with a plan similar to its timber predecessors. This included a colonnaded portico along its southern frontage which took advantage of the magnificent view over the Dee below (III V.3). A well was provided under the cover of this portico and a second was added at the end of the second century when further building works were carried out (III V.4). The refurbished building continued in use down to the end of the third century, when much of the *mansio* was destroyed by a catastrophic fire. This had claimed the lives of at least two of the occupants whose remains were cast along with other debris into one of the wells as part of the subsequent clearing-up operation. New structures were then erected and remained in use until the middle of the fourth century. A notable item found re-used in their foundations was an altar dedicated to the *numina* or ‘guiding spirits’



III V.4 Head of well under portico on south side of *mansio*. (Copyright Chester City Council)

of the emperors by a person whose name began Com[....], one of the few inscriptions found in Chester in recent years (III V.5).

The *mansio* would have had its own bath building, and antiquarian accounts of discoveries in the area suggest that this may have lain to the east, beside the road leading down to the bridge. Exploration of the area lying west and south-west of the *mansio* has been impeded by the medieval and later buildings of Chester Castle, although structural remains encountered during its early nineteenth-century remodelling suggest the existence of at least one substantial Roman building in this area. Downhill from the *mansio* fragments of a succession of Roman buildings were found close to the west side of the bridgehead in 1983, while excavations in Edgar's Field in Handbridge in 1996 demonstrated that the built-up area extended to the opposite bank of the River Dee, where lay the principal legionary quarries.

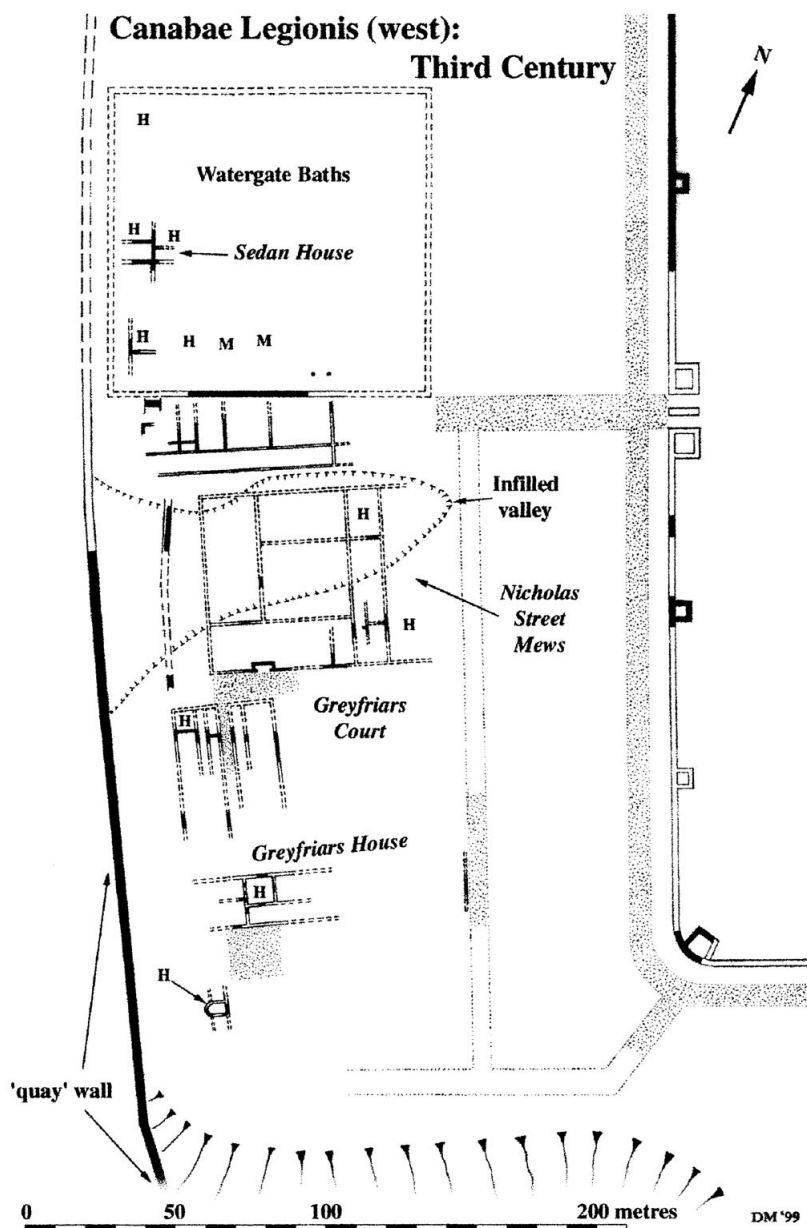
It is, however, in the western sector of the *canabae* that the greatest amount of new information has been recovered over the last twenty-five years. This area formed a quite distinct and well defined part of the extramural settlement, consisting of the 180-m-wide strip of land lying between the fortress and the harbour and separated from the southern sector by a large natural declivity which extended from the Roodee almost as far as the south-west angle of the fortress. Earlier chance discoveries had hinted at the presence of buildings of some quality in this area, while an excavation at the south-west corner of Lower Watergate Street, which roughly perpetuates the line of a road running from the fortress west gate to the harbour, had shown that considerable landscaping and terracing operations had been undertaken to accommodate them. Excavations carried out between 1974 and 1988 on a number of sites further south — principally Greyfriars Court,



