

Excavations on the Site of the Old Market Hall, Chester: Second Summary Report, 1968-1970

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PART I: The area west of Town Hall (Phase III)

Introduction (see plan, fig. 1)

A brief account of work during the winter of 1967-8 south of Town Hall was published in a previous volume of this Journal,¹ the building uncovered being identified as the *praetorium* of the fortress. The second stage of work on the site of the Old Market Hall concerned the 'Elliptical' or 'Theatre-like' Building first exposed by Professor R. Newstead in 1939,² and more recently re-excavated by Mr. J. V. H. Eames.

From June 1968, work began in the area now to be described, and continued to mid-January, 1969. This was the northernmost part of the site, lying between Town Hall and the New Market, and bounded on the north side by Princess Street. It measured approximately 100 ft. (30.5 m.) from north to south by 90 ft. (27.5 m.) east to west, about a third of the whole being stripped. This part of the fortress, west of the *praetorium* and north of the 'Elliptical' Building, was not entirely *terra incognita*: Professor Newstead had dug immediately to the west of the Old Market in 1939,³ and so had the present writer in 1965.⁴ The earlier work was to a large extent inconclusive, but the more recent sections indicated three stone buildings on an east-west alignment, the first two being 27 ft. and 26 ft. (8.1 m. and 7.8 m.) wide, the width of the third being uncertain. Whilst it will clearly be desirable to publish the results of the work in 1965 in the final report, alongside the later and more extensive excavations of 1968, it has not been practicable to conflate the results of two quite distinct excavations within the framework of this brief summary.

One other shortcoming should also be mentioned at this point. The attempts to indicate, in broad terms, the various periods of occupation are based on a first examination of the finds, some of which are still undergoing conservation. Some of these tentative conclusions may well be upset by more detailed examination of the material, particularly the samian. Nevertheless it is hoped that the publication of a summary report is justified by the general interest in the results of the excavation, and by the lapse of time that will inevitably accompany preparation of the final report.⁵

¹ *C.A.S.* 55 (1968), 1.

² *C.A.S.* XXXIV (1939), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ *J.R.S.* LVI (1966), 200.

⁵ This is an appropriate point at which to acknowledge the assistance rendered by the University of Liverpool in offering the writer an Honorary Research Fellowship. This he took up, with the consent and encouragement of Chester Corporation, in the autumn of 1970.

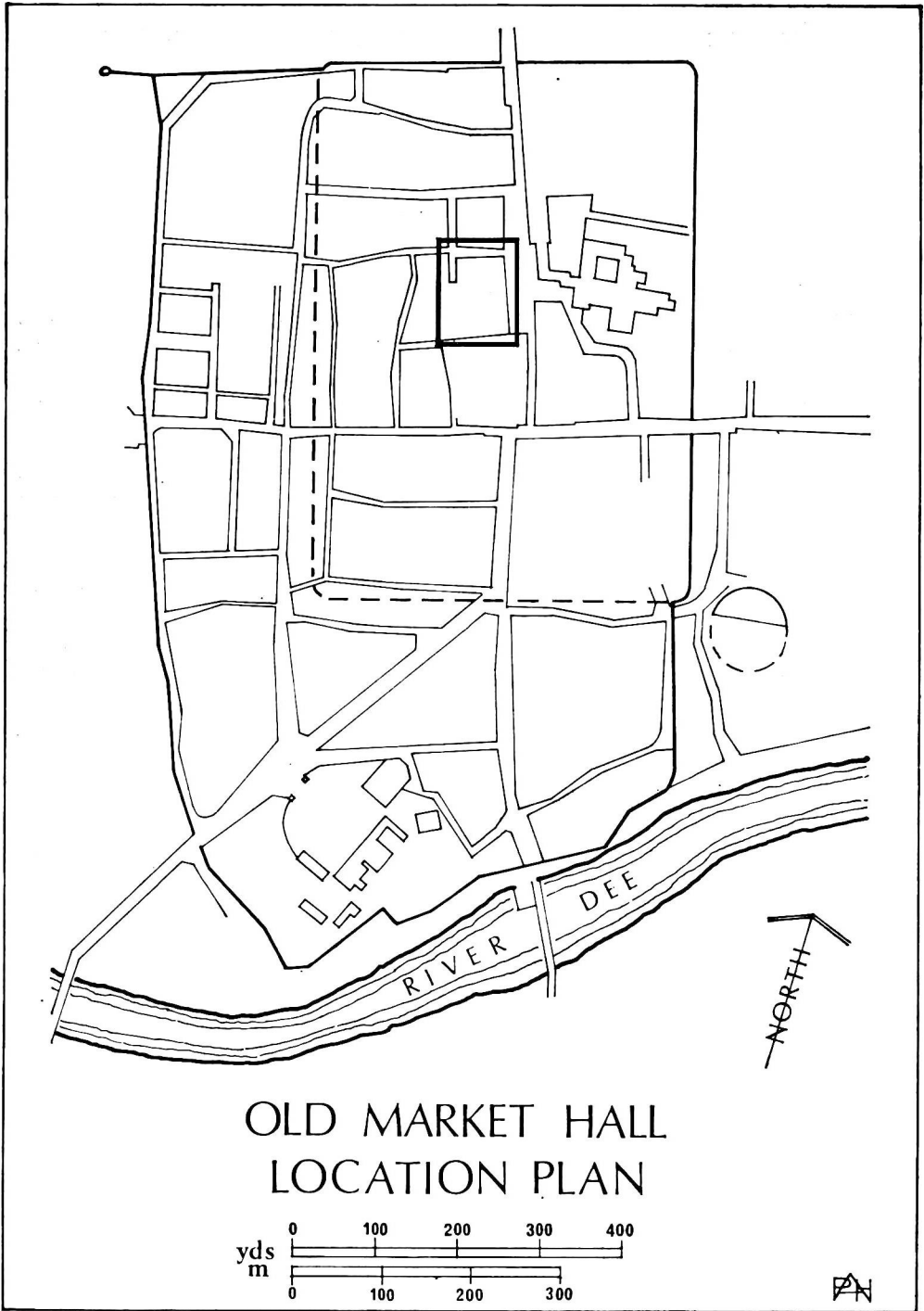
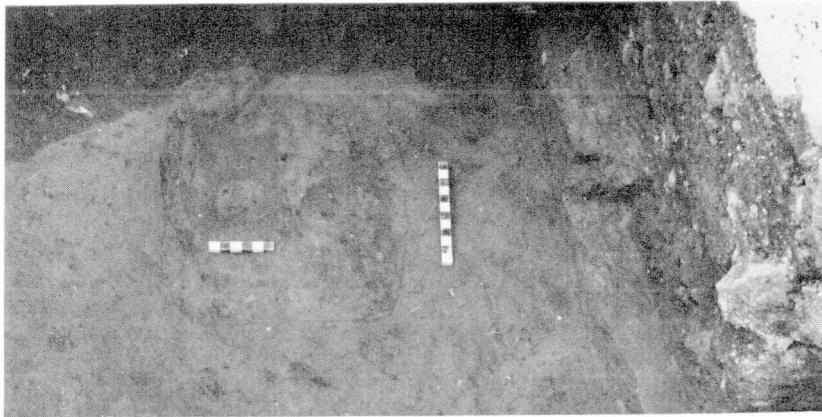


FIG. 1. Site location plan within the fortress.

PLATE I



(a) Posts and slots of timber barrack (from west). Hearth area of stone building to further baulk (Box Y5SE).



(b) Post-pit of timber *principia* (D3W).

PLATE II



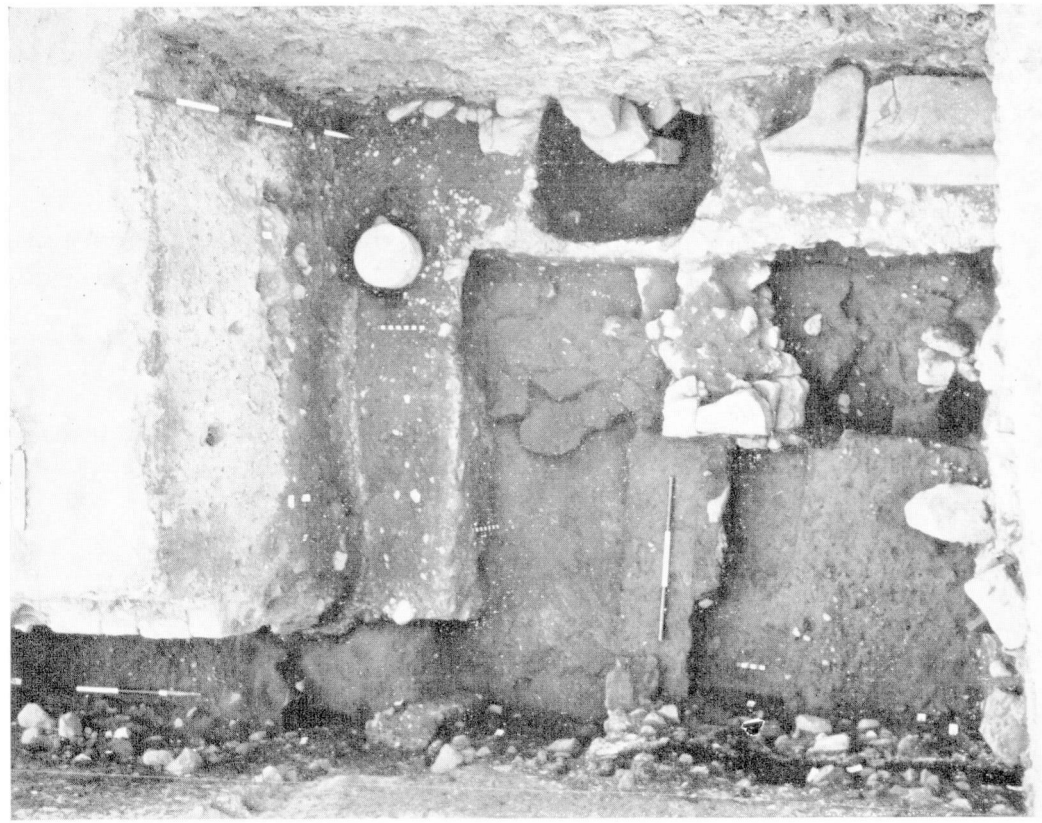
(a) Column base of store building from east, with emptied foundations of later phase (Y5NE).



(b) Store building, footing of back wall, from west (X4SW).

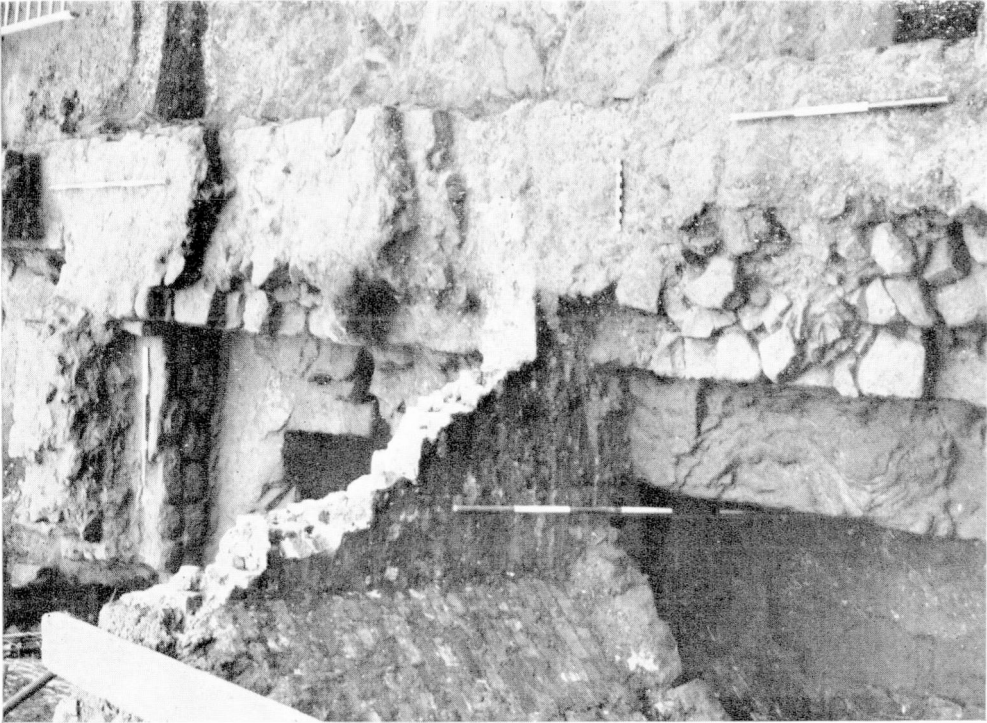


(a) General view over part of Phase V area, from west.



