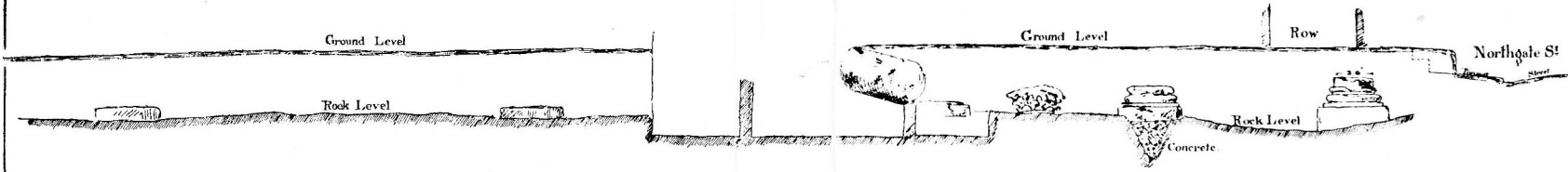
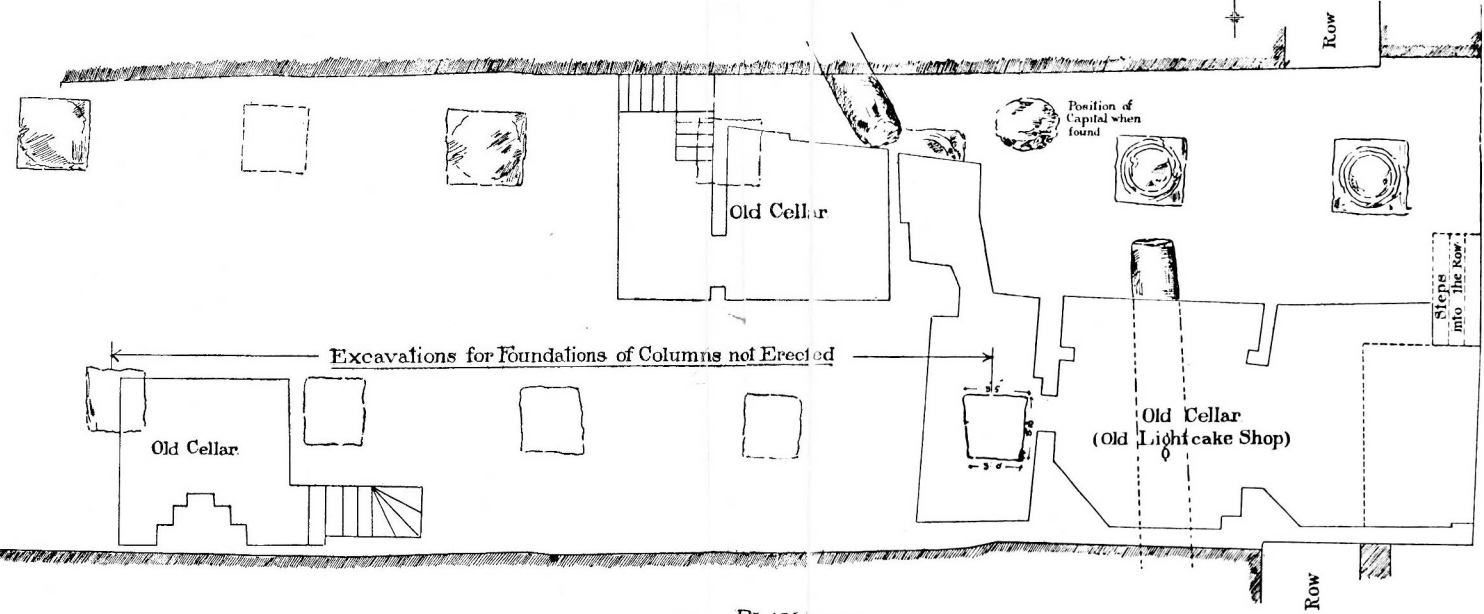