Ill V.5 Altar found in *mansio* dedicated *numinibus Augustorum*, ie 'to the guiding spirits of the Emperors'. (Copyright Chester City Council)

Greyfriars House and Nicholas Street Mews — revealed the area to be densely packed with buildings, many of which were of good-quality masonry construction in their second-century and later manifestations, equipped with concrete floors, hypocausts and, in the case of that occupying the south-west corner of the area, its own private baths suite (Ill V.6). Most if not all of these buildings were apparently residential, and it would appear that this area was the 'up market' sector of the *canabae*. The development of this area had commenced early on, and late first-century timber buildings, at least one of which may have been an official store, were found beneath the later structures on the Greyfriars Court site.

Further north, remains found during the construction of town houses at the bottom end of Lower Watergate Street in 1778/9, together with chance discoveries made during later building operations in areas nearby, suggested the presence of a very large and imposing building. These discoveries included very thick walls and hypocausts as well as mosaic floors, implying it could have been the main extramural bath building. The first opportunity to test this theory in modern times came in 1989 with the building of an extension to Sedan House, which lies at the corner of City Walls Road and Stanley Place. Excavation



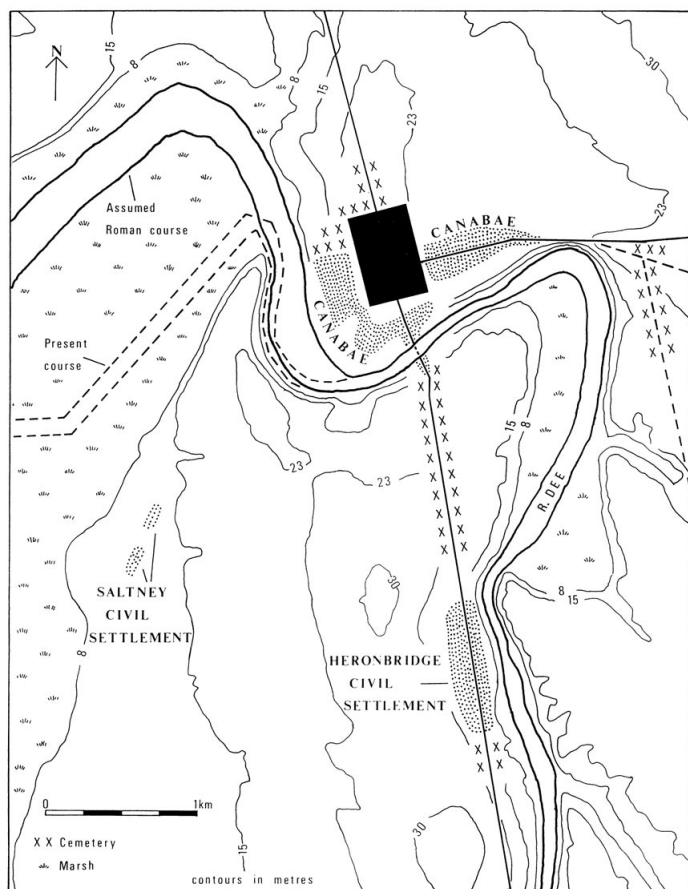
III V.6 Western sector of the *canabae* c AD 200: plan. (Scale 1/2500)



III V.7 Baths in Lower Watergate Street: Sedan House excavation 1989, showing remains of latest flooring. (Copyright Chester City Council)

exposed parts of several rooms in this complex, all with a very complicated structural history, while the quality and substantial nature of the masonry and the presence of both concrete and herringbone-pattern tiled floors, hypocausts, a plunge bath and complex drainage systems confirmed that it was indeed an important bath building (III V.7). Taken together with the other structural remains of a similar character found in the vicinity, this bath building appears to have covered an area approximately 100 m square, that is about one third greater than the main fortress baths. It is almost certainly the presence of the substantial remains of this building which explains the westward deviation in the course of the City Walls at this point.