(b) North-west corner of *Principia* from above, east (D4E).

PLATE IV



(a) North wall of *sacellum*, strongroom to left (from east).



(b) *Praetorium*, column bases and caved drip, street to left (from above, east) (DIE/NX).



(a) Re-used column capitals and base, Room II; north wall of *praeae* in foreground (from north) (D2E).



(b) Re-used column capital, north-west corner of Room II, from north. Note *praeae* north and internal walls, and mortar floor to right (D2W).

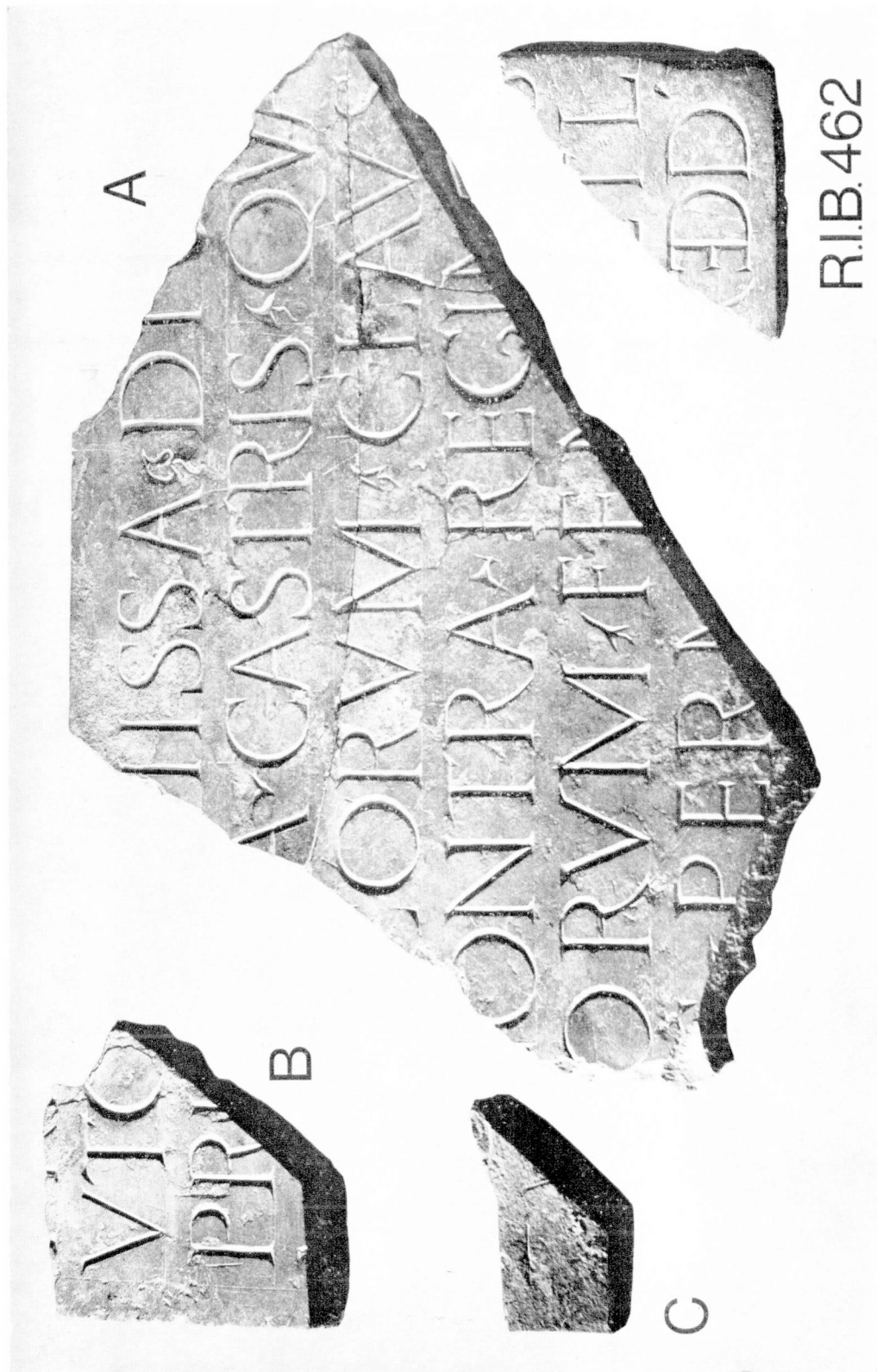
PLATE VI



(a) Room III, worn mortar floor and patchy flagging, from west (D3E).



(b) Slate-cut inscription fragments as found, from north (C3SW).



Slate-cut inscribed fragments: A, B, and C from Old Market Hall excavations, 1968; D from Sellar Street, 1890 (*R.I.B.* 462).

Timber Buildings (see plan, fig. 2)

The most clearly defined timber building lay immediately north of the 'Elliptical' Building. It was c.23 ft. (7 m.) wide, and was orientated east-west, its length being at least 100 ft. (30.5 m.). The area it covered was almost exactly coincident with that covered by a later stone building, and there were certain points of similarity in their internal plans. Fortunately the plan of the earlier building was not seriously obscured by this similarity of layout. A consistent feature appeared to be an internal wall running the length of the building and dividing it into two unequal portions 14 ft. 6 ins. (4.3 m) and 8 ft. 6 ins. (2.5 m.) wide respectively. This was supplemented by cross-walls running from north to south which divided the building into pairs of rooms. From the plan it would seem likely that one cross-wall has been lost beneath a stone foundation: if this is restored, then the spacing of the cross-walls would seem to have been reasonably regular at a little over 11 ft. (3.3 m.). However, the consistency of the plan is marred to some extent by the duplication of slots towards the eastern end. One of these reduced the width of the inner room to 10 ft. but did not extend to the outer room. The spine wall was moved some 3 ft. (0.9 m.) to the south, perhaps at the same time.

There was no difficulty in identifying the remains of timber buildings (plate Ia), in contrast to the area occupied by the *praetorium*.⁶ The method of construction was that normal for Chester: slots were cut into the natural sands and soft sandstone to receive the upright posts for the frame of the building, and were then backfilled with the spoil to hold the uprights firm. In width the slots varied from 15 to 21 ins. (38–53 cm.), the depth being approximately 2 ft. 6 ins. (76 cm.). In the end the building had been systematically dismantled, and the withdrawal of uprights for re-use elsewhere had left empty sockets from which details of construction could be inferred. In size the posts seem to have been quite consistently about 5 ins. (12.5 cm.) square, and they were spaced at intervals of some 2 ft. to 2 ft. 9 ins. (0.6 to 0.8 m.).

The inner room at the eastern end of the building had a beaten earth floor, over which lay a thin spread of occupation trample, sealed in its turn by material derived from the demolition of the building. The lowest parts of both north and west walls in this room survived as stubs of clay rendered with plaster 6 ins. (15 cm.) thick and standing up to 8 ins. (20 cm.) high: this presumably represented the packing below the lowest horizontal member in the wall. An oval clay hearth was placed approximately midway across the room, backing onto the spine wall.

Although the timber levels and details were not as well preserved elsewhere in the building the floors seem uniformly to have been of the same simple character. Apart from the rearrangement of internal walls already noted, other repairs and modifications included the replacement of uprights and the insertion of new walls. A slight 5 ft. (1.5 m.) partition sub-divided one outer room, whilst at the

⁶ *C.A.S.* 55 (1968), 4 *f.n.* Work in 1969 on the 'Elliptical' Building suggested the likelihood that this was in stone from the outset. Quite apart from the internal bath-building, to which special conditions apply, this could be true of other principal buildings also.

west side of the area a shallow secondary slot crossed the full width of the building. The latter had apparently held a horizontal beam some 8 ins. by 4 ins. (20 cm. by 10 cm.) into which uprights had been mortised—a somewhat different method of construction to that normally adopted.

These modifications excluded, the plan presents a close analogy with a barrack building. It is true that the width overall falls short of the 28 ft. (8.5 m.) normally recorded for stone-built barracks, but the relevant point of comparison is presumably the internal size of the rooms. In this respect the measurements agree almost exactly with those of a stone barrack except that the cross-walls were rather closely spaced by comparison with the c.13 ft. (3.9 m.) intervals found in stone barracks. The analogy with a barrack would require a veranda on the north side of the building, and this feature was in fact confirmed by the discovery of successive post-pits, and an eaves-drip. The width of the veranda was about 6 ft. (1.8 m.) as compared with the width of 9 ft. (2.7 m.) in a stone barrack.⁷

As would be expected, evidence from primary construction contexts was very slight. The slots produced a handful of small sherds, and a coin of Vespasian from a post impression may have been dropped by a construction worker rather than by a man engaged on demolition. The material from occupation levels, whilst not large in quantity, agrees with the Flavian—Trajanic range anticipated, as does the material in the demolition spread of broken daub, plaster etc., and from pits sealed by this or by make-up for later floors. Three pits stood out as being potentially structural, but it is not easy to see how these could form part of the building which contained them. A urinal soakaway pit outside the south wall of the building appeared to pre-date the stone building and produced a first century sherd from its primary fill.

The eastern limit of this building was indicated clearly enough by exposure of its south-east corner: extension of excavation to the eastern limit of the site at this point produced no further sign of timber structure. However, to the north of the first building three further timber slots on an east-west alignment were located, the first being 27 ft. (8.2 m.) away from it. The spacing of the slots was almost exactly equidistant—19 ft. (5.8 m.) and 18 ft. 6 ins. (5.6 m.) respectively. The northernmost slot preserved indications of square uprights 2 ft. to 3 ft. (0.6–0.9 m.) apart, and was joined on its south side by a north-south slot, implying that the central and northern walls should be associated as forming part of one building. Certainly they contained an accumulation of about 9 ins. (23 cm.) of dirty sands and charcoal spreads marking successive floor levels, as well as at least three working hearths. The fills north of the northern slot were quite distinct, and it seems likely that this was the limit of the building on this side. A shallow gully immediately south of the southern slot may represent an eaves-drip, and if all three slots are accepted as belonging to one building its width overall was about 39 ft. (11.8 m.). The material finds to be associated with the







⁷ This is the most complete plan of a timber building so far to be revealed in the fortress. Plentiful traces of timber buildings have, of course, been recognised since the excavations in Goss Street, 1948. The most substantial Roman timber building still remains the amphitheatre.