PLAN SHEWING ROMAN REMAINS DISCOVERED IN NORTHGATE ST^E CHESTER

SCALE OF FEET



SECTIONAL ELEVATION



PLAN

NORTHGATE STREET

H. BEWICK
CHESTER



Discovery of Remains of a Roman Building in Northgate Street, Chester

BY H. BESWICK

THIS important discovery was made in June, 1897, in Shoemaker's Row, on the west side of Northgate Street, Chester, on the site of buildings belonging to Mr. Alderman Charles Brown. These old buildings, which formed a portion of Shoemaker's Row, had a frontage to Northgate Street of about 29 feet, and were situated about 33 yards from the northern outlet of Shoemaker's Row into the Market Square.

The buildings which were pulled down contained no architectural features whatever of interest, being plain brick buildings of little importance, the only interest in retaining them being the old shop under the Row, known for many years as the "Old Lightcake Shop," and which has been removed in erecting the new premises. This little shop was no doubt originally the cellar of one of the shops in the Row, and stood upon the southerly half of the frontage of the premises. The other half, or northerly portion of the frontage, had no cellar or lower shop. The Row in this instance was carried level through the street frontage, and was only two steps above the street footpath. It was here that the most interesting portion of the Roman antiquities

were discovered, just below the level of the Row. It was evident that this part of Shoemaker's Row had not been disturbed since Roman times, although comparatively modern cellars had been formed in the old premises at a distance of about 30 feet from the street frontage, which had interfered with the bases of the columns at that point.

When the old buildings were removed, and excavations made for the front piers of the new premises, the base of a large Roman column was discovered at a distance of 4 feet from the front of the Row. This column had evidently been a portion of an important building, as the diameter above the base-mouldings measured 2 feet 6 inches. The base was in a good state of preservation, and was placed directly upon the natural rock, which is at this point 3 feet below the present street level. The moulded base rested upon a square plinth. Upon making this important discovery, careful excavations revealed another similar base at a distance of 13 feet in a westerly direction, and again another base at a similar distance. This third base had, however, been cut away to form a portion of the cellar above-mentioned; but close to it, and almost touching the base upon which it stood, lay the lower portion of one of the columns, which had been thrown over in a northerly direction, and lay horizontally into the adjoining premises; about 5 feet of this column is visible, the remainder being buried under the next property.

The bases already discovered indicated that a row of columns had stood in a direction east and west, and as the excavations were continued this was found to be the case. The plinths of two more columns, at a distance of 26 feet apart, were found extending as far as the excavations for the new premises were made. There



View of Excavations Looking East.

were no indications of the columns or bases for these pedestals, nor of the intermediate columns which had been placed between them; one of these had been removed when the old cellar was made.

A further interesting discovery was made of a roughly carved capital of the Corinthian order, which lay between the second and third bases. This capital had evidently belonged to a parallel row of columns of similar proportions—for the upper portion of a column was discovered lying close to the second base—and projecting through the north wall of the old lightcake shop or cellar in the southerly half of the premises. This column had fallen from a base about 25 feet away from the base No. 2, and had evidently been one of a corresponding row of columns placed at this distance. The greater part of this column had been cut away when the old lightcake shop had been excavated, and the upper part left where it had fallen, and had been built in the north wall of the cellar or shop, and neatly dressed off and plastered over.

An interesting feature in connection with the foundation of these columns is that, although placed on the solid rock, excavations were made in the rock and filled in with concrete upon which the plinths were placed. As the bases and columns have been left *in situ* by the owner of the property (Mr. Alderman Charles Brown) this can be seen.