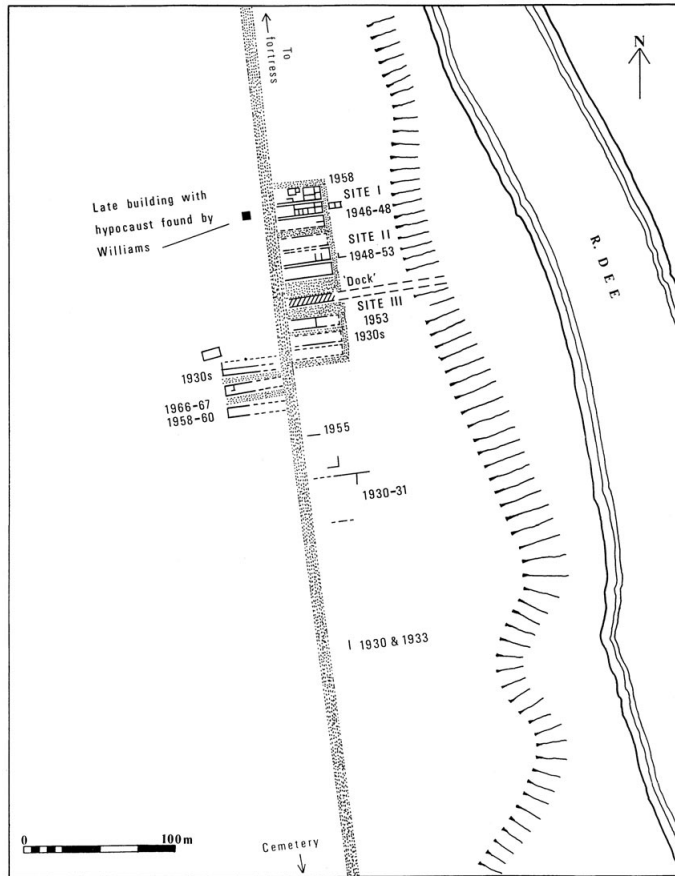
Undoubtedly built by the legion, the constructional characteristics of some of the earliest features of this building would suggest it was erected not long after the foundation of the fortress. The early provision of a large extramural bathing complex, supplementary to the intramural baths, is a feature found at many fortresses and indicates official recognition of the attendant civilian community as being indivisible from the legion and approval of the construction of facilities especially for their use. No doubt the military authorities saw the worth of promoting high standards of hygiene and cleanliness among those with whom the soldiers frequently consorted.



III V.8 Location of Heronbridge and Saltney settlements: plan.
(Scale 1/50 000)

There is sufficient evidence to prove that buildings continued for some distance north of the baths, but exploration has been very limited and their date and purpose remain unknown. Much of the northern portion of this area, however, remained as open ground throughout the Roman period and was used as an inhumation cemetery in the mid- to late second century.

Evidence for civilian settlement along the road heading north from the fortress towards the Wirral is still lacking despite many years of observation and recording, and it seems probable that this area was used largely, if not exclusively, as a burial ground. Cemeteries also lined the other roads heading out from the fortress beyond the built-up areas. Possibly the largest of these lay on the opposite side of the river, encompassing the land beyond the quarries and lining the road which ran south to Whitchurch for a distance of about 1 km. Burials have also been found at the outer edge of the land south-west of the fortress, while another group, apparently all cremations and thus probably comparatively early, lay



III V.9 Heronbridge: plan showing layout of stone strip buildings *c* AD 130.
(Scale 1/5000)

clustered in the vicinity of the source of the legionary aqueduct at Boughton 1.5 km east of the fortress.

The suburbs immediately beside the fortress did not, however, constitute the totality of civilian settlement at Chester. As at the majority of legionary fortresses there was another civilian community of urban-like form only a few kilometres away, in Chester's case at Heronbridge astride the road running south to Whitchurch (III V.8). The last major campaign of excavation here in the 1960s demonstrated that occupation had begun *c* AD 90 and continued down to at least the middle of the third century. As in the eastern sector of the *canabae*, the majority of buildings were strip houses set end-on to the main road (III V.9). Retailing was clearly an important part of its economy, and evidence for both the production of bronze objects and the processing of grain was recovered. The reasons for the phenomenon of settlement duality at legionary bases are unknown but it is thought to be bound up with differences between the constitutional and territorial status of the two

communities. That lying next to the fortress stood on ground owned by the legion (the *territorium* or *prata legionis*), where civilians could only be tenants, whereas that further out lay outside its boundary on the territory of the neighbouring *civitas* and thus had greater autonomy, with its inhabitants being able to own the land where they lived.