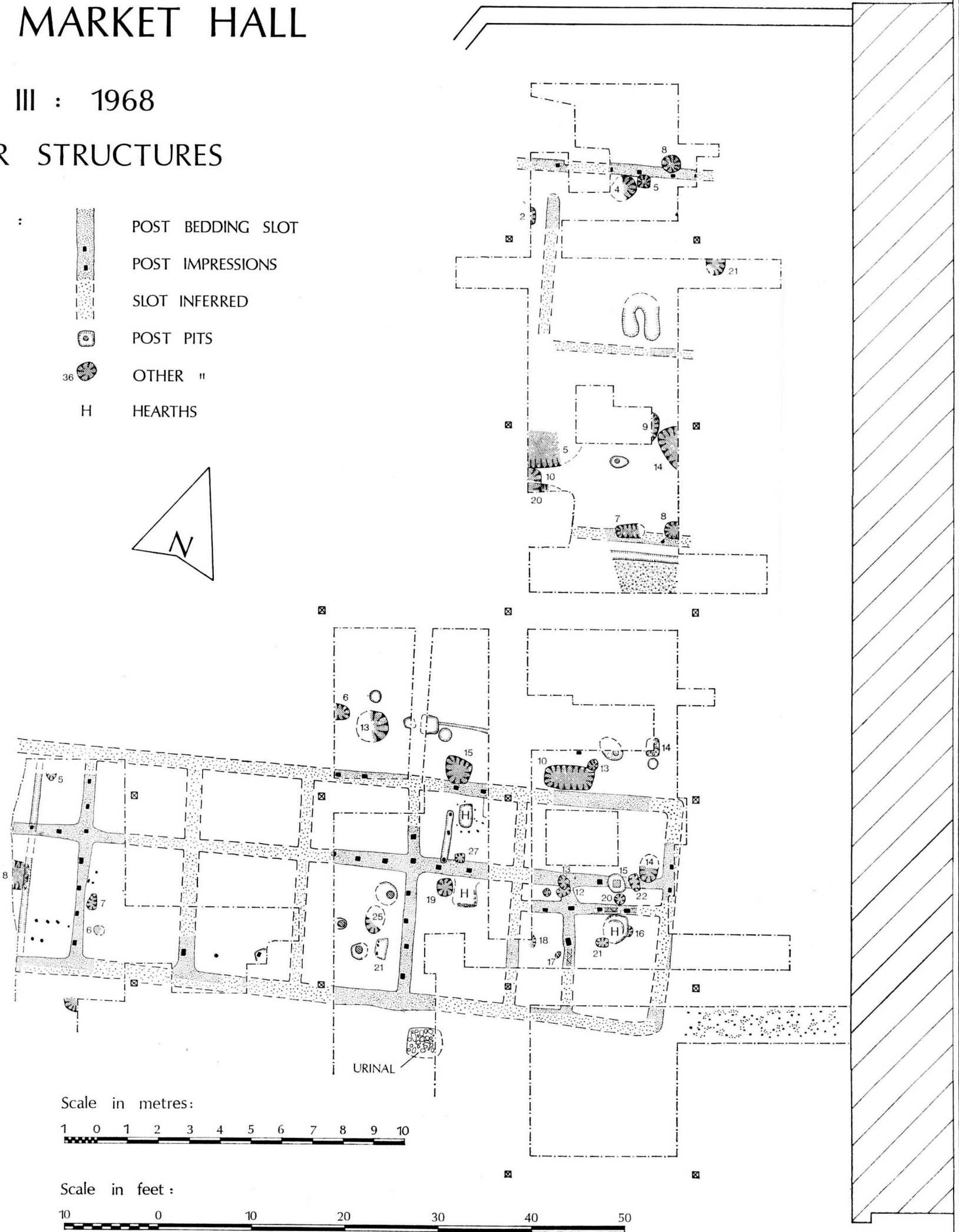
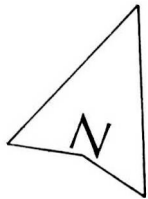
CHESTER OLD MARKET HALL

PHASE III : 1968

TIMBER STRUCTURES

PRINCESS STREET

- KEY :
-  POST BEDDING SLOT
 -  POST IMPRESSIONS
 -  SLOT INFERRED
 -  POST PITS
 -  OTHER "
 -  HEARTHHS



D.F.P. 1971

FIG. 2. Phase III, the timber buildings.

occupation of this building were scrappy and sparse, but consonant with a Flavian date.

It will be apparent that this building differs in size and plan from that to the south of it, and also seems to have extended further to the east. The working hearths found in the northern half of the building may provide a hint as to its function. So far as the southern building goes, the difference in plans must inevitably cast some doubt on its identification as a barrack, since we do not normally expect to find these buildings in isolation. Two hearths were located in the southern timber building: both were placed in very much the same way as the hearths in the barracks in the Deanery Field,⁸ and so might be thought to support the identification as a barrack. On the other hand, the semi-rectangular ash-filled depression found in an outer room was surrounded by a number of small stake-holes, and must be assumed to be industrial in character.

Stone Buildings (see plan, fig. 3)

As with the timber buildings, it will be convenient to describe the stone buildings from south to north, beginning with the building immediately north of the 'Elliptical' Building.

Demolition of the southern timber building was marked at its eastern end by a spread of broken wall material, and elsewhere by a spread of comparatively clean sand make-up for the floors of the stone building. This was a little under 27 ft. (8. m.) wide, and was at least 100 ft. (30 m.) long. It stood only 2 ft. 6 ins. (76 cm.) away from the 'Elliptical' Building, and clearly faced north. Nowhere did the south wall survive, but its width could be estimated at one point at *c.* 2 ft. 3 ins. (68.5 cm.): along the greater part of the length even its foundations had been robbed. The north wall was comparatively narrow at *c.* 1 ft. 9 ins. (53.3 cm.) and also had a slighter foundation, suggesting the possibility of a lean-to roof sloping northwards. Both north and east walls were also quite distinctive in that they were interrupted by wide openings. Thus the east wall foundation stopped a little short of 16 ft. (4.8 m.) from the south-east corner, and the ensuing gap implied an opening of about 6 ft. (1.8 m.) or a little more on this side. On the north side the piers were about 3 ft. 6 ins. (1 m.) long, and the two openings seen were 8 ft. (2.4 m.) and 10 ft. (3 m.) wide respectively. The third opening cannot have been less than 8 ft.

The fairly close agreement in plan between the stone building and its timber predecessor was presumably fortuitous, and in any case was confined to the western side of the area available. The eastern room extended the full width of the building, and was nearly 40 ft. (12 m.) east-west. The first and second internal walls north-south were separated by a space of 15 ft. 6 ins. (4.5 m.). At the western side the equivalent of the timber spine wall divided the building into rooms *c.* 8 ft. and 12 ft. (2.4 and 3.6 m.) wide respectively: the size east-west could not be determined.

⁸ *Liverpool A.A.A.* XV (1928), plate II.

In the eastern of the rooms the spread of demolition material was sealed by sandy make-up for a weak and patchy mortar floor. The make-up yielded comparatively little, but what there was agreed with an early second century date for the rebuilding. Elsewhere the demolition spread did not survive, but the sand make-up could generally be distinguished, sometimes augmented by red sand and sandstone chippings derived from the excavation of the foundation trenches: this produced material of a comparable date.

A hearth was set more-or-less in the centre of the eastern room, and this continued to be a focus of working activity for a considerable period. The section across this showed an accumulation of some 2 ft. (0.6 m.) of hearth material, and signs of intense heat over an area about 8 ft. (2.4 m.) north to south by at least 4 ft. (1.2 m.) east to west. Another similar but smaller working area was less completely exposed to the south-west of the first. Especially east of the hearths this activity was represented by the excavation of a number of pits, and the deposition of spreads of dirty sand charged with ash and charcoal, and containing iron clinker and slag. Finally, however, an *opus signinum* floor was laid in this part of the room sealing, amongst other things, a urinal soakaway near to the south-east corner. The fills and make-up sealed by this floor produced pottery running in date to at least the Antonine period. Equivalent fills west of the hearth area produced material in general agreement, with perhaps a hint at a slightly later date. No certainly stratified material post-dating the laying of the *opus signinum* floor was recovered. In the adjacent room to the west, where the floor was absent, the uppermost spread of some 2 ft. (0.6 m.) of building rubbish contained undoubtedly third century material. This spread sealed a trench parallel to the east wall of the room and 2 ft. away from it. The trench was consistently a little over 2 ft. wide, and approximately 2 ft. 6 ins. (0.75 m.) deep: this was presumably destined to receive a wall foundation which for some reason was not required. The greater part of its fill was the red sand and crushed stone which would have resulted from its excavation.

The two rooms at the west side of the site produced abundant evidence of metalworking activity in the vicinity. The northern retained a small part of a stone flagged floor of second century date, but otherwise clear signs of floors were absent. In neither room need the uppermost fills be later in date than the *opus signinum* floor.






As has already been implied, the building in question must be identified as a workshop in view of the evidence it produced. The main workshops complex lay further to the west, and was uncovered in part by the excavations of 1963-4. The large area occupied by the workshops makes it slightly curious that an annex of this sort was required, so close to two of the principal buildings.

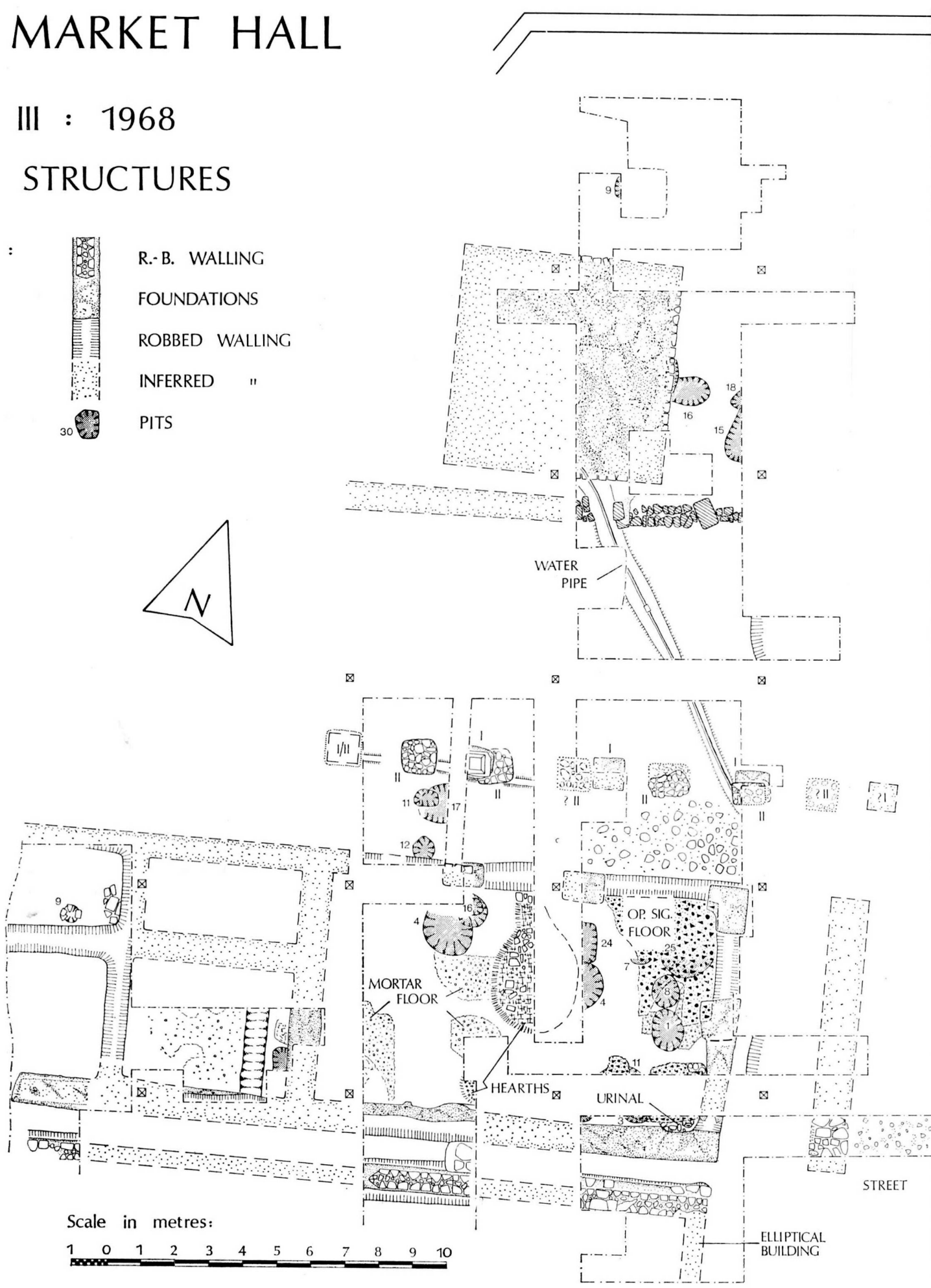
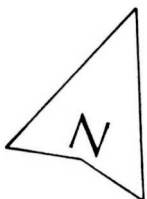
It was only during the closing stages of the work that it was realised that 17 ft. 6 ins. (5.35 m.) east of the east wall of the workshop there was a stylobate foundation. This must belong to a rebuild, since there were surfaces of gravel and rammed tile which clearly pre-dated it. The earlier colonnade presumably had individual column bases, but these were not located. To the east of the

CHESTER OLD MARKET HALL

PHASE III : 1968
STONE STRUCTURES

PRINCESS STREET

- KEY :
-  R.-B. WALLING
 -  FOUNDATIONS
 -  ROBBED WALLING
 -  INFERRED "
 -  PITS



Scale in metres:
1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Scale in feet :
10 0 10 20 30 40 50

D.F.P. 1971

FIG. 3. Phase III, the stone buildings.

colonnade there was the surfacing of the street skirting the west side of the *praetorium*, here approximately 24 ft. (7.2 m.) wide.