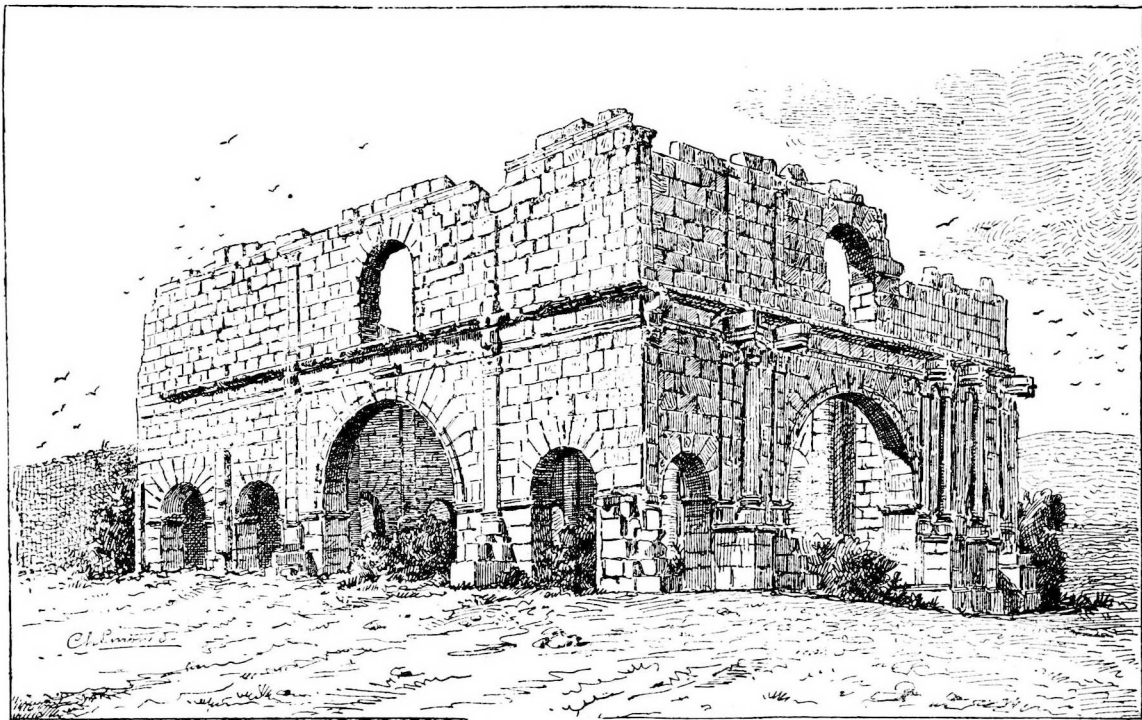
As the excavations proceeded in a southerly direction, certain excavations in the rock were discovered at equal distances, and roughly corresponding in position with the bases of the colonnade, and in a parallel line at about a distance of 16 feet from them. These excavations had evidently been intended for the concrete foundations of the bases of a colonnade which had been

abandoned, or the site altered. The excavations had no trace of concrete in them, which points out that the architect had reconsidered and altered the position of the building after having actually commenced the work.

The conclusion to be derived from this discovery is, that a building of great importance stood on this site in Northgate Street, having parallel colonnades of at least 25 feet in height, well-designed, and finished with a certain elegance. These colonnades were about 25 feet apart, and have been traced for a distance of 85 feet back from the front street. Unfortunately, the site dealt with was too limited in its width to enable definite conclusions to be arrived at as to whether these colonnades formed portion of the exterior or interior of a building; but from the fact that the colonnades are so far apart—and that no indications were discovered of any external walls, steps, or pavements—I am inclined to the opinion that these columns formed the internal colonnades supporting the roof of a large building, such as a Basilica or Hall of Justice; though if this were the case, one would have expected to find at least some traces of the flooring or pavement of such a building, but of this nothing was found. Could the building therefore have been left incomplete, or was it an open Forum or Market Place?

Unfortunately, there can be no doubt but that all moveable interesting objects—with the exception of a few roof tiles and other Roman antiquities—had been removed in mediæval times, or when the old premises were erected.

It is, however, a remarkable fact that no traces of mediæval buildings were discovered on this site, or vestige of masonry, or any indication of mediæval buildings were found. Could this Roman building,



Ruins of the Prætorium of Lambæsis.

therefore, have remained standing for a longer period than was usually the case—which would very likely happen if this was an open space—such as a Forum or Market Place?

