

4. The *Praetorium*

INTRODUCTION

At the western side of the area of the central range excavated in 1979 were the remains of several phases of stone walls and other features. These comprised the north-east corner of a building fronting onto the '*via principalis*' and separated by an alley from the *principia* which lay to the east. This area is difficult to interpret, mainly because of the small area available for excavation and the amount of disturbance from grave cuts and other intrusions, leaving some of the Roman deposits surviving as isolated upstands. The remains are best interpreted as belonging to a *praetorium*. Important factors in reaching this conclusion were the location in the central range, the identification of a series of channels as part of a hypocaust system and the presence of patches of *opus signinum* flooring.

There were three distinct periods of occupation. The only surviving remains of the first period were part of a channel hypocaust system and fragments of a north wall and an east/west transverse wall; the position of a wall forming the east side of the building can be inferred. The east wall of the second period survived, and there was a doorway through it into the alley opposite the doorway into the *principia* crosshall, suggesting a private entrance for a commanding officer. A channel hypocaust was also inserted into the second period structure. In the final period the east wall was rebuilt, and a hypocaust with suspended floor was constructed, as shown by a single *pila* still *in situ*.

The *praetorium*, or at least the north-east corner of it, was demolished in the post-Roman period and some of the earliest hypocaust channels were re-used as a drain. No facing stones were found amongst the rubble in this area. Unlike the situation in the *principia*, where fallen facing stones suggest the building eventually collapsed, the *praetorium* may have been neatly demolished.

THE *PRAETORIUM* OF THE PRIMARY FORT

Transverse wall, channel hypocaust, fragment of north wall and possible *opus signinum* floor (figs. 2.3, 3.3, 3.7 and 4.1)

Prior to construction, the area was levelled up; clay was spread over the fills of the early ditches and gully. The multiple contexts given to the levelling layers (377C*, 398C*, 410C*, 411C) reflects the way in which this part of the site was interrupted by many later intrusions, the levelling layers surviving as discontinuous patches.

Little remained of the earliest building which had lain in this area. The best preserved feature was the foundation of an east/west wall (wall context 262C; context of clay bonding 263C*) (fig. 3.3), which had survived because it subsided into the fill of the pre-fort east/west gully (364C) (fig. 2.3). The gully continued further east; had the wall also continued eastwards, further traces of it would have survived. Since there is no record of any such traces, the surviving eastern end, c. 2.50m from the limit of excavation, must represent the original extent of the wall.

Of the same build as the wall was a channel hypocaust system (figs 3.3, 4.1). Immediately to the south of the wall, and only partially within the excavation area, was a circular stoke pit (418C); a gap in the wall connected this to a short length of flue (256C) lined with roughly squared stone blocks (269C*), lying to the north of the wall. This branched into two channels. One (172.IIC) ran due north, and was lined with slabs or flags set on edge. Another (374C) ran to the north-east and was also partly lined with small slabs, although a row of squared blocks appeared to have been added later.

Overlying the flue (256C) and part of the north/south channel (172.IIC) were cover flags (272C*) with small stones (271C*) overlying



Fig. 4.1 The praetorium. The hypocaust of the primary phase, showing stone-lined channels in the centre and at the left, east/west wall and stoke pit at the upper left. The stone-lined channel at the right is of a later phase. Viewed from the north.

those. There was clay packing (199C*) in the sides of this channel (172.IIC) and the other channel (374C) also had a clay lining (373C* and 392C*). The base of the flue (256C) and stoke pit (418C) was clay (268C*).

A short length of mortared wall on cobble foundations (201C) just appearing in the baulk at the north-west corner of the trench appears to represent the northern wall of the building. There is no direct evidence for the eastern limit of the structure. However, comparison of figs. 3.3 and 3.7 is useful in showing that the transverse wall (262C) ended at the line taken by the east wall (131C) of the second period in the

second quarter of the fourth century (see below). This latter wall was left *in situ*, but might have been built on the foundations of a demolished primary wall (see below). The possible position of the primary east wall is shown by the dashed lines on fig. 3.3.