8 ft. (2.4 m.) north of the first building the mortar and sandstone foundations for a row of columns were located. One of these still retained a base slab and base 2 ft. (0.6 m.) square similar to the examples exposed in 1965 (plate IIa).⁹ The inter-columniation was 11 ft. (3.3 m.) in the first period, but there were signs that the colonnade was renewed with a closer inter-columniation which did not permit re-use of the original foundations save at the east end. This foundation may, therefore, be the last in the series at the south-east corner.

It is tempting to suppose that these bases represent a north front colonnade for the workshop. This was not, however, the impression formed in either 1965 or 1968, and we must rather conclude that the colonnade is to be linked to the pitched stone foundation located 28 ft. (8.4 m.) to the north of it (plate IIb). The two buildings were therefore separated by a narrow alley onto which both fronted.

Within the area uncovered, the floor of the second building consisted of nothing more elaborate than a spread of sandstone rubble. Its extent in an easterly direction could not be proved because of later disturbance, but similar surfacing was encountered outside the building on its north side. Once again comparatively little material was sealed by the earliest surface, four of the six pits under it being sterile. However, there seemed no reason to suppose that the date of construction differed from the workshop to the south. The slight amount of pottery sealed by a second sandstone surface was not demonstrably later than that under the first. As originally exposed the north wall foundation was concealed by sandstone surfacing, and it seems possible that the building was ultimately demolished. A lead water pipe which ran on a north-west to south-east alignment across the building was certainly laid whilst the building was still in use. Where its trench broke through the back wall the foundation was carefully revetted on either side to prevent subsidence. Although the small amount of pottery from the trench was not of great help in supplying a date for the pipe, indirect evidence was supplied by the area immediately to the north.

On general grounds it seems reasonable to conclude that this building was related in function to the workshop it faced. The simple plan, undivided internally, and the open south side and rubble floor argue equally for a simple use, such as a store for fuel or materials, or perhaps both.

The third stone building consisted of a solid platform of sandstone and mortar measuring nearly 22 ft. (6.6 m.) north-south. The surviving masonry (of which the full depth was not determined) represents substructure only, all the superstructure having been removed. That this was demolition rather than robbing may be argued on two counts: the removal of masonry was carried out to a consistent level, and the pottery from the backfilling of the resulting hole was all Roman. A fair quantity was recovered from this context, including some colour-

⁹ Another may have been found in 1939—*op. cit.*, plate II.

coated and grey latticed sherds for which a third century date would be appropriate.

As might be expected, only the slightest traces remained of construction contexts. However, on its south side this structure cut through a pit which was also cut by the foundation of the adjacent store. Similarly, agreement in general terms with the date for the construction of the workshop and store was indicated by the material sealed by a sandstone surface laid at the same time as, or soon after, its completion. This surface had been repaired before it was cut by the demolition trench. No certainly stratified later levels survived.

The width of the foundation east-west was at least 17 ft. 6 ins. (5.3 m.), and it therefore seems likely that its shape was square. There are comparatively few structures for which such a platform could have formed the foundation, and of these the most likely is a water tank.¹⁰ On the other hand it is only fair to point out that no sign of a feeder pipe was seen: on general grounds one would have expected the tank to have been fed from the east side. The lead water pipe which crossed the area south of the tank had every appearance of having been laid through the demolition fills over the tank. As we have seen, it was certainly secondary to the store.

The base just described must certainly have had its western limit within the site, as the earlier excavations had indicated the presence of a third building east-west possibly of similar dimensions to the other two. To the north of the base no further traces of stone structure were found for a distance of about 11 ft. (3.3 m.), and it seems reasonable to suggest that Princess Street perpetuates the line of an east-west street dividing buildings *in latere praetorii* from the *retentura* of the fortress.¹¹

CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the plan of the legionary fortress the area explored lay west of the *praetorium* and north of the 'Elliptical' Building. From the foundation of the fortress in the mid-70's of the first century to the early second century this site was occupied by two timber buildings orientated east-west. The southern resembled a barrack building sufficiently closely in size and plan to make this a possible identification, although the point cannot be considered to be completely proved. In terms of a barrack six *contubernia* were revealed, representing a little over half the length of the building.¹² The second timber building was less clearly defined, but was different in plan to the first. Its function was not certainly proved, despite the hearths it contained.

¹⁰ An immediate analogy suggests itself in the fountain formerly at 291-292 High Street, Lincoln (*J.R.S.* XLVI (1956), 32-36).

¹¹ cf. plan in G. Webster, *A Short Guide to the Roman Inscriptions and Sculptured Stones in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester*, revised edition, 1970.

¹² Assuming the building to have had eleven *contubernia*, its full length would have been 105 ft. (32 m.) or more. The actual space available is rather over 200 ft. (61 m.) east-west, so that there would have been ample room for a centurion's house at the west end.

The Trajanic period saw the timber structures dismantled to make way for three stone buildings. One of these, lying close to the north side of the 'Elliptical' Building and facing north, was identified as a workshop: its neighbour facing it across a narrow alley seemed most likely to be a store building. Like the timber buildings, these lay east-west at right angles to the long axis of the fortress. Both were 100 ft. or more in length. The third structure consisted of a mortared stone base, possibly the substructure for a water tank.

Whilst all three buildings were apparently laid out and built at the same time, their subsequent histories seem to have diverged. The water tank was the shortest lived: use of the adjacent store building is known to have continued after its demolition. Both workshop and store showed signs of repairs and reconstructions, but it is not certain that these necessarily took place at the same time. The re-flooring of the workshop, and possibly also the provision of a new stylobate foundation for the east front colonnade, was at earliest late second century. Subsequent occupation continued in the third century, if not into the fourth. We cannot be sure, however, that occupation of the store building continued as long as this.¹³

PART II: Final phase of excavations, 1969-70 (Phase V)

Introduction (see fig. 1)

The final phase (phase V) of excavation work on this site began, after some delay caused by the contractor, on 14th July, 1969, and drew to a close at the end of October.¹⁴ Work continued on the site in recording further evidence revealed by the contractor, and excavating the small areas still available, until 7th April 1970. As with the previous excavations on the site the work was occasioned by redevelopment of the area previously occupied by the Market Hall for new shops and municipal offices. The greater part of the site was also utilised for underground car parking at two levels; the destruction of archaeological features was therefore virtually total.¹⁵ Foreknowledge of this destruction dictated the mode of excavation: as in earlier phases, a series of boxes was excavated related to a grid established at the commencement of work in 1967.

The area explored in 1969 lay to the south of that excavated between November 1967, and March 1968. It consisted of a long strip 230 ft. (70 m.) from east to west, and normally no more than about 25 ft. (7.5 m.) wide (plate IIIa). In the first instance, indeed, it had been anticipated that the width north-south of the area would be 40 ft. (12 m.), but much of this was lost in over-digging by the contractor.¹⁶ Fortunately it still proved possible to obtain an overlap with

¹³ The excavations described, forming the third phase of work on the site, were jointly sponsored by the (then) Ministry of Public Building and Works and Chester City Corporation. They were directed by the writer with the assistance of other members of the Grosvenor Museum's staff. Welcome help was received from a number of volunteers, and assistance was also provided by Appleton Thorn Open Prison, as on Phase I.

¹⁴ A brief notice of the work in 1969-70 has already appeared in *Britannia* I (1970), 282.

¹⁵ Chester Corporation has, however, arranged with the developer for the preservation of the north-west corner of the *sacellum*. This is to be seen from Hamilton Place.

¹⁶ See below, p. 21, for a slate-cut inscription from this area.

the 1967–8 excavations at two points. Spoil disposal presented considerable problems with a site as long and narrow as this, especially as active construction work continued on the new building immediately alongside.

This note is only concerned with that part of the site which extended from the Northgate Street frontage approximately 120 ft. (36.5 m.) westwards. The western part of the site, when explored, was found to cover an extensive baths suite, clearly related to the elliptical building to the north of it.¹⁷ Along the southern edge of this part of the site lay traces of the northern ends of two barracks. The eastern of these was the barrack located by I. A. Richmond and G. Webster in 1948–9; this was shown to have faced west (i.e. away from the *principia*) rather than east as was suggested, understandably, by the excavators.¹⁸ One of the principal objectives of the 1948–9 excavations had, of course, been the location of the west side of the *principia* (headquarters building) of the fortress, and it was with the *principia* that the 1969 excavations here summarised were concerned.

The form of the legionary *principia* is sufficiently well known to require no more than the most summary of descriptions here. At one end of the complex, facing the junction of the *via principalis* and the *via praetoria*, was the main entrance. An open quadrangle surrounded by a colonnade and ranges of rooms on three sides gave access to a large hall or *basilica principiorum* normally divided into a nave and aisles. Beyond the *basilica* (so far as Chester is concerned at the northern end of the building) there is invariably a range of rooms normally termed, for the want of more precise information, offices. One of these, sometimes distinguished by its size, is placed on the long axis of the *principia*, and indeed on the major axis of the fortress. This has often in the past been termed the *sacellum*, but the term used may in fact have been *aedes*, and either word is apt. This was the shrine in which the eagle and other legionary *signa* were kept when not in the field. Beneath the floor of this room one would normally expect to find a subterranean strongroom or *aerarium*, but apparently this was not always provided.¹⁹ In this was kept the pay chest, together with other valuables, protected by the standards above, and their sentry. One might with truth describe the *principia* as the hub of the legion's existence, and this fact gives its excavation an unusual significance.

Timber period (see plan, fig. 4)

The principal evidence for a timber building underlying the stone *principia* consisted of a line of post-pits lying roughly parallel to, and between 4 ft. 6 ins. and 5 ft. (1.3 m. and 1.5 m.) south of, the north wall of the *principia*. Five post pits in all were located, four of them in series. Their spacing was not particularly consistent, varying from 7 ft. (2.1 m.) to 9 ft. 6 ins. (2.9 m.). Although irregular






¹⁷ Work in the western half of the site (excluding the barracks) was directed by Mr. J. V. H. Eames.

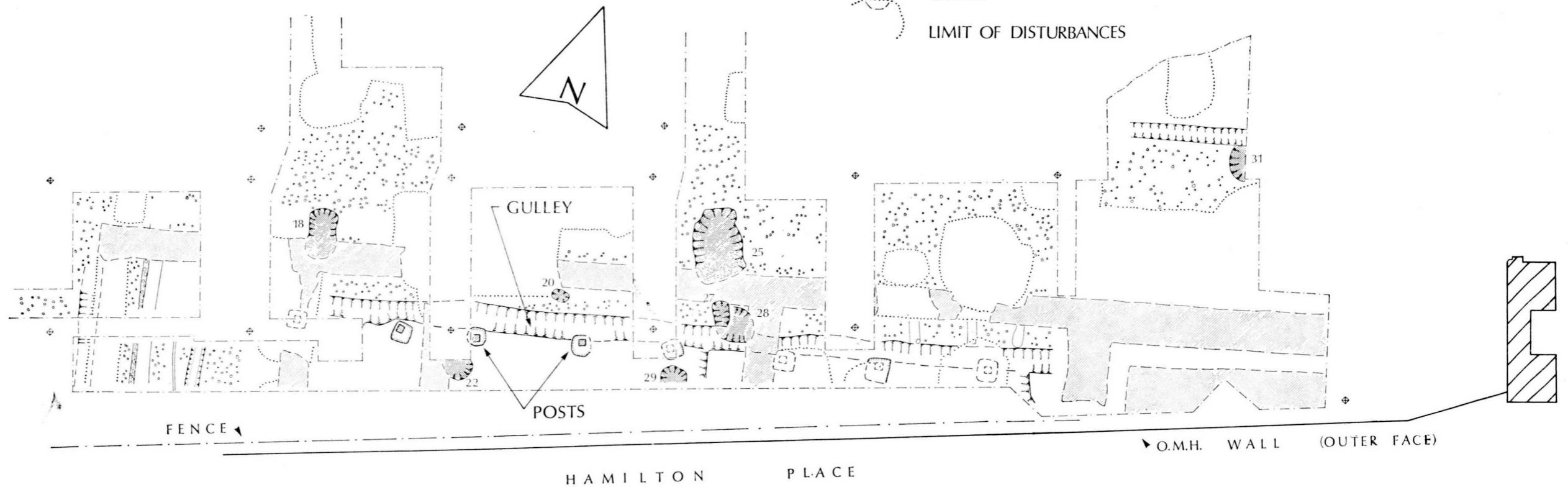
¹⁸ The western of these barracks was more extensively revealed by Mr. G. M. R. Davies's work on the site of the former Assay Office on the west side of Goss Street (1968–70).