To complete the picture of civilian settlement there was another community at Saltney, 2 km south-west of the fortress. Hastily excavated in the 1920s, this appears to have been a much poorer community consisting of single, crudely constructed dwellings set in fenced and ditched enclosures. Agriculture may have been the basis of its economy.

Finally, the existence of a cremation cemetery (and thus presumably of second-century date or earlier) 1.5 km east of the fortress may hint at the presence of civilian settlement around the natural springs here which were the source of the fortress water supply.

The Port

The incorporation of vast tracts of new territory into the province in the early 70s of the first century involved a forward move in the disposition of the legions in Britain, and it was undoubtedly Chester's location at the head of a navigable estuary, together with its possession of a fine natural harbour, that caused it to be chosen as the site for the new fortress needed in the north-west. Access to the sea was important to the high command in a number of ways: for the mounting of combined land and sea operations, such as those which played such a prominent role in Agricola's campaigns in Scotland; the logistical support of land forces by the fleet; the import of raw materials needed for the construction and maintenance of the fortress, such as metals from North Wales especially lead and copper; the movement of men and manufactured goods, such as pottery, brick and tile and metal goods, to the garrisons of the outlying auxiliary forces in its command area and later northwards to the west end of Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall; and, most importantly, for the importation of the vast quantities of foodstuffs and other materials required by the legion, especially grain, which it would have been impossible to obtain locally and which it was far easier to transport by water than overland. At both of the other permanent legionary bases, Caerleon and York, there is evidence that grain was shipped in from as far afield as the Mediterranean, and the same was probably true at Chester. Other commodities unobtainable locally were also imported from abroad, such as wine and olive oil from Gaul and Spain, as were specialist forms of manufactured goods such as pottery and glassware from the Rhineland.

In the later Roman period patrol vessels would have operated out of a naval base at Chester to keep watch for sea-raiders, while the military command would have had access to valuable intelligence about the political situation amongst the tribes both north of Hadrian's Wall and across the Irish Sea from the independent seafaring merchants who called regularly at Deva. The truth of this is well illustrated by a passage in Tacitus' *Agricola* 24, where he tells us that his famous father-in-law acquired much information about the approaches and harbours of Ireland from this source. There is no evidence for the existence of a fleet for the western seaboard independent of the *classis Britannica*. Yet it might be thought strange that stamped bricks and tiles of the latter, so numerous at sites along the south-east coast, are totally absent in the west, where the volume of naval activity



Ill V.10 Tombstone of *optio* who died in a shipwreck.
(Copyright Chester City Council, Grosvenor Museum)

must have been quite considerable. Perhaps the evidence is there but simply has not been recognised. How would one know, for example, whether the stamp ‘CLIV’ on a brick was merely the batch number ‘154’ or an abbreviation for *Cl[assis Iv]ernica* (the *Oceanus Ivernicus* being the Roman name for the Irish Sea)? Certainly in the fourth century, when naval defences along the west coast were strengthened with the addition of Saxon Shore-type forts at Cardiff, Lancaster and Holyhead, Chester would have been the obvious head-quarters for such a separate naval command. By this period, though, it was common for the constituent squadrons or flotillas of a fleet to be named after the forts where they were based. Thus, in this period, if not a *Classis Ivernica*, there could well have been a flotilla known as the *Classis Devae* at Chester. We have but a single inscription from Chester with a naval connection and it also demonstrates the dangers of sea travel. This is the tombstone of a man (his name does not survive) serving in the century of Lucilius Ingenuus and awaiting promotion from *optio* to centurion who died in a shipwreck — *naufragio periit* — before his new rank could be confirmed (Ill V.10).

Post-Roman changes in the course and flow of the Dee estuary, coupled with land reclamation schemes, now render it difficult to envisage the port of Roman Chester. The harbour lay to the west of the fortress where the erosive power of the Dee at the end of the last Ice Age had gouged out the large bowl-shaped area now known as the Roodee, just before the river opens out into its broad estuary. This spot is now occupied by the racecourse, a recreational facility formed out of land which had already been reclaimed from the sea by



III V.11 Best preserved section of the so-called 'quay wall' beside the Roodee

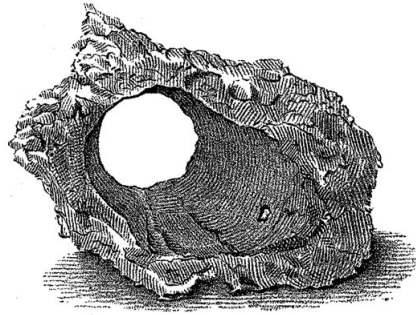
the middle of the sixteenth century. The modern visitor's comprehension of how this area once looked is further impeded by its total visual separation from the general course of the Dee by the embankment for the Grosvenor Bridge at the south end and the nineteenth-century railway viaduct at the other.

