

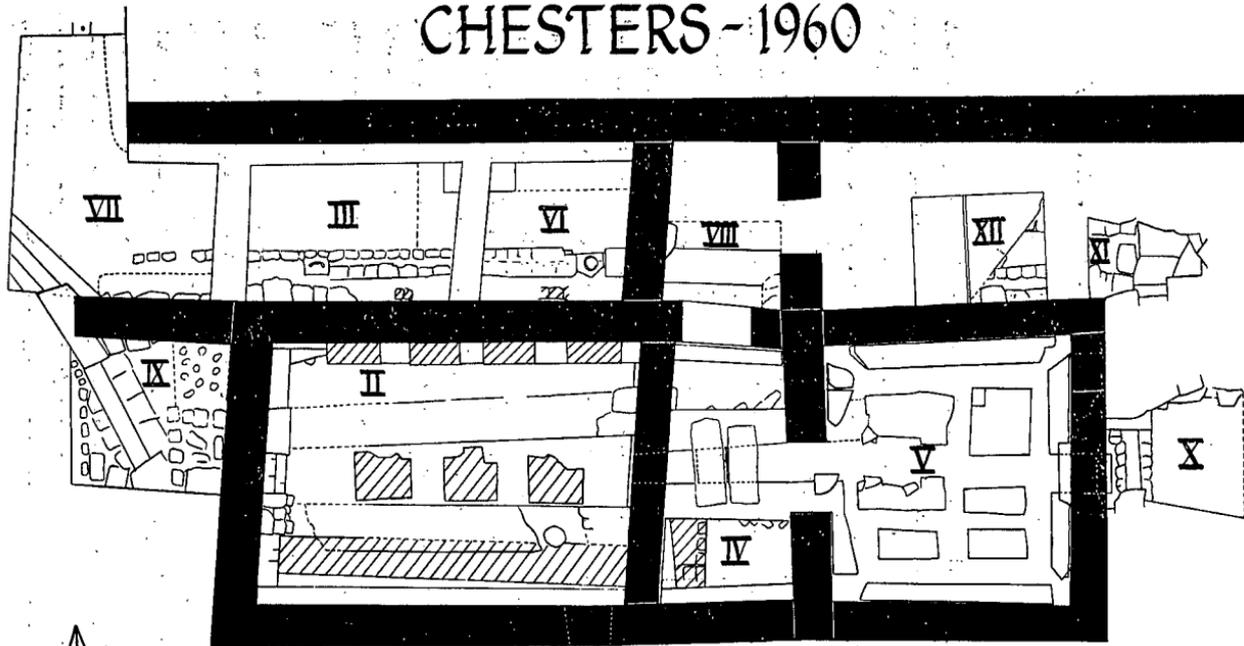
XIV. AN EXCAVATION AT CHESTERS, 1960.

BY R. P. HARPER.

In March and April, 1960, four weeks' excavation took place in the south-west part of the commandant's house (*praetorium*) of the Wall-fort at Chesters, so that such stratification as might remain could be examined before consolidation of the exposed masonry by the Ministry of Works. The present writer was in charge of the work, on behalf of the Durham University Excavation Committee. During the first two weeks, he had the good fortune to have the services and the guidance of the committee's experienced foreman, the late Thomas Batey (whose last excavation it proved to be); in the closing stages he had the assistance of Mr. Wilfred Dodds, who has also given help in the preparation of this report. Professor Birley and Mr. Gillam paid visits to the site while work was in progress, and thanks are due to Dr. J. P. C. Kent for identifying the coins, Miss Dorothy Charlesworth for her note on an interesting piece of glass, and Mr. M. Billingham for drawing the plan from the writer's survey.

The first recorded digging in the commandant's house was by John Clayton in 1843 (AA1 iii 142ff.), when the eastern bath block was largely uncovered, and also part of a room to west of it across the main N.-S. corridor. By 1851, more had been opened out, Bruce's plan (RW1 175) showing two entire rooms, both with hypocausts, west of the corridor; by 1884 (HB2, plan facing 83) the next room to the south and partition-walls projecting further west had been exposed, and by 1895 (HB4, plan at 88/89) substantially all the masonry shown on the modern plan of the fort had been revealed, but no record of its examination was ever published. Lastly, in 1938 Mr. Matthew Rowlands did a little digging

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to elucidate one or two points of structural detail, revealing some early walls running under the eastern range of the building, recording his results in an unpublished thesis which I have been able to consult in the department of archæology in Durham.

The area examined in 1960 comprised the S.W. part, in which the visible remains consisted of a range of three rooms, separated from the rest of the house by corridors on the east and north sides; the western room contained a number of hypocaust pillars, all re-used material, while the central and eastern rooms had flagged floors. Ten trenches were cut (as marked on the plan), laid out so as to secure maximum detail with minimum disturbance of the structures. Evidence was found for three main periods, with a hint of a fourth; details follow.

First period. In the western room the earliest structures were the bottom courses of a row of three hypocaust pillars, seemingly in series with a row of four pillars which survive as footings for a later wall on the north side. The south wall of this room extended the full length of trench II, and the outer corner was found in trench IV; traces of its north wall were revealed, below the footings of a later wall in trenches III and VI, but they could not be examined more fully since, parallel to that wall and only 15 in. from it, the surviving bottom course of another narrow wall was found. No walling of this period was left outside the W. end of the later building, where trench IX revealed only heavy footings of cobbles set in stiff clay.

Second period. The 18-in. wall found in trenches III and VI continued across trench VIII, but it could not be examined further east without damage to later structures; it did not survive complete in trench VII, where only disconnected fragments remained. In trenches III and VI there was a lime floor up to the north face of this wall, into which two moulded column bases had been built, suggesting that it had been the edge of a south-facing verandah, with an open space now, where the original western room had been.