¹⁹ *Arch. Camb.* XCI (1936), 320 f.; *ibid.* CXIX (1971), 10 f.

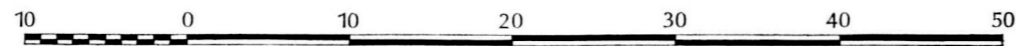
CHESTER OLD MARKET HALL

PHASE V : 1969-70
TIMBER STRUCTURES

- KEY :
-  FOUNDATION OF STONE PRINCIPIA
 -  GULLEYS
 -  POST PITS
 -  OTHER "
 -  LIMIT OF DISTURBANCES



Scale in feet :



Scale in metres :



D. F. P.

FIG. 4. Phase V, the timber *principia*.

both in size and shape, the post pits were approximately 2 ft. (0.6 m.) across, and may be broadly described as 'sub-rectangular' (plate Ib). As recovered they were not consistent as to depth, varying from *c.* 9 ins. to 1 ft. 6 ins. (*c.* 23-45 cm.), and it seems fair to infer that some of them at least had been truncated by later building activity on the site. Three of the pits retained indications of the timbers they had contained, but in no case were these as clear and unequivocal as the timber remains found in phase III.²⁰ These rather vague traces suggested timbers between 8 and 10 ins. (20 to 25 cm.) square.

Some uncertainty must exist as to whether the westernmost of the posts excavated was in fact the last of the series. One more could be conjectured beneath the next wall to the west, but cannot be proved. The last box in the series produced no sign of timber structures, but contained instead successive surfacings of gravel. The irregularity of the spacing of the posts leaves the slight possibility that a post pit may have been concealed beneath the unexcavated baulk between the last two boxes, but the likelihood of this does not seem very great.

Immediately to the north of the post pits, and to a certain extent impinging on them, was a shallow gully. Somewhat irregular in shape, the gully varied between 2 ft. (0.6 m.) and 2 ft. 6 ins. (0.75 m.) in width. This may, perhaps, be compared with a similar but slightly smaller gully located on the other side of the street and one foot south of the stone gutter fronting the *praetorium*. The most likely function for these gulleys seems to be the collection of surface water or as eaves-drips: the profile of the lower part of the gully fronting the *praetorium* suggested that it may have been plank-lined. This also seems to be true of a later and deeper slot on a north-south alignment which was located immediately east of the west wall of the *principia* (see section, fig. 6).

Several pits of this period were found, and one of these (pit 25), sealed by the earliest street north of the *principia* and containing mixed brown sand and charcoal, is probably best interpreted as a site clearance pit. No internal floor levels were recognised. If the post pits had been truncated, as suggested above, then presumably all traces of timber period floor levels would have disappeared.

Stone *principia* (see plan, fig. 5)

Some 122 ft. (37.2 m.) of the north wall of the *principia* was uncovered by excavation, and to this can be added a further 25 ft. (7.6 m.) recorded as a result of work done by the contractor. The north-west corner of the *principia* (plate IIIb) was located 145 ft. (44.2 m.) west of the Market Hall frontage to Northgate Street, and 23 ft. (7 m.) north of Hamilton Place. In addition to the west wall a series of four internal walls was defined, dividing this part of the *principia* into a range of rooms, as has been described above. Working from the west end eastwards the first four rooms were 16 ft. (4.9 m.), 11 ft. 6 ins. (3.5 m.), 29 ft. 3 ins. (8.9 m.), and 29 ft. 6 ins. (9 m.) in width. The width of the fifth and easternmost room would have remained a matter for conjecture had it not been

²⁰ See plate Ia.

for the additional discoveries made after the end of formal excavations. It had already been established that, whereas the thickness of the north wall of the building was in general 2 ft. 6 ins. (0.75 m.), at this point it was increased to 4 ft. (1.2 m.). Even more significant, the sandstone rock had been cut away to within 2 ft. (0.6 m.) of the west and north walls of the room to a depth of 4 ft. 7 ins. (1.4 m.) below the base course of the north wall (plate IVa). There could be no doubt that this was the strongroom situated beneath the *sacellum*, and it was subsequently shown that the strongroom extended the full width of the room above it. Its north-east corner was revealed by the contractor's excavations just within the corner made by the Market's south and east walls, and the east wall of the *sacellum* would have been beneath the Market's east wall. The width of the strongroom was ultimately found by direct measurement to be a little over 35 ft. (10.6 m.) and the width of the *sacellum* may be conjectured to have been between 39 and 40 feet (c. 12 m.). Recovery of these figures is of significance, not least for restoration of the *principia* east-west, and this point is discussed further below.

Of the floor of the *sacellum* nothing survived, and it can only be conjectured that this was of timber construction, possibly raised above the general level of the flooring of the cross-hall. Without this elevation headroom in the strongroom would have been inadequate: a raised floor would undoubtedly have been appropriate to the special function of the *sacellum*. Before leaving the *sacellum* to describe the rest of the building two further points should be mentioned. At the foot of the rock-cut sides of the strongroom a mortar strip 1 ft. 7 ins. (48.2 cm.) wide by 8 ins. (20.3 cm.) deep presumably marks the site of the screen wall which concealed the bare rock behind. When the strong-room was excavated the rock face was found to have been rendered with wall plaster, and it seems likely that the screen wall had been dismantled in a subsequent rebuilding.

The second point relates to the recovery during excavation of the impression of a large stone block on the upper surviving surface of the north wall of the *sacellum*. This block was some 3 ft. 3 ins. (c. 1 m.) square, and was situated at the point where north and west walls of the *sacellum* joined. Whether the outer wall of the *principia* was treated in some distinctive way architecturally where it formed the north wall of the *sacellum* must at the moment remain conjectural, although on the face of it the suggestion is attractive; and such a feature can be recognised at Lambaesis and perhaps also at Bonn. Unfortunately the responding north-east corner was not available for examination, and no intervening features of note were recorded.







If the room just described was the principal shrine, there can be little doubt that the room immediately to the west of it was also ultimately used for a similar purpose, whatever its original function may have been. This diagnosis is based on the series of two up-turned unfinished²¹ column capitals, a re-used column

²¹ I am obliged to Professor Donald Strong for pointing out that the capitals in question were unfinished. A similar capital was found behind a shop in Bridge Street in 1954 (*C.A.S.* 41 (1954), 85).

CHESTER OLD MARKET HALL

PHASES I & V : 1967-70
STONE STRUCTURES

KEY :

-  R-B. WALLING
-  FOUNDATIONS
-  ROBBED WALLING
-  INFERRED
-  R-B. PITS
-  LIMIT OF DISTURBANCES



Scale in feet :
10 0 10 20 30 40 50

Scale in metres :
1 0 1 2 3 4 5 10 15

D.F.P.

FIG. 5. Phases I and V, the stone *principia* and *praetorium*.

capital, and a re-used base, which lined the walls of the room: these were interpreted as bases for altars (plates Va, Vb).²² Fragments of a fifth capital or base were recovered from the appropriate spot on the back wall of the room to give a regular spacing of about 8 or 9 ft. (2.4–2.7 m.). As will be seen from the section (see fig. 6) traces of flooring survived but did not extend far into the area available for excavation. There were hints that the flooring of the room was in all likelihood timber in the first instance (see plan, fig. 4). It may well be that the installation of the capitals and base was accompanied by a general making up of the floor level, capped by a flagged floor: indeed, indications of such a floor may be seen in the section. There were also signs of an intermediate flagged floor over the mortar floor.

The adjacent room to the west had a worn and patchy grey mortar 'primary' floor which capped only a few inches of make-up over the levels at which traces of timber structure appeared. From this make-up came pottery indicating a third century date at earliest. Over the lower floor there were the remains of a second mortar floor, which had also clearly been subjected to a great deal of wear and inadequate maintenance. Lying on this was a column base slab and another architectural fragment: these, it seems likely, were incorporated into the flagged floor, of which part survived close to the north wall (plate VIa).

In contrast to the room just described, the next room yielded no clear sign of flooring at all. The consistent level of the spreads in this room leads one to suggest that it had been flagged, and that the flagstones had been lifted and reused in a new flooring which raised the floor level by rather over a foot (0.30 m.). The earlier floor was second century in date; the later was at earliest third century, and is more likely to have been fourth century.

By contrast with the foregoing, the westernmost of the rooms sealed beneath its primary floor of *opus signinum* quite a significant build-up of earlier levels which consisted of superimposed pebble surfaces, all of which ran out towards the east side of the room. It was noted that the east wall of this room had been rebuilt virtually from ground level, and from a dirty inclusion between lower and upper wall came a black burnished dish with lattice decoration.²³ The *opus signinum* floor was by far the most substantial found during work on this range of rooms. Although it showed few signs of wear in the small areas examined, nevertheless it had been covered by flagging of a rather poor character before the end of the Roman period. This floor, which survived only patchily, capped a sooty spread which in all probability originated in the adjacent bath building. Sealed beneath the *opus signinum* floor was a lead water pipe which had been inserted through all the underlying surfaces.

In the short length exposed the west wall was exceptionally thoroughly robbed: not only had the superstructure been removed, but also the greater part of the

²² The suggested analogy being with the bases found in the *Nemeseum* at the amphitheatre, see *J.R.S.* LVII (1967), 186 and plate XIII, 3.

²³ A similar reconstruction of the west wall from the ground up was recorded by Richmond and Webster in 1948 (see *C.A.S.* 38 (1951), 11 and fig. 3).

underlying foundation. However, the width of the robbing trench was quite consistent with that of the north wall foundation at a little over 3 ft. (1 m.), so that a similar width of wall may be assumed.

Immediately west of the *principia* was the street which separated it from the bath building and barracks. At the northern end this was 14 ft. or so in width (4.2 m.); the distance between *principia* and back wall of the nearest barrack was 26 ft. 9 ins. (8.13 m.) so that the street width was rather more at that point at 18 ft. or a little under (5.4 m.), allowing 9 ft. (2.7 m.) for the width of the colonnade.²⁴ This agrees closely with the measurement recorded in 1948. The single section excavated across the street showed a series of at least five superimposed surfaces. Part of a column shaft was found embedded in the surfacing close to the north-west corner of the *principia*, and a second was located during the removal of fills by the contractor a little over 2 ft. (0.6 m.) from the first. The purpose of these is obscure: they are reminiscent of the bollards put up in more recent times to protect the corners of buildings from damage by passing vehicles, but could perhaps have served a less mundane purpose as the bases for small altars or statues.

The praetorium

During the first phase of the excavation comparatively little work was done on the south front of the *praetorium*, as this lay outside the area available for excavation at that time. It had been shown, however, that the building was fronted by a colonnade on this side: the single base slab located lay 10 ft. 4 in. (3.1 m.) in advance of the south wall. As noted above, much of the remaining part of the *praetorium* had been destroyed before the southern part of the site was handed over for investigation. Fortunately, however, it proved possible to strip an area close to the eastern limit of the site which gave useful additional information concerning the colonnade.

Two cobble and mortar foundations were located a little over 6 ft. (1.8 m.) apart: the eastern of these measured 3 ft. 6 ins. by 3 ft. 10 ins. (1.0 m. by 1.1 m.), and still carried its column base slab which was 3 ft. by 3 ft. 3 ins. (0.90 m. by 0.98 m.). A substantial impression survived of the south-east corner of the slab which had been carried by the western foundation, and although this did not indicate its size, it gave an opportunity to calculate the spacing of the colonnade. This seems to have been between 10 ft. 6 ins. (3.2 m.) and 11 ft. (3.3 m.), an interval which fits both the column base found during phase I and the known position of the south-west corner of the building.

If we can assume that the axes of the *principia* and *praetorium* were not dissimilar, then there can be little doubt that the eastern of the two foundations just described must mark the west side of the entrance to the *praetorium*, for it lay only a little over 6 ft. (1.9 m.) west of the north-south axis of the *principia*. This argument is given added force by the size of two column bases found in the immediate vicinity, since it seems reasonable to suppose that one or other of

²⁴ The measurements recorded in 1948 were not consistent, the veranda apparently varying in width from 6 ft. 9 ins. (2 m.) (*op. cit.* p. 3) to over 10 ft. (3 m.).