What has traditionally been regarded as the sole surviving feature of Deva's harbour is the so-called Roman 'quay wall' which lies at the eastern edge of the Roodee below and a few metres in advance of the medieval City Walls. Although only a comparatively short section is now visible opposite the junction of Blackfriars Lane with Nun's Road, observations during building and engineering works in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enabled it to be traced northwards as far as the Water Gate, a distance in excess of 200 m. At the south end of the visible portion, the wall appears to be turning to the south-east to follow the contours of the mouth of the substantial inlet or valley which once existed in this area. The wall was about 2.4 m thick and was constructed of large blocks of sandstone 0.30–0.40 m high and up to 1.2 m in length bonded together with high quality mortar, the whole backed by at least 1.5 m of concrete. The extant length of wall survives to an average height of 1 m above the present surface of the Roodee but it originally rose much higher than this, as is demonstrated by the best preserved section (now enclosed by railings) where there is nearly 3 m of upstanding masonry (III V.11). Furthermore, explorations at this spot in 1884 followed the wall down to a depth of 4.60 m, where there was an offset course. Excavation below this level was prevented by the ingress of water, but the

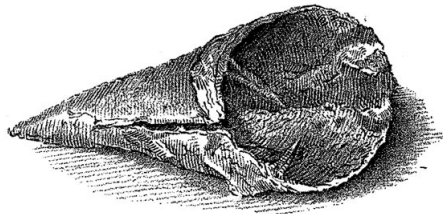
wall clearly carried on down for some considerable distance and calculations suggest that in order to obtain a secure base there would have been at least another 3 m below this point. The nineteenth-century exploration also demonstrated the presence of pilaster-like buttresses on its outer face.

The quay wall was obviously a very substantial feat of engineering, and in terms of the quantities of stone used alone it was the equivalent of more than half the entire circuit of the fortress curtain wall. But did it actually function as a quay where ships could be loaded and unloaded? There is in fact persuasive evidence to suggest that it did not. First, close to the spot where the railway passes over the modern river channel, excavations to allow the insertion of foundations for a new gasometer in 1885 struck the ancient river bed, here consisting of boulder clay covered by 0.30–0.40 m of coarse gravel, at a depth of about 6 m below ground level (roughly equivalent to 0.00 m OD). Lying on this were lengths of oak timbers averaging 0.30 m in diameter and in excess of 3 m in length, some of which had a point at one end encased in an iron sheath and set around with concrete (Ill V.12). These were clearly the piles for some substantial structure such as a wharf or jetty, and close by was found the 2-m-deep trench into which they had been set. That they were Roman is clear not only from their similarity to piles found used in Roman structures elsewhere, particularly bridges, but also from the fact that they were surrounded by a mass of Roman material which included bricks and tiles, samian ware and other types of pottery, and an ingot of lead bearing a cast inscription with consular dates indicating its manufacture in AD 74 from ore mined in the territory of Deceangli (roughly modern Flintshire). A wall with a stepped northern face found a few years later a little to the south, if Roman, could have been a replacement for the earlier timber landing stage.

Contemporary writers linked the discoveries at the gas works with similar timbers found outside the Water Gate in 1874, also at a considerable depth and associated with Roman material, to suggest that they represented opposite ends of a single large landing stage extending from the eastern shoreline of the Roodee for a distance of about 350 m. This idea later fell into disfavour, in part at least owing to the acceptance of the



IMPRESSION OF IRON SHOE OF OAK PILE.



POINTED END OF IRON SHOE.

OTHER REMAINS,
FOUND AT THE ROODEYE, 1885.