These reflections raise interesting points as to the use and intention of such a building as this, and create a longing on the part of antiquarians to continue researches so hopefully begun, but which, unfortunately, cannot be gratified, owing to the way this site is surrounded by other buildings.

It may be mentioned that a few sections of smaller columns and portions of carved-stones of Roman date were found; and that the level of Northgate Street was, during the Roman period, about 3 feet below the present street at this point.

The photographs from which the illustrations accompanying this Paper have been taken, have been furnished by Mr. G. Watmough Webster.

NOTES BY F. HAVERFIELD, F.S.A.

THE interpretation of the architectural fragments in Northgate Street, as of all architectural fragments found within the area of Chester—so far as they are of Roman origin—is conditioned by the fact that Chester in Roman times was a large fortress, and not a town; that, as I said in a previous volume of this *Journal*, it contained no civic or municipal elements (N.S., V., 356). The excavations of French Archæologists at Lambæsis, in Algeria, and of Austrians at Carnuntum, on the Danube a little below Vienna, have revealed to us some of the internal arrangements of a large Roman fortress. These arrangements are very different from those which we find, for instance, at Silchester, or any other town of civic life; they resemble much more the internal arrangements of the small forts on Hadrian's Wall and

elsewhere in northern England. The chief edifice—which stood more or less in the centre of the fortress—was the *Prætorium*, a complex of buildings ranged round a square open courtyard. Here were the headquarters, which included, as it seems, such things as the *sacellum*—where the eagle was kept—the treasury, some of the armouries, and so forth. The *Prætorium* was not only a comparatively extensive range of buildings, but a well-built and even stately structure. The remains of it which still stand at Lambæsis (Plate 1) are among the most striking Roman remains which even Africa can shew. On the other hand, we do not find in these fortresses the edifices which distinguish civic life—Market Place, Basilica, Courts of Justice. Even Temples are kept outside the ramparts, save for the one shrine in the *Prætorium*. Accordingly, I suppose that the remains found lately in Northgate Street belong to some part of the *Prætorium*; what particular part of the *Prætorium* they represent I do not venture to guess. We do not possess sufficient information about the extent of these fragments beyond the area of recent excavation, nor do we know enough in detail about the plans of *Prætoria* generally, nor do I possess architectural knowledge adequate to so difficult a task; but I think there was on the south side of the court at Carnuntum (Plate 2) a double row of columns such as this at Chester.

✓ The remains found in Bridge Street in 1863-4 are, however, not probably part of the same range of buildings. They appear rather to be either officers' quarters, like the *Quæstorium* at Carnuntum; or baths, such as were found at Lambæsis.

F. HAVERFIELD.

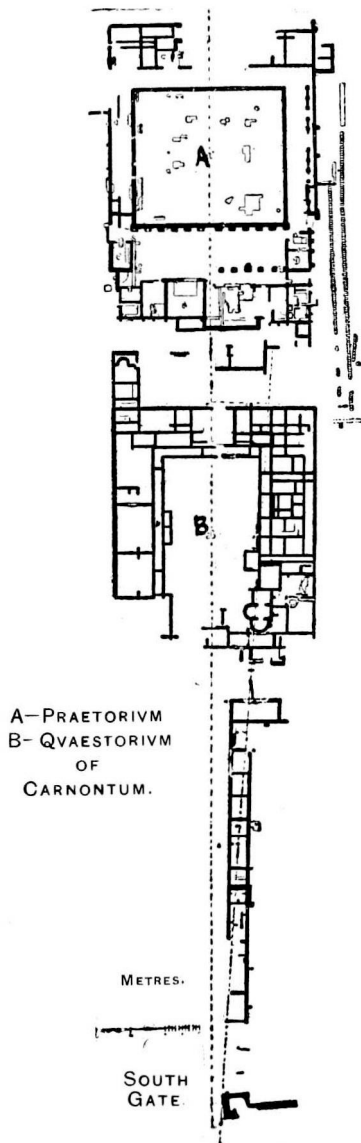


PLATE II.