CHESTER : OLD MARKET HALL

PHASE V : 1969-70

BOXES D2E - D4E

EAST - WEST SECTIONS A - D

AND E - F

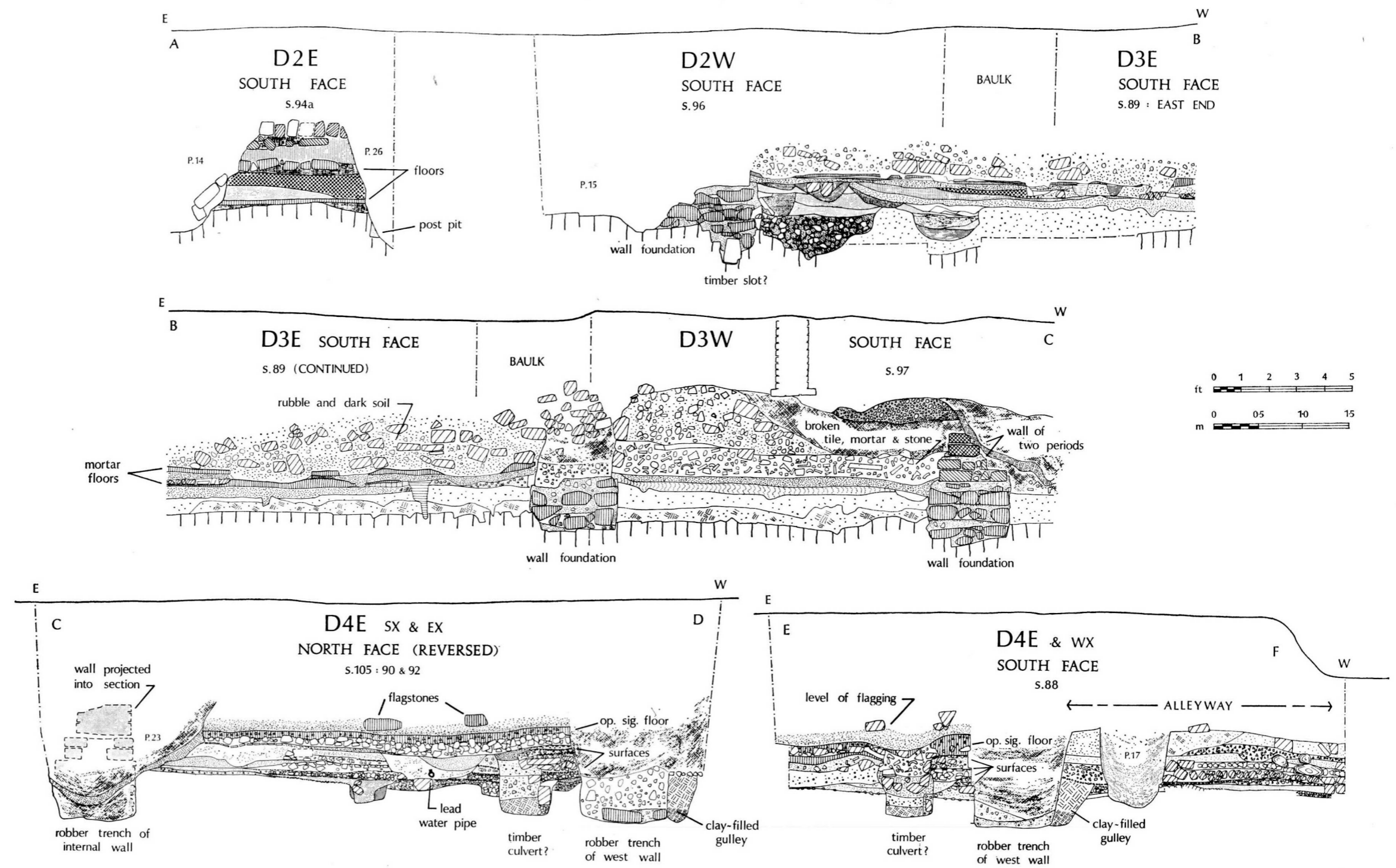


FIG. 6. Phase V, east-west section through the *principia*.

these had originally been placed on the foundation. Both in fact measured 2 ft. 5 ins. (0.72 m.) across the base, whilst the top of the base slab uncovered in 1968 had had its top marked out for a column base some 2 ft. (0.6 m.) square. Within the compass of this summary report it must suffice to suggest that the main entrance to the *praetorium* lay on its south side, facing the *principia*, and was given distinctive architectural treatment, as by being pedimented. The space between the columns flanking the entrance may have been of the order of 14 ft. (4.2 m.), and the entrance passage behind these was possibly about 19 ft. (5.8 m.) wide. These calculations are based on the rather uncertain assumption that the north-south axes of *principia* and *praetorium* coincided exactly; extension of this would lead to a slight reduction of the assumed width east-west of the *praetorium* from the c. 220 ft. originally proposed to c. 212 ft. (64.6 m.).²⁵ A short length of wall 2 ft. (0.6 m.) wide running north-south some 10 ft. (3. m.) east of the Market Hall beneath the pavement of Northgate Street would imply that the width of the room on the east side of the entrance passageway was c. 17 ft. (c. 5.2 m.). This is rather less than the room on the west side, which was 22 ft. 9 ins. (6.9 m.) wide. Having regard to our uncertainty about the axis of the *praetorium* it might also be pointed out that if the room on the east side of the entrance passage had been of a broadly similar width to that on the west side the width of the passage would have been commensurately reduced by some five feet or so.

Of the two column bases mentioned above (see plate IVb), one was lying on its side immediately west of the base slab and foundation, whilst the other was placed immediately to the north of it. The latter base was the right way up, but was based on sandy fill, and was quite clearly in a re-used context. This base had had a dowel hole cut into its top.

Direct measurement between the *praetorium* colonnade and the north wall of the *principia* showed that the width of the street between was 21 ft. (6.4 m.). Both buildings were provided with eaves-drip gutters, that for the *praetorium* lying immediately south of the colonnade base slabs, and that for the *principia* between 18 ins. and 2 ft. (0.45 to 0.60 m.) in advance of its north wall. Between these two gutters the ground was completely occupied by successive surfaces, save where these had been removed by later disturbances. The street was built up on a layer of sandstone rubble and chips with sand, lying on clean natural sand. The number of surfaces identified in the sections varied, although there never seem to have been fewer than three: the number seemed to increase towards the crossroads at the west end of the two buildings.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The timber *principia*

Since the stripping of substantial areas to the north of the line of post-pits in 1967-8, and again in 1969, produced no sign of further timber structure²⁶ it

²⁵ *C.A.S.* 55 (1968), 3. The revised estimate is bound to rely on the unproven (and at present unprovable) assumption that the entrance was placed in the centre of this side of the building; or alternatively on the equally uncertain premise that the building would have been accurately and symmetrically placed in relation to the long axis of the fortress.

²⁶ *C.A.S.* 55 (1968), 4.

seems reasonable to conclude that these posts mark the north side of a building. However, it does not immediately follow that the building in question was the *principia*: the *principia* at Inchtuthil, for example, is markedly smaller than the *insula* containing it; and G. C. Boon has recently suggested that at Caerleon a small makeshift timber *principia* was probably followed very quickly by the earliest stone building.²⁷ In fact the evidence from the excavations under discussion agrees with that from the previous discoveries in suggesting that matters were otherwise at Chester.

The traces of the timber *principia* recovered in 1948–9 consisted of bedding slots, which in one case measured 17 ins. (43 cm.) in width and 14 ins. (35 cm.) in depth. The slot which ran beneath the colonnade surfacing agrees sufficiently closely with the west side of the stone *principia* to suggest that it is the corresponding wall of the timber building, as was assumed by the excavators.²⁸ Nevertheless, this would not necessarily be conclusive, were it not for Professor Richmond's reassessment of the discoveries made in Shoemakers' Row in 1897.²⁹ He distinguished five rectangular post-pits on an east–west alignment some 12 ft. (3.6 m.) south of the columns of the stone *principia*. These measured 3 to 4 ft. (0.9 to 1.2 m.) across, and held the uprights of the north arcade of the timber cross-hall. Beneath the stone bases the filled slots of a timber building were also identified by Professor Richmond, and these would indicate the north side of the *basilica*.³⁰ The trend of the evidence, therefore, is to suggest that the timber *principia* was not markedly smaller than the stone building which followed it. Evidently its cross-hall was placed a little further south, and this in itself suggests that the back wall of the *sacellum* and the other accompanying shrines and offices lay outside the area available for excavation in 1969. Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that the series of post pits found in 1969 represents a colonnade running along the north front of the building. Whilst an analogy in a timber legionary *principia* does not seem to be immediately available, the corresponding frontage of the stone-built *principia* at Neuss (*Novaesium*) is treated in just this way. On the site evidence the colonnade (if such it was) cannot have been less than 6 ft. (1.8 m.) wide.

Assuming that the axes of the timber and stone fortresses were broadly similar, and that the timber *principia* is likely to have been laid out from this axis, then its width east–west (on the basis of the evidence recovered in 1969) would have been between 180 and 200 ft. (55–61 m.). Unfortunately this order of size does

²⁷ *Arch. Camb.* CXIX (1971), 10–11.

²⁸ *C.A.S.* 38 (1951), 15–17. It is, however, interesting to find that the slot assigned to the *principia* was apparently very similar in size to that belonging to the adjacent barrack. Both agree closely in width, which is also that of the slots found during phase III (see above, p. 5). The slots beneath the column bases in the Northgate Street cellar (Nola's Gowns) are 29–31 in. (75–79 cm.) wide, and 33–35 in. (84–89 cm.) deep. The apparent shallowness of the slots found in 1948 is perhaps illusory, as they may not have been completely emptied—cf., for example, fig. 3 in the report. It is salutary to remember that the excavations in Goss Street 1948–9 were the first in Chester to produce recognised evidence of timber buildings.

²⁹ *C.A.S.* VI (1899), 277f.; *C.A.S.* 38 (1951), 17.

³⁰ The fill was described by Professor Richmond as packed rock, but re-examination suggests that the rubble is intermixed with mortar.

not agree with the results of the work in 1948–9 which indicated a width only 8 ft. (2.4 m.) or so less than the stone *principia*, i.e. *c.* 230 ft. (*c.* 70 m.). On present evidence it seems best to assume that the width of the building lay in the range 200–230 ft. (*c.* 60–70 m.).

From the width of the north aisle of the *basilica*, some 13 ft. (*c.* 4 m.), it seems reasonable to restore a nave of some 25 ft. (7.6 m.), giving an overall width for the *basilica* of *c.* 77 ft. (*c.* 23.5 m.). The length north–south of the range of offices and the north front colonnade combined was *c.* 40 ft. (*c.* 12 m.). Of the forecourt and associated structures we at present know nothing.³¹

The stone *principia*

One of the happiest outcomes of the work in 1969–70 was to confirm the acute percipience of Professor Richmond and Dr. Webster. The restored plan of the building put forward in their report on the 1948–9 excavations, whilst departing slightly from the dimensions recorded twenty years later, was of a high order of accuracy. For example, the width overall of the building, postulated as being 244 ft. (64.36 m.), is apparently only some 4 ft. (1.21 m.) short of this at 240 ft. (73.15 m.). This may be contrasted with the width of the *principia* at Caerleon, now restored as 217 ft. (66.2 m.). The reconstruction made as a result of the work in 1948–9 would indeed have been even nearer the truth had not a slight mistake been made in calculating the axis of the fortress, placing it a little too far east. This accuracy of prediction was, of course, of considerable practical value in planning the work on the site.

Within the limited terms of reference of the cramped site, the 1969–70 excavations usefully augmented previous knowledge concerning the *principia*, and specifically in investigating the range of rooms on the north side of the *basilica principiorum*, about which nothing was previously known. Centrally placed in this range was the *sacellum*, with its underlying rock-cut strong-room. The width of this room can be accurately restored at 39 or 40 ft. (*c.* 12 m.); certainly it cannot have exceeded 41 ft. The measurement north–south of this and other rooms in the range can be estimated at *c.* 30 ft. (*c.* 9 m.), so that the *sacellum* at Chester is not dissimilar in size to that at Caerleon which measured 32 ft. (9.8 m.) by 35 ft. (10.5 m.). Where it differs is in having the longer side of the room at right angles to the main axis of the building. Other and more significant differences emerge, however, the most striking being the absence at Caerleon of any sign of a basement or cellar strongroom beneath the *sacellum*.