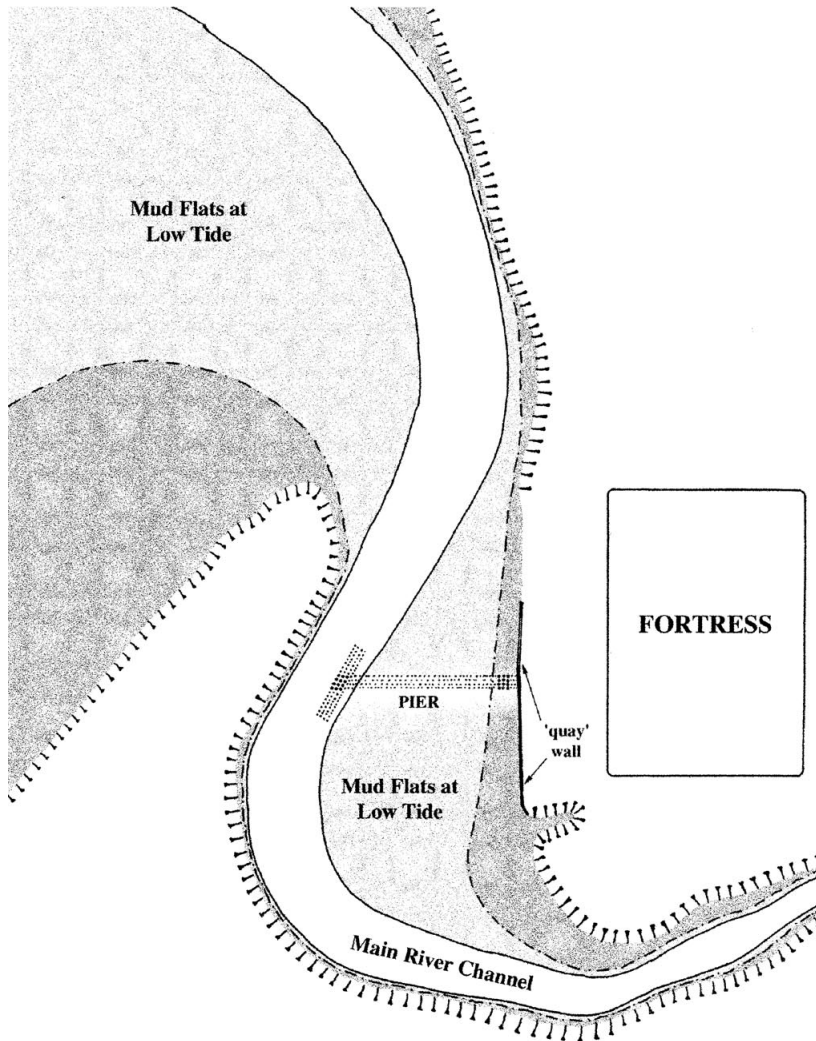
Ill V.12 Drawings of iron shoes from timber piles found in 1885 during construction of a gasometer. (*J Chester Archaeol Soc* new ser 1, 1887, facing 80.)

interpretation of the wall running along the east edge of the Roodee as a quay. Consequently, the gas works timbers were instead seen as belonging to a landing stage projecting out from the west bank of the river, the assumption being that the channel in the Roman period lay further east than it does today. There are, however, obvious difficulties with this interpretation. Firstly, there is a steep cliff on the west side of the river at this point and, secondly, any goods offloaded at this point would have to be transported by cart on a roundabout journey through what is now Curzon Park and Handbridge, across the bridge over the Dee, and then up the steep slope leading to the south gate of the fortress. Secondly, there is no evidence for any form of Roman installation on this side of the river.

The results of recent research into sea levels in the Roman period in general and tidal conditions in the Roodee area in particular suggest that the Victorian writers were correct in their interpretation of the gas works/Water Gate timbers, and this in turn has important implications for the 'quay wall'. At the time that Chester was founded, sea levels are thought to have been somewhat lower than it is today. The precise level is much debated but this need not concern us here as there is evidence from Chester itself sufficient for our purposes. The timbers found outside the Water Gate in 1874 mentioned above were discovered during excavations for the laying of a new main sewer at the foot of the City Walls. Several hundred metres to the south, beneath the race course track and at a spot on the far side of the mouth of the large inlet south-west of the fortress, these same excavations encountered a Roman burial. The grave contained two skeletons, an adult and a child, which the accompanying tombstone identified as Flavius Callimorphus and his son or nephew Serapion. Amongst the grave goods was a coin of Domitian (AD 81–96). The grave was 1.80 m deep, and it is possible to work out from the information recorded that its floor lay at a level about 3.5m OD. The position and depth of this grave is very important because it shows that this area was dry land in the early Roman period and that there had already been considerable silt deposition along the east side of the Roodee by the time that Chester was founded.

It is also clear both from this discovery and levels recorded in more recent excavations near the Old Dee Bridge that even the highest tide in the Roman era is unlikely to have reached a level over 4.5 m OD. Ordinary tides may have averaged around 4 m, receding to 1.5–2.0 m at the ebb. As the sort of sea-going vessels using the harbour had a draft of about 1.5 m when laden it is obvious that they could only have approached the eastern shore of the Roodee and the 'quay wall' at periods of high tide and even then only in part because of the build-up of silt in front of its southern half. This would have been most inconvenient for the military authorities given the volume of materials with which the port had to cope. The solution was the erection of the structure to which the gas works and Water Gate timbers belonged, a landing stage projecting from the fortress side of the Roodee basin into the deepest part of the river channel — the outer bend lying close to the opposite bank — which allowed ships to dock and cargoes to be transferred under most, if not all, tidal conditions (Ill V.13).