Also surviving in this area were many small discontinuous spreads of mortar. Although these had the same context number (219C), it is noted in the context book that their composition varied slightly. At least one can be shown to be debris from the demolition of the primary building (see below), but it is possible that some may represent the remains of a floor still *in situ*.

Four of these lay within the suggested limits of the *praetorium*; the spread at the south-east corner was overlain by a patch of *opus signinum*.

Finds

Dating evidence – pottery

From the hypocaust channel lining (392C* (79KV)) there was a single sherd of pottery, a scrap of a Central Gaulish Form 31R, mid- to late Antonine in date.

MODIFICATIONS OF THE SECOND QUARTER OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

Demolition of primary features (fig. 2.3)

The north/south hypocaust channel (172.IIC) was filled with clay and mortar (196C*, 152C*), described as demolition material. The early fill of the other channel (374C), a greenish brown sand (375C*), was overlain by an upper fill (407C*). The fills of the flue (256C) and the stoke pit (418C) were clay (267C*) and ash (216C).

The east/west transverse wall (262C) was demolished; overlying it was a stony layer (253C), probably demolition debris. As seen in section (fig. 2.3), the stony material was overlain by clay (347C), above which was a spread of mortar, small stones and clay (219C). This may be material redeposited from an earlier floor, described above. Two other spreads of mortar extended for a distance of 0.50–0.60m beyond the line of the postulated primary east wall and lay in the area of the alley, to the north of the surviving cobbles (228C), where there was another patch of *opus signinum*.

Finds

Dating evidence

There is little dating evidence for this demolition, but a *terminus ante quem* of the 330s is provided by an unworn coin of Constantine I from the succeeding structure, described below. From the fill of the hypocaust channel (407C* (79LI)) there was a single sherd of grey fabric BB2.

Other finds

From the remains of the transverse wall:

Bone: Not illustrated, no. 77, knife fragment, 262C

From the fill of the hypocaust channel:

Bone: Not illustrated, no. 87, pin, 375C*

Probable hearth and clay working surface (figs. 2.3, 3.6, 3.7 and 4.2)

Above the fill of the blocked hypocaust channel (374C) was a clay levelling material (378C*), overlain by other clay layers (254C and 234C*). The channel was also truncated by the construction of a stone feature (173C) which clearly post-dated the demolition material (219C) mentioned above. This feature consisted of an arc of stones, 1.20m in length, bonded with clay (227C*) and apparently set on a cobble foundation (figs. 3.6 and 4.2). Its ashy fill suggests it was a hearth. Its eastern extent cannot be defined with certainty. It could not have been contemporary with the east wall of the early fourth-century *praetorium*, because it would have projected across the doorway (fig. 3.7), and therefore it may have been a temporary structure in use during construction work on the new *praetorium*. Clay layers (264C and 215C) (fig. 2.3), and the layer (265C) below them, were probably working surfaces in use with the hearth.

The fill of the hearth (173C) was a black ash layer (217C) (fig. 4.2). The relationship between this ash and the eastern edge of the *praetorium* is useful in providing evidence for a primary east wall below the earliest recorded east wall, of the second quarter of the fourth century. Both the context notebook and the matrix drawing state that the ash layer overlay two layers of mortar (221C*, 223C*), both of which overlay the clay (222C*) packing the footings of the earliest surviving east wall (131C) (fig. 3.7). At first sight this seems to be anomalous, since all the rest of the stratigraphic and spatial evidence shows that the wall (131C) must be *later* than the hearth (173C) and its fill. However, the likely explanation is that the footings, the clay layer (222C*) and the mortar (221C*, 223C* and another spread of mortar 226C*) belong to a demolished primary wall,

which was subsequently rebuilt (131C) on the same line in the early fourth century. Demolition of the hearth prior to the construction of the new wall would account for the narrow trail of ash (fig. 3.6) projecting across the postulated line of the primary wall (fig. 3.3). The new wall had a doorway in this position, which may have caused additional disturbance.

Other deposits were associated with this period; several layers (206C*, 207C, 218C* and 239C) overlay the above-mentioned clay working surface (264C), but were below the floor make up of the next period.