Third period. In the first phase of this period came the main building activity. At the west end (trench II) the northern row of hypocaust pillars was blocked to form continuous footings, similar projecting footings were made on the west and south sides and continued in trench IV, at this stage as part of the same room. The eastern room (trench V), although built with butt joints, seems to belong to the same period; its walls were decorated with painted plaster, some of which survives *in situ* behind the rests for the flags covering the hypocaust, showing that it was a later insertion. There may have been a doorway (later blocked) in the N.E. corner of this room, but rebuilding of the Clayton period makes this uncertain.

In the second phase, the floor-level was raised and a heating-system installed. A gap was cut in the east wall for the hypocaust channel, and Roman restoration of the wall above this can still be seen. Six irregularly shaped pillars, and rests against the walls, were built to support a flagged floor; it was a disappointment to find that the flags had been replaced in modern times, the area having been previously excavated to the bottom of the hypocaust, though one small patch of stratification remained, yielding the Crambeck beaker of which more will be said presently. In all four corners many fragments of flue-tiles were found, showing where the hot air had been allowed to escape upwards. This was all in the eastern room. The western room was reduced in size, at the same stage, by building a cross-wall to form a small central room, which had a doorway into the northern corridor; there, too, two walls were built, the eastern one with a doorway in it. The hypocaust channel ran the whole length of the building, being walled very solidly below the central room, the rest of which was filled to the new floor level with heavy, mortary rubble, including two sections of pillar. The western room had suffered much from earlier investigations, but one course of the flue walls remained, together with its thin stone flooring. The furnace for this system was probably at the western end but

here, as also at the eastern end, later drains had been laid just where one would have wished to be able to dig deeper.

In a third phase the hypocaust channel was blocked, both at the east end and in the middle of the central room. It was perhaps at this stage that a hole was cut in the wall at the S.-E. corner of the western room and in the channel-wall of the hypocaust, which contained a great deal of soot. There were also a number of small hypocaust pillars of re-used material arranged in this room, and although none of them (except possibly one in the gap in the channel-wall) had any firm basis, the evidence taken together suggests another late heating-system in this western room at a time when the eastern room had been converted to another use, its hypocaust being eliminated and filled up solid. Professor Birley, in consultation with whom this report has been written, suggests that these changes may in fact represent a drastic re-planning of the building in Wall-period IV, and that the three periods already distinguished should be equated with Wall-periods I-III. Pottery assignable to each of the four Wall-periods was found, most of it readily attributable to one or other of Mr. Gillam's types (AA4 xxxv); the only vessel calling for illustration and a brief note is a beaker of the rare Crambeck type 11 (*Antiquaries Journal* xvii, 1937, 403f.), fig. 1:

It was found in trench V, in the small patch of stratification to which reference has been made above, and may well have been broken by the men who were responsible for filling in what had been the hypocaust space below the eastern room. In any case, Crambeck products have not been found in deposits on the Wall which can be assigned to an earlier period than its reconstruction by Count Theodosius, which marks the beginning of period IV.

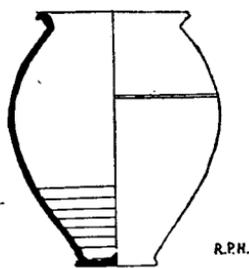


FIG. 1. (1/4).

Glass. Miss Dorothy Charlesworth kindly furnishes the following report on part of a glass bowl, fig. 2, unfortunately unstratified:

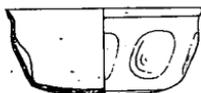


FIG. 2. (4).

“Fragment giving a complete section of a bowl in good colourless glass with flaking milky iridescence. The rim is knocked off and unworked; slight constriction below it and a cut line, bulbous body decorated with four circular indents, cut line below them at the edge of the plain base. Height 4.8 cm.,

diameter c. 6.2 cm. I can find no close parallel to this piece. Indented beakers are quite common during the Roman period: three typical early examples were found at Red House (AA4 xxxvii 164 and fig. 22, 1-3), but this piece does not belong to that type. The shape was used c. A.D. 250-350 by the Rhenish glass-houses, but their decoration is most often facet cutting. There is one bowl, in Cologne, of good colourless glass, height 5 cm., decorated with eight broad oval facets (as against the indents of the Chesters example), cf. F. Fremersdorf, *Die Denkmäler des römischen Köln* i (1928), pl. 38; in spite of the difference in the techniques, the style of the two is similar. Other bowls of this shape are decorated with prominent ribs and there are undecorated examples, generally in poorer quality metal. Several fragments of good colourless glass, with similar weathering, have been found at Chesters previously and are exhibited in the Clayton Memorial Museum there.”

Coins. Six coins were found during the excavation, none of them stratified securely. Dr. J. P. C. Kent has identified them as follows:

1. *As*, first-second century.
2. Plated (imitation) *denarius* of an empress, early third century.
3. Constantine I, “*Urbs Roma*”, c. A.D. 330-335.
4. House of Constantine, “*Gloria exercitus*” imitation, c. 330-340.
5. “*Populus Romanus*”, mint of Constantinople, c. 340 (LRBC I, no. 1066).
6. Valens, “*Securitas reipublicae*”, mint of Arles, mint-mark DF/VIII, 367-375 (LRBC II, no. 523).

CON



1. II FROM WEST, SHOWING PERIOD I, OVERLAID BY PERIOD III.



2. II FROM WEST, PERIOD III.



1. V, FROM SOUTH-WEST CORNER.



2. V, SOUTH-WEST CORNER, HYPOCAUST BUILT AGAINST PLASTER OF EARLIER PERIOD.