To the west of the *sacellum* lay four rooms,³² the first two just short of 30 ft. (*c.* 9 m.) wide, the third and fourth markedly less at 11 ft. 6 ins. (3.5 m.) and

³¹ Richmond and Webster's comment (*op. cit.*, 17) is noted. If the Agricolan water pipe marked the north side of the Flavian *via principalis* the length north–south of the timber *principia* would have been significantly less than that of the later stone building at between 240 and 250 feet (73–76 m.).

³² Despite the drastic remodelling, the layout of the building apparently remained precisely the same. During excavation the only uncertainty in this respect lay in whether the westernmost room had always been part of the plan, or had been added to it.

16 ft. (4.8 m.) respectively. The dimension north-south must in each case have been the same. The room next to the *sacellum* may itself have been a secondary shrine if the interpretation of the bases lining the walls is correct. That the *principia* might contain more than one shrine seems to be confirmed by the plan of Lambaesis, where the *sacellum* is provided with an apsidal projection. Three of the rooms flanking the *sacellum* are similarly provided with apses. As to the function of the second of the larger rooms, or of the two smaller rooms flanking it, nothing can be said apart from commenting on the considerable degree of wear which the floor of the large room exhibited. It would appear that this room had been used intensively over a long period.

An interesting, and unfortunate, parallel between the *principia* at Chester and Caerleon lies in the poor dating evidence yielded. So far as the building under discussion is concerned, a first examination of the material finds does not offer direct evidence as to date of construction, and there is therefore a temptation to fall back on the supposition that the building of a stone *principia* would have taken place at the same time as that of other stone buildings under Trajan. However, this does not necessarily follow: we may now legitimately suspect that some buildings in the fortress were in stone from the beginning;³³ and it is also salutary to remember that the stone *principia* at Caerleon sealed no recognisable traces of a timber building. Until the evidence has been examined more carefully, therefore, and the samian subjected to expert examination, the date of construction of the stone building must remain an uncertainty. What is unambiguous is the unexpectedly late date of the pottery sealed by the earliest floor levels or their associated fills. Since it would be unreasonable to propose that these were in fact the primary floor levels of the *principia*, and we have already the evidence from the 1948-9 excavations of a substantial reconstruction no earlier than c. A.D. 222, the interim solution suggested is that the third century reconstruction was radical, and amongst other things removed virtually all traces of second century floors. That occupation continued into the fourth century seems indicated by the rather scanty finds of that period associated with reflooring. Assessment of the duration of occupation must await further consideration of the evidence.

The praetorium

The contributions made by the work in 1969 and 1970 to our understanding of this building lay in refining the details supplied by the earlier work in 1967-8. The spacing of the south front colonnade was determined, and the western of a pair of columns defining the entrance was identified. Determination of the axis of the *principia* suggested the likely width of the entrance, and of the passageway behind it, and also prompted a reassessment of the overall width of the building to c. 212 ft. (64.6 m).

³³ In addition to the internal bath-building, for which a first-century date is certain on epigraphic grounds, my colleague Mr. Eames informs me that the elliptical building which occupied the site immediately west of the *praetorium* began its life in the Flavian period, and has yielded a third length of Agricolaean lead water pipe (*Britannia* II (1971), 292-3). The *praetorium* itself does not seem to have been preceded by a timber building.

Appendix: A slate-cut inscription (see fig. 7 and plate VII)

During the later stages of the first phase of excavation on the Old Market Hall site fragments of a slate-cut inscription came to light. This discovery was not included in the first brief discussion of the site, in part because conservation work was immediately required, and in part because the rather ambiguous character of the inscription made additional time for consideration particularly desirable. Additionally, there was some reason to hope that further fragments would come to light.

The two smallest fragments were the first to be recovered: they came from the construction trench for a brick stanchion belonging to the Victorian market hall. Subsequent extension of the box (C₃SW) containing this feature produced a further large fragment, broken into three pieces, which obviously belonged to the same inscription. This part of the inscription came from a sealed Romano-British context which requires further discussion.

The south face section of C₃SW showed a succession of road surfaces lying on disturbed sands, the whole build-up being a little over two feet (0.6 m.) thick. The lowest surface, of sandstone, was followed by a further spread of gravel and cobble metalling which ran out on the sandstone, and might perhaps have been of the same period of deposition. Neither produced any finds. The third surface consisted of sandstone, mortar and tile fragments. On this lay the principal fragment of the inscription, face downwards (plate VIb). The surface produced, in addition to substantial waste tile fragments, one Holt jar sherd, and two fragments from the rim of a grey jar. Around and over the inscription lay brown soil with tiles and some clay—this produced nothing in the way of finds. A further spread of tile and mortar fragments was covered by a series of sandstone blocks which at the time gave the impression of a paved surface. Later work to the south rather tended to cast some doubt on this interpretation. In summary, the inscription lay on the second (or third) of a series of streets, and may have been sealed by at least one further surface.

The overall context of the discovery can be most easily appreciated from the plan (fig. 5). The inscription came from the street dividing the *praetorium* from the *principia*. Its top lay towards the latter building, and (remembering that it lay face downwards) further points of interest could follow. If we may suppose, for the sake of argument, that the inscription lay as it had fallen from a building, then that building must have been the *praetorium*. Further, it would be logical to expect the left-hand margin of the inscription to lie west of the part found lying on the road, and in fact the two fragments from the disturbed context lay west of the main fragment and both form part of the left-hand side. Finally, it would follow that the remainder of the inscription, or at least this part of it, would have been contained by the area north and east of these fragments.

The box which produced this inscription lay for the greater part outside the area available at that time for exploration, and excavation was considerably hindered by a temporary covered pedestrian way which formed the southern boundary of the site. As can be seen from the plan, the adjacent areas which could have produced further fragments of this inscription were only partially explored,

and it must remain a matter for lasting regret that unconsidered action by the contractor prevented full excavation. Nevertheless, at the moment the writer is rather drawn to conclude that these were isolated fragments, and whilst it is certainly possible that others were swept away by the contractor before they could be recorded, the immediate vicinity produced nothing further. On balance it strains the existing evidence to suppose that the rest of the inscription lay as it had fallen on the surface of the street, and this must immediately cast a certain doubt as to its having come from either of the two major buildings in the vicinity. The inscription came from an undoubtedly Romano-British context, and must surely relate to the fortress of Deva or its civil settlement, but on existing evidence it would be difficult to prove more than this. Certainly the layer containing the inscription must be secondary to the stone-built *principia*.

Whilst there can be no doubt that the three fragments found during this excavation came from the same inscription, the two pieces from the left-hand side do not fit together, and there is no way of telling how these relate to the largest fragment. Indeed, accepting the suggestion that the inscription originally covered more than one slab, it must remain a theoretical possibility that one or both came from a quite separate slab.

With the exception of the smallest piece the condition of the inscribed face is so good that it seems unlikely to the present writer that it should have been exposed to weathering for any considerable period of time. The damage to the smallest piece assumedly results from its exposure during the Victorian period.

The inscription

The description of the text of the inscription which follows differs slightly from that already published by R. P. Wright,³⁴ and has benefited at a number of points from discussion with various colleagues. In terms of interpretation this section must be taken very much with the discussion of the inscription by D. J. Robinson which follows it.

The largest fragment (A) consists of three contiguous pieces, its overall size being some 28 in. (71 cm.) by 20.5 in. (52 cm.). It embraces six lines, including an upper border only 1.5 in. (38 mm.) wide.³⁵ The height of the letters in each line is consistent at 2.5 in. (64 mm.), the spacing between lines varying from 1.6 to 1.8 in. (40–46 mm.). The lettering is well cut between scribed guide-lines, and remains sharp and fresh. On lifting the fragments it became apparent that the slate was in poor condition, as the inscribed face (the under-side as found) manifested a disconcerting tendency to sheer off in thin flakes.³⁶

Line 1 : this certainly begins with M, the break preserving the upstroke. This is either *missa*, or a word ending with those letters, such as *omissa*. Following a

³⁴ *Britannia* II (1971), 290–291. The writer is obliged to Mr. Wright for his helpful comments on this inscription.

³⁵ It seems uncertain that this edge marks the top of the inscription.

³⁶ The inscription was treated at the North Western Museum and Art Gallery Area Service Laboratory. The surface of the stone was treated in a number of areas using Bedacryl 122X (1 : 3 in toluene). A coat of Maranyl was given to the surface.

leaf stop a word begins DIV . . . ; the last surviving letter is identifiable on the edge of the break, and is confirmed by the spacing.

Line 2 : again it is uncertain whether the A at the beginning of this line stands by itself, or is the terminal letter of a longer word. It is followed by CASTRIS, in its turn separated by a leaf stop from QVA . . .

Line 3 : the commencing letters, . . . CORVM, represent a case ending, and it seems possible that an auxiliary unit is being referred to, even though the reference *supra* is to a legionary fortress. Following a leaf stop are the letters CLAVS, the terminal surviving letter being either E or I. Either way a difficulty in interpretation is presented.

Line 4 : the first word must be CONTRA, although only a small part of the lower serif of the C survives. The second, at first temptingly looking like REGIN[AM, must be restored REGIM[EN on the basis of the size of letter.

Line 5 : again commences with the genitive plural case ending, . . . ORVM, with no hint as to the word it followed. A leaf stop separates it from a word beginning FEN . . . ; again the range of available words seems limited.

Line 6 : this begins with S, followed by a word PERM . . . The present writer prefers this to the reconstruction suggested by R. P. Wright PER-M . . . , for whilst the stop in front of *per* is easy enough to see, there is no sign of one following, nor is the spacing of the letters such as to make the presence of a stop really definite.³⁷

The second fragment (B) measuring 8 in. (20.3 cm.) by 8.25 in. (21 cm.) has four lines. This, the first of the two pieces from the left-hand margin of the inscription, is again in a sufficiently well preserved state for the guide-lines and margin line to have survived.

Line 1 : only the lowest parts of three letters survive. The second of these must be R and the third I; the spacing of the first by comparison with the margin and second line makes it far more likely that this is T or P rather than I (as restored by Mr. Wright).

Line 2 : this preserves three letters presumably from the middle of a word VTO . . . , or perhaps VTQ . . . : the former is to be preferred.

Line 3 : to all appearances this repeats the uppermost line, and it may be that both represent the same word. We lack, of course, any definite information as to length of line, apart from knowing that this cannot be less than 24.5 in. (75 cm.). In a military context there is no shortage of appropriate words beginning with either *tri* . . . or *pri* . . . , but as some doubt must exist as to this being a military inscription this is not necessarily relevant.

Line 4 : begins M . . .

The third and smallest fragment (C), also from the left hand side of the in-

³⁷ See line above, space between M and F.

scription, is the least well-preserved. It measures 6 in. (15.2 cm.) by 3.25 in. (8.2 cm.). The only letters clearly identifiable are TV . . . ; to these Mr. Wright would suggest as a possible reading C or similar rounded letter in the line above. Further consideration during the drawing of the inscription makes the letter S seem the most likely.

Discussion by D. J. Robinson

The following thoughts on the slate inscription were prompted by witnessing the progress of the drawing which accompanies this report. I would like to thank Peter Alebon, Archaeological Draughtsman at the Grosvenor Museum, for the skill and patience which made the following appraisal possible, and R. P. Wright and Mark Hassall for valuable advice which in no way makes them responsible for the views expressed below.