Finds

Dating evidence – pottery

There were two sherds of pottery from the levelling material (378C* (79LD)), a body sherd from a Nene Valley ware indented beaker, and a body sherd from a SENK cooking pot. From the clay bonding material of the hearth (227C* (79HU)) there was a single SENK rim sherd of third century date. The clay surface (214C* (79HG)) produced a small group of pottery, including sherds from two BB2 bowls, a Horningsea ware body sherd and the base of a Nene Valley beaker.

Coin

From the clay levelling:
234C* (79IZ) No.129, Constantine I, 330–1,
UW/UW

Reconstruction of *praetorium* east wall, possible *opus signinum* floor and new hypocaust (figs. 2.3, 3.7 and 4.2)

The new east wall (131C) had a doorway at the northern end. The positioning of a door opposite the doorway into the *principia* is one factor suggesting the building could be a *praetorium*. The context notebook suggests that the earlier northern wall (201C) could have been incorporated into this period of the building.

Floor make up in this period was grey/brown clay with many carbon flecks (142C). There was a patch of *opus signinum* (213C) overlying make up (142C), but it was too small to say whether this represents a surviving trace of a

floor *in situ*, or redeposited material from an earlier period.

A new channel hypocaust was constructed. All that survived was a short length of channel (184C) lined with stone slabs set on edge, bonded with clay, with packing stones behind it, and a clay base (180C and other contexts listed in the archive). Photographs in the site archive (not reproduced here) show that this feature was constructed at a much higher level than the earlier channels (172.IIC, 374C and 256C), and could not have been part of the same system.

There was an even more heavily truncated set of features to the north-east of this channel. These consisted of two rows of roughly squared blocks (176C and 175C), set on layers of clay (236C* and 237C*). It is not clear how the two related to each other in use.

Dating evidence

The only direct dating evidence for this reconstruction is the *terminus post quem* provided by the unworn coin of 330–1 from the levelling layer mentioned above. There is also some indirect evidence. Archive notes place the construction of the east wall at the same time as a remetalling of the '*via principalis*', described below. This street metalling overlay the foundations of the north wall of the *principia*, which also on coin evidence was rebuilt in the 330s.

MODIFICATIONS OF THE MID-FOURTH CENTURY OR LATER

Demolition of excavated part of *praetorium* (fig. 2.3)

After the east wall (131C) was demolished a layer of brown soil, mortar, cobbles and flecks of ash (118C*) was spread over the eastern edge of the remains of the wall and over layers in the alley (169C* and 130C).

The hypocaust went out of use. One channel (184C) was filled with sand, mortar and stones (186C*, 187C*), covered with lenses of burnt material (179C*, 181C, 182C* and 183C*). Clay layers (387C* and 376C*) post-dating the hypocaust may be levelling layers or demolition