What then of the 'quay wall'? While the possibility of ships actually tying up against it seems unlikely, it has been suggested that it was still able to function as a quay by means of additional jetties projecting out at right angles. However, the top of the best preserved

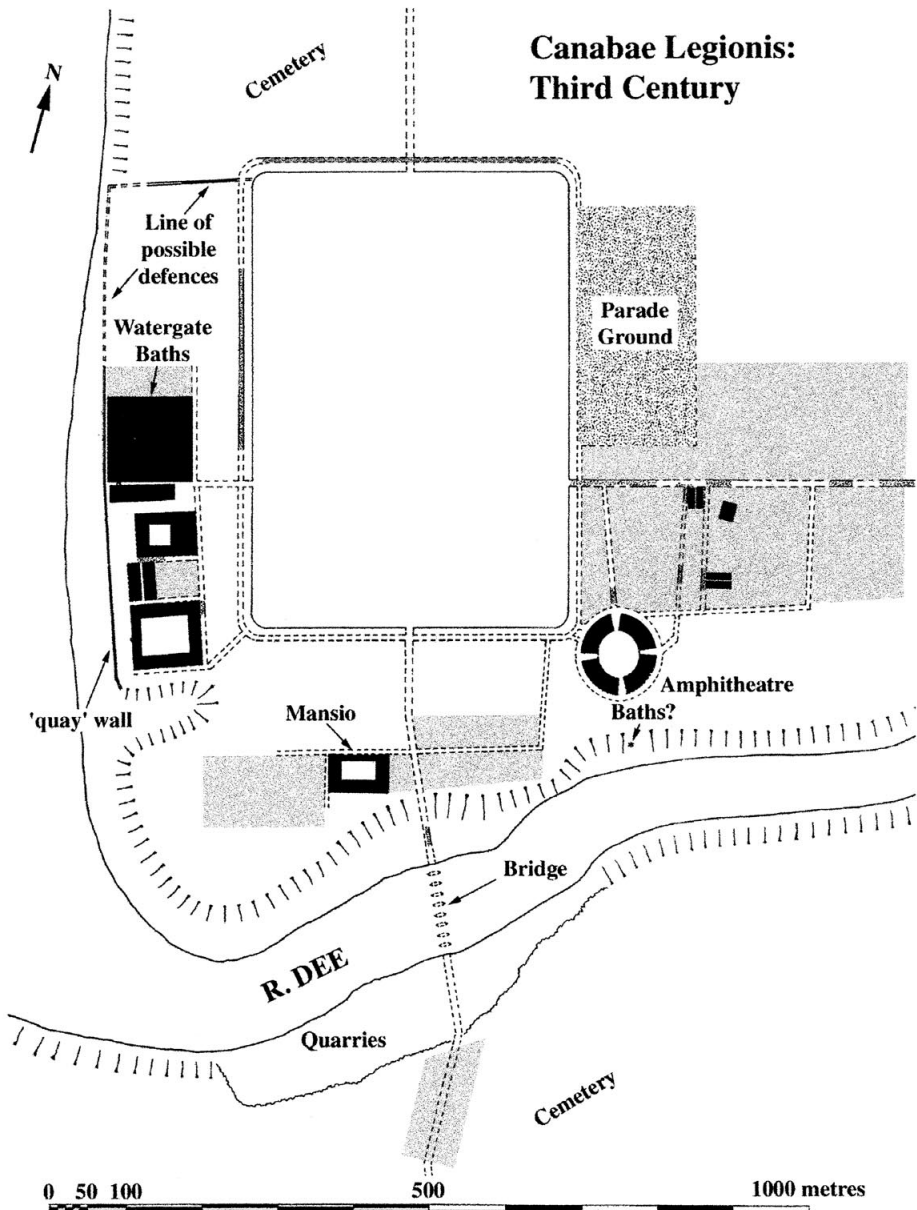


III V.13 Possible condition of harbour area in late first century AD: map showing extensive mud flats and position of timber pier. (Not to scale)

section of the wall lies at around 11.00 m OD, and it has the appearance of having risen still further originally, whereas the deck of an averaged sized sea-going vessel of the period would have lain about 2 m above the water line, the equivalent of *c* 6.00 m OD under optimum local river conditions. Having a quayside 5 m higher than deck level is clearly a nonsense. So, if not a quay, what was the function of the 'quay wall'? Excavation has shown that Roman ground level immediately east of the City Walls lies at *c* 13.00 m OD, and it seems quite feasible that the wall was carried up for another 2 m to reach this level. Perhaps, therefore, in the same way that the City Walls here have enabled the ground behind them to be built up and levelled, the 'quay wall' was constructed as a revetment to enable the steep natural slope down to the Roodee to be reclaimed and terraced so as to increase building space. Yet building a wall 2.4 m thick and at least 12 m high (requiring around 30,000 blocks of stone each weighing around half a tonne for a 200-m length) to reclaim a strip of land no more than 5 m wide seems an effort out of all proportion to the gain. Furthermore, there was plenty of spare land available for building to the south of the fortress.