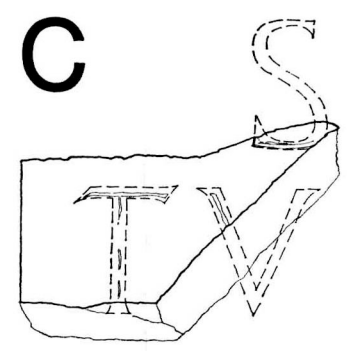
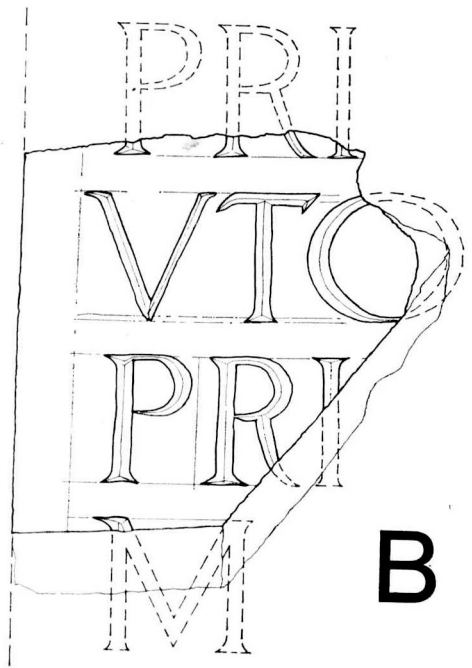
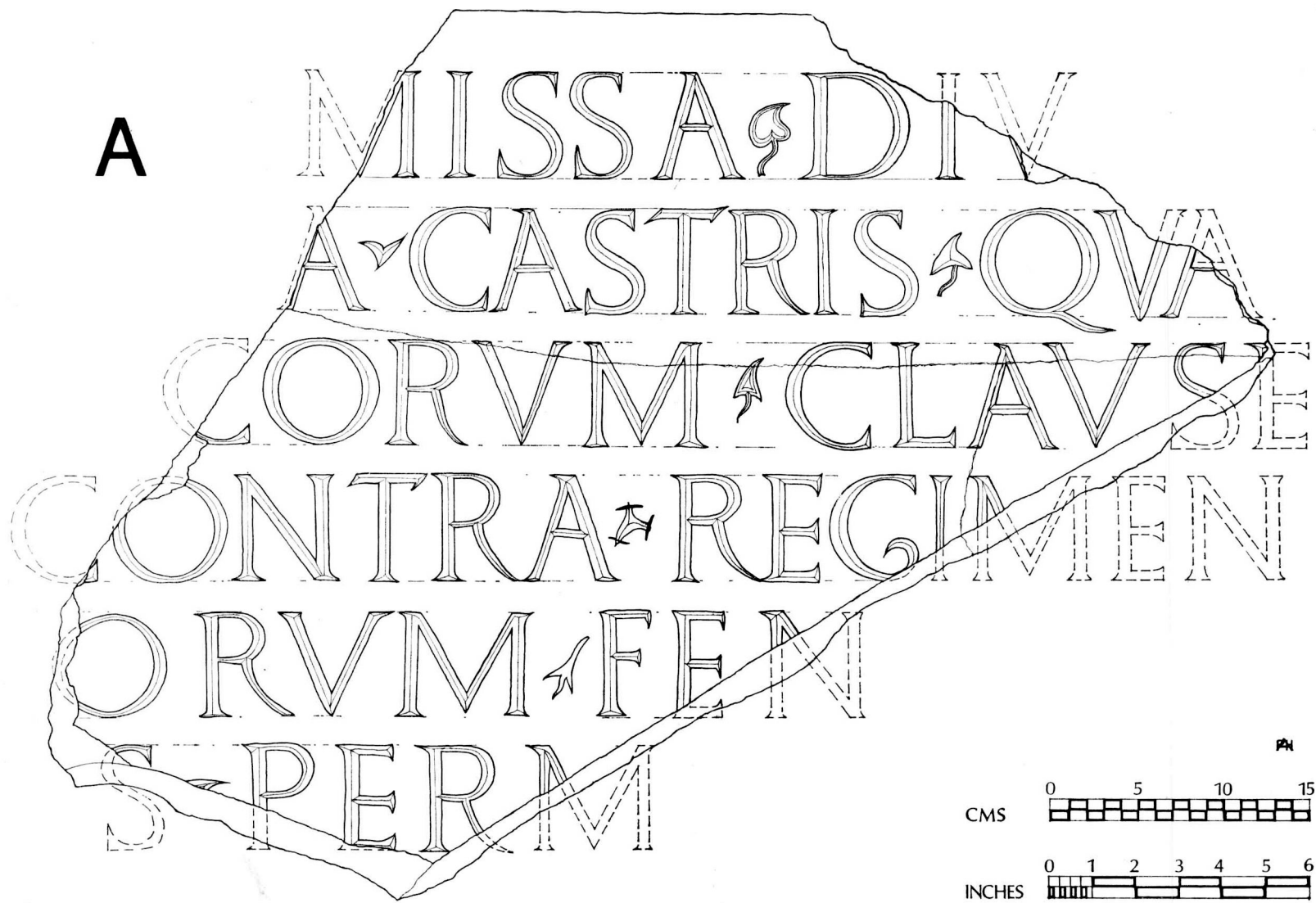
Close examination of the lettering of the inscription suggested comparison with a small fragment found in 1896 in the Sellar Street area, R.I.B. 462.³⁸ The latter was removed from display and found to agree in all dimensions with the main inscription. It gives a bottom edge, and has a flange for mounting behind some kind of frame. There can be little doubt that it is part of the same inscription, but it does not join with any of the fragments found in the Old Market Hall excavations.

It is obviously impossible to reconstruct the text of the inscription from the pieces we now have, but some speculation as to its contents may be profitable. The mason has been extremely accurate and consistent in laying out the script, so that it has been possible to expand the remains of letters where the slate is broken with a high degree of certainty. For example R. P. Wright's expansion of line 4 as CONTRA REGIMEN is confirmed, thus increasing the total of complete words to three.³⁹ The additional letters reduce the number of possibilities at several points, and it now seems safe to say that the inscription is written in normal prose rather than the stereotyped formulae usually encountered in Roman Britain.

One possible view of the sense of the text is that it is a military record of action in Britain from the time of the conquest, and this has some initial attraction; line 1 could be taken to contain an oblique case of DIVVS CLAVDIVS or another deified Emperor, line 2 has CASTRIS, line 4 CONTRA REGIMEN, and R.I.B. 462 has ETLI for which Mark Hassall has suggested to the writer in correspondence PETILLIVS, which might be taken as a reference to the legate Cerialis. However the original stimulus for this interpretation was the impression that line 4 gave CONTRA REGI[NAM and line 5 FE[MINA, i.e. references to Boudicca or Cartimandua. R. P. Wright has corrected line 4, and it is now necessary to remove FEMINA from line 5 since the vital letter at the break is N. The case for a military topic therefore becomes much less substantial

³⁸ R.I.B. 462 has one, possibly two ligatures. These do not occur on the other fragments. The E-D ligature is drawn with compasses.

³⁹ *Britannia* II (1971), 290-291. I have differed from R. P. Wright's preliminary reading at several points.



R.I.B.462

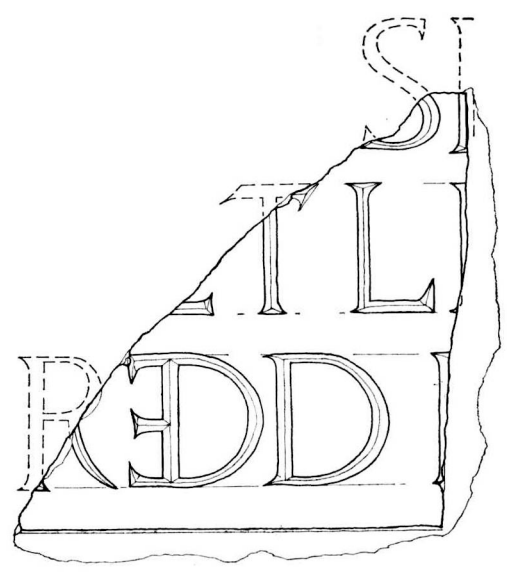


FIG. 7. The slate-cut inscription, and the fragment from Seller Street.

It is unfortunate that the verbs which appear in mutilated form on the fragments are all rather neutral in meaning, i.e. MITTO or compound (line 1), CLAVDO (line 3), perhaps PERM --- (line 6), and REDDO (R.I.B. 462).

There is a broad class of inscription so far unrecorded in Britain which is typified by prose, and can be brought under the heading 'administrative'. This includes such documents as CONSTITUTIONES, and edicts and rescripts from the Emperor. Such inscriptions are not common and are usually on bronze tablets, the best known example of this type being the Lex Metalli Vipascensis from Spain. An edict recorded on marble is extant from Venafrum in Italy. While the subject matter of these inscriptions varies considerably, they are generally expressed in legal or quasi-legal language, and are a public record of some facet of the administration of the community in question. There seems every reason to anticipate a number of these in Britain.⁴⁰

Looking at the inscription from Chester in this light, line 2 might be expanded as a simple location, e.g. A CASTRIS QVAE OCCUPAT LEGIO VICESIMA etc., and line 4 CONTRA REGIMEN is a little happier in a legal rather than military context. In line 5 the choice of words seems to be FENVM: hay, FENESTRA: window, and FENERATIO etc.: money-lending.⁴¹ The first is virtually impossible on any reckoning, the other two difficult, but it is perhaps a little easier to imagine usury or interest mentioned on an important inscription rather than windows. If this line of reasoning is pursued, several interesting points follow.

Our inscription must be civilian, and therefore should not come from the fortress area. In D. F. Petch's account of the discovery of the main fragments it will be seen that they were found lying on a road surface, apparently as they had fallen. Against this view must be set the fact that no further fragments were found in the area, whereas on any interpretation of the inscription's original size there ought to have been a considerable number. Furthermore R.I.B. 462 was found well outside the fortress walls. It is possible then that the inscription was already broken up when the fragments we have found their way onto the road surface behind the Principia, where they were used for patching or make-up.

If our fragments are part of an administrative inscription it seems likely that it would have referred to the *canabae* outside the walls of the fortress and stood on one of the major buildings of the settlement. The style of the script may be compared, with some reservations, to two other British inscriptions, from York (R.I.B. 665; A.D. 107-108) and from Wroxeter (R.I.B. 288; A.D. 129-130), and a similar date can perhaps be suggested. There is certainly a marked divergence between these three and extant examples of Flavian and Antonine lettering.⁴²

⁴⁰ Lex Metalli Vipascensis—CIL II 5181, 5439. Edictum Augusti de Aquaeductu Venefrano—CIL X 4842. cf. also Henchir—Mettich (Africa)—CIL VIII 25002. See F. F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire*, 1968.

⁴¹ O. Ruggieri, *Dizionario Epigrafico di Antichità Romane*, has FENVM, FENARII, and FENESTRA.

⁴² e.g. the Verulamium Forum inscription, *J.R.S.* XLVI (1956) Pl. XIX, and the inscriptions from the Antonine Wall.

To push a slender hypothesis still further, could one suggest that there was some impetus from the Emperor Hadrian in person to civilian development in the North-West, to be seen both at Wroxeter and at Chester? Our knowledge of the civilian element in Roman Chester is so slender that even a *colonia* is not out of the question,⁴³ and might justify the erection of a grandiose inscription giving the town's charter.⁴⁴ This is stretching meagre evidence to its absolute limit, but exceptional circumstances must surely be postulated for an exceptional inscription. At least there is hope of coming closer to the truth in the future, since the recognition of the Sellar Street fragment means there is every chance of finding further pieces of this tantalising inscription.

Acknowledgments

Although this is not perhaps the appropriate place for extensive acknowledgment of the many sources of assistance, among those who took part in the excavations I would particularly like to thank the following: Miss M. Moffat and Mr. G. M. R. Davies (Archaeological Assistants, Grosvenor Museum); Miss C. Colyer, Mrs K. Webber, Mr. T. Courtney, Mr. J. McPeake and Mr. T. Ward (Site Assistants); Mr. A. P. Devlin and Mr. J. Burke (Charge-hands); and among the voluntary workers Mrs. E. Brotherton-Ratcliffe, Mr. P. Alebon, Mr. G. Cross and the late Cdr. A. Lawford particularly deserve mention.

The work was sponsored jointly by the City of Chester and the Department of the Environment, and a considerable debt of gratitude is owed to officers of both. Mention should also be made of the unstinting support provided by the Education Committee, the Civic Amenities Committee, and the Improvements Committee. Chester Archaeological Society was also associated in various ways with the excavation, and specific mention should be made of Mr. J. Collicutt (Hon. Treasurer) and Mrs. E. Berry (Hon. Editor).

⁴³ cf. Professor Birley, "The Status of Roman Chester", *C.A.S.* XXXVI pt. II (1948), 173.

⁴⁴ Such archaeological evidence as there is for the settlement suggests that it was a failure in the long term. If the inscription was broken and reused, possibly as early as the Second Century, this would fit such an interpretation.