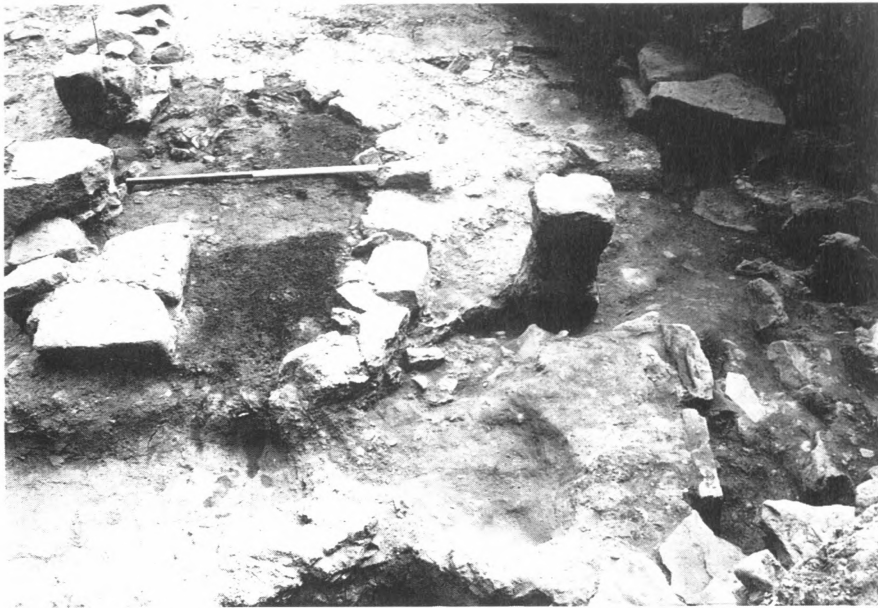


Fig. 4.2 The remains of a hearth and fill, overlain at the left by the east wall of the rebuilt praetorium of the second quarter of the fourth century. To the right is the surviving hypocaust pila of the third phase of the praetorium. At the far right is a post-Roman drain. Viewed from the north.

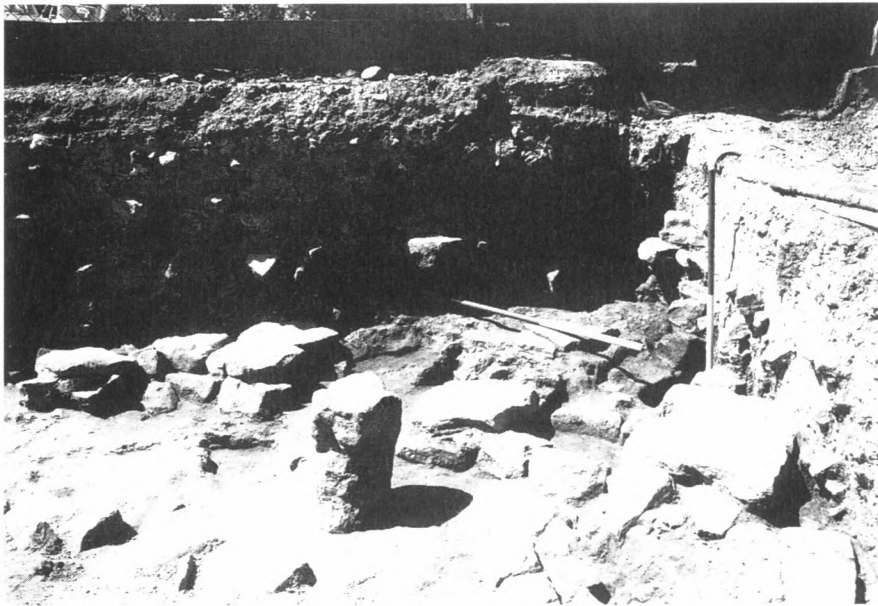


Fig. 4.3 At left centre, hypocaust pila of the third phase of the praetorium, at top right, patch of opus signinum over earlier hypocaust channels. The post-Roman drain runs across the centre. Viewed from the south-east.

material. The other channel (175/176C) was also filled with mortar; this is shown on fig. 2.3 as context 133C. However this context is also shown as a widespread layer, so there appears to have been a confusion between two different mortar layers here.

Finds

Dating evidence – pottery

The small quantity of pottery recovered from the hypocaust fills (183C* (79GW); 186C* (79GR)) contained Nene Valley ware, BB2 and Horningsea ware, plus a few sherds of late gritty ware. From the clay levelling or demolition material over hypocaust (376C* (79KR)) there was a single sherd of a Nene Valley beaker.

Rebuilding in the *praetorium* – new east wall, *opus signinum* floor, followed by new hypocaust with suspended floor (figs. 2.3, 4.3 and 4.4)

There is direct stratigraphic evidence to show that the demolition and reconstruction of the east wall of the *praetorium* followed after the robbing and infilling of the drain which ran across the '*via principalis*' and down the alley to the east of the *praetorium* (see Part 5). Coins from the fill of the drain provide a *terminus post quem* of 346–8 for the subsequent rebuilding of the east wall.