For a work of this scale, there is only one possible explanation left — that its purpose was principally, if not exclusively, one of defence. The erection of walls around legionary suburbs in the later Roman period is a phenomenon found at a number of fortresses, including those at Mogontiacum (Mainz), Aquincum (Budapest) and Novae (Stuklen). In our case, the intention was presumably to protect the western sector of the *canabae*, which, evidence suggests, was the wealthiest section of the extramural settlement. This would not, however, have entailed the demolition of the western fortress wall, for that is known to have been maintained and repaired into the fourth century. The date of the 'quay wall' is unknown but it is very probably later than a group of late first- or early second-century burials discovered close behind it. Its course beyond the Water Gate is unknown but it undoubtedly continued along the frontage of the large bath building immediately to the north. An eastward return, running back to link up with fortress defences, would have been required to close off the north side of the defended enceinte and this might have lain shortly beyond the baths. However, there is reason to believe that it followed the same line as the section of the medieval town wall which runs from Morgan's Mount (close to the site of the fortress north-west angle tower) down to Bonewaldesthorpe's Tower at the north-west corner of the circuit (Ill V.14).

The present City Walls stand on top of and slightly back from an older wall, a situation frequently found along those parts of the walls where the medieval and Roman defences coincide. Much of the lower wall is obscured by the accumulation of soil against its outer face but varying types of masonry are apparent, including sections built of large blocks like those found in the 'quay wall'. This suggests that either it was built with whatever materials were to hand, with little care for style or appearance, or that it represents successive phases of construction and repair. Partway along this sector stands Pemberton's Parlour, in origin a medieval tower once known as the Goblin Tower, which was partially demolished and rebuilt in 1701 with its upper part being reconstructed again in 1894. It is the relationship between the base of this tower and the lower wall just mentioned that is potentially very significant. The towers of the medieval circuit were designed so that approximately half of their diameter projected forward of the curtain wall for obvious



III V.14 Western sector of *canabae* with 'quay wall' re-interpreted as part of late defensive circuit.
(Scale 1/10 000)

defensive reasons, and this is precisely the relationship which exists between the Goblin Tower and the existing City Walls and also between the latter and Bonewaldesthorpe's Tower further west. Yet the lower wall is almost flush with the front of the base of the Goblin Tower and in fact shows every indication of having been partially removed to make way for the tower. Despite much rebuilding, the Goblin Tower must still stand on its original foundations. Thus, the lower wall must be earlier. This could represent a stretch of the original walls erected in the late twelfth–early thirteenth centuries with the work above and the accompanying towers replacing it a century later. Then again, the patchwork character of the visible facing might suggest a date in the late Anglo-Saxon period when Chester was again becoming a major military centre as well as a thriving port. Yet, the similarity between the relationship of the two phases of wall in this sector and that which exists elsewhere along the circuit between the fortress wall and medieval City Walls is so striking as to suggest the possibility that the lower wall might in fact be Roman in origin. If so, then it would constitute the eastward return of the 'quay wall', following a logical course for the northern defences of the western suburbs by linking up with the north-west corner of the fortress.

The course of the proposed circuit of defences beyond the southern end of the extant portion of the 'quay wall' can only be conjectural. The latter does begin to turn into the mouth of the neighbouring large inlet, and a logical solution would have been for it to carry on turning so as to link up with the south-west angle of the fortress. No trace of such was found when the latter was examined in the 1960s but this could be explained by the existence of a gap to accommodate a gate at the point of junction. The area thus enclosed would have amounted to 12.5 ha. It is worth noting in passing, however, that a wall of similar character to the 'quay wall' once ran along the frontage of the river to the west of the Old Dee Bridge. If — and it is a big if — this was also Roman then this may indeed have been a quay. Alternatively, and this is an even more startling possibility, it could have been a continuation of the 'quay wall' which would mean that the land south of the fortress was also included within the defended area, which would thus have totalled something approaching 48 ha. If so, then the line followed by the medieval City Walls, beyond as well as within the fortress, would have been established in the late Roman rather than the Norman period as is usually assumed.

The port of Chester is no more. But when next you look out across the green sward of the Roodee, where now Mammon is worshipped and everyone is seeking their own swift Pegasus, remember that this part of Chester was once under Neptune's sway.

Further Reading

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