A clay levelling layer (141C; and incorporating several other lenses) was spread over the interior and the remains of the wall (131C). The building was extended slightly to the east, with a new east wall (116C), partially overlying the remains of the early wall (131C) and the layer of soil or demolition material (118C*) spread out over the alley. The new wall (116C) was the one found by F. G. Simpson (Spain and Simpson 1930, 503). Only discontinuous fragments of this wall survive, so there is no direct evidence as to whether the doorway remained in the same place. However, as described below, it is likely that there was a raised floor in this phase, so there could not have been a doorway in the new east wall unless there had been steps out into the alley – for which there was no evidence.

Above the clay levelling (141C) were spreads of *opus signinum* which, although discontinuous, were all at a consistent level of c. 27.40mOD (fig. 2.3). Small patches (134C) seen in the centre of the section were set on a cobble make up. At the northern end of the excavation, overlying the disused former hypocaust channel (184C) and lapping over one side of the shorter length of channel (176C) was a larger spread (178C), also on cobble make up (figs. 4.3 and 4.4). Other make-up layers of mortar, clay and burnt material (135C*, 136C*, 137C*, 138C and 139C) were found. Above this spread was another small patch of *opus signinum* (also contexted as 134C).

Evidence that the latest surviving phase of occupation in this part of the building included a hypocaust with a suspended floor is provided by the presence of one *pila* still *in situ*. Photographs (fig. 4.3) show a roughly-dressed stone pillar, similar to those found by Simpson in the building to the south of the *principia* (*ibid.*, 504,

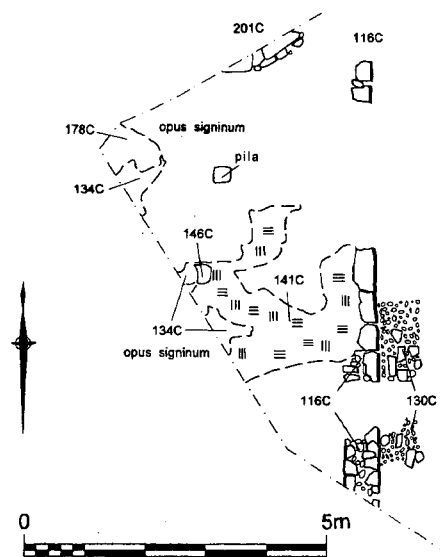


Fig. 4.4 Modifications to the *praetorium* in the second half of the fourth century, comprising a rebuilt east wall and the insertion of a hypocaust with a raised floor supported on *pilae*. The drain across the centre of the '*via principalis*' and down the alley was out of use by this time. Scale 1:125.

fig. 13). Also shown in the corner of the excavation trench (covered by a ranging pole in fig. 4.3) is the larger of the patches of *opus signinum* (178/134C). Between it and the pillar is a drain (172.IC), probably dating to the earliest phases of Anglo-Saxon occupation, formed by re-using one of the primary hypocaust channels or trench hearths. The position of the stone pillar can also be seen on fig. 4.4. It was rectangular in section, measuring 0.30m by 0.25m. It was set into the fill of the other primary channel (374C), and that would provide a reason for it remaining *in situ* when presumably other *pilae* had been removed on the final demolition of the building. The top of the stone was at a height of 27.56m OD, only 0.16m higher than the level of the *opus signinum* layer mentioned above. However, as the *pila* is likely to have subsided deeply into the channel fill, its original height above the *opus signinum* is unknown.

There is a further piece of evidence to support the suggestion of a raised floor. A flagstone

(146C), measuring 0.32m by 0.22m was also found on a patch of clay (202C*) overlying the levelling layer (141C) and associated with one of the smaller patches of *opus signinum* (fig. 4.4). This could have been a padstone on which a *pila* rested.

DECAY AND DEMOLITION OF THE PRAETORIUM

There is no surviving evidence of the eventual disuse and decay of the *praetorium*, or at least the excavated corner of it, at the end of the Roman occupation. This corner of the building was demolished and the area cleared prior to the construction of a large drain or aqueduct, probably in the earliest phases of Anglo-Saxon occupation. This is likely to have occurred at a stage when Roman buildings had become so ruinous that it was no longer possible to distinguish their form and alignments. These events are described in Part 12.

