

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

## Roman Wales: past, present and future

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I must begin by expressing my sincerest thanks to the Cambrians for inviting me to be your president. It was an unexpected honour and one which I greatly appreciate. When thinking about the subject of tonight's address, I felt that it must be relevant to Wales, and, since my work in Wales has been concerned with the Roman period, it seemed that a suitable subject might be a consideration of the progress of the study of Roman Wales over the past half-century, with some thoughts on what might be achieved in the future.<sup>1</sup>

In talking of Roman Wales we must always remember that it is not a concept with which Romans were familiar. For them, there was the island of *Britannia* within which there were not countries but tribes, four of which were on the western side of the island in the area known to us as Wales, the Silures, the Demetae, the Ordovices and the Deceangli.

The Roman conquest of Britain began in AD 43 and although *Britannia* is rarely mentioned in the surviving Roman histories, some of the more complete accounts, notably in Tacitus' *Annals* and *Agricola*, do give details of the Roman campaigns in Wales.<sup>2</sup> The Roman army had reached the Welsh Marches by AD 47 when they attacked the Deceangli of the Flintshire area, which is the only surviving reference to this tribe. The war then spread throughout eastern Wales with the involvement of the Silures of south Wales and the Ordovices of central and northern Wales. We hear of a pitched battle in Ordovician territory, although we do not know where, from which the Romans, under the command of the governor, Ostorius Scapula, emerged victorious. But this did not end the war which continued with guerrilla campaigns by the native tribes, in the midst of which Scapula died. His successor, Didius Gallus, appears to have had little difficulty in restoring control, but he undertook no major new campaigns. No doubt he was following orders from Rome, which, we can surmise, were to consolidate what had been conquered, and create a spring-board for future wars. These began in AD 57 with a campaign against the Silures, which was soon extended into North Wales, culminating in AD 60 with the capture of Anglesey. But then came the near disaster of the Boudiccan revolt in eastern England, which brought further campaigning in Wales and the consolidation of the new conquests to an abrupt halt. The Romans probably envisaged only a relatively short delay before resuming the conquest of Wales, but military demands elsewhere in the Empire in the mid-sixties led to the removal of one of the four legions then in Britain. We now know that the resultant troop movements led to the closure of the legionary fortresses at Usk and Exeter and the creation of a new fortress for the II Augustan Legion at Gloucester, from where it controlled both the south-west of England and south Wales; an arrangement which suggests that by then those areas had been largely pacified.

Nero's reign ended in AD 69 in civil war, but the eventual victor, Vespasian, almost immediately authorised the resumption of the conquest of Britain.<sup>3</sup> The first campaigns were in the north of England. Then in 74 there came a new governor, Julius Frontinus, whose brief was to bring the remainder of Wales under Roman control, which he very largely did, for his successor, Agricola needed only a short campaign in 78 to complete the conquest of north Wales and to capture Anglesey.

So much for the historical account, but what archaeological evidence do we have for these campaigns? When I came to Wales in 1964 the short answer was none, and that remains largely true for the campaigns of Ostorius Scapula in the late forties and early fifties. In fact, the best evidence comes from England where the timber fortress at Kingsholm, now a suburb of Gloucester, is undoubtedly that built by the XX Legion when Ostorius moved it forward from Colchester to spearhead his campaigns in south Wales. Its area is around 10 hectares (25 acres), which is half the size of a full legionary fortress.<sup>4</sup> In this it accords with almost all of the legionary bases built in Britain in the 40s and early 50s, probably because at that stage in the conquest the legions were divided and brigaded with auxiliary units to form field armies. Somewhere to the west of the Severn there may be another half-legionary fortress awaiting discovery, perhaps in the area of Kenchester, although no evidence for it has been found in excavations in the Roman town there.<sup>5</sup>

But we do have forts in Wales which must date to the years immediately after Ostorius' campaigns. In 1954 when Victor Nash-Williams published his seminal study of *The Roman Frontier in Wales*, he noted that these early campaigns had 'left little or no certainly discernible mark . . . in the archaeological record.'<sup>6</sup> In fact he did include two sites which we now know date from this period, Usk and Clyro, near Hay-on-Wye, but he thought that the former was late first-century in date.<sup>7</sup> while the latter, he decided, was too large to be a fort and must have been a temporary camp.<sup>8</sup>

By 1969 when Michael Jarrett's new version of *The Roman Frontier in Wales* appeared, he was able to show that both Usk and Clyro did date from this early phase in the conquest, although the evidence that Usk was a full legionary fortress was still emerging.<sup>9</sup> In the northern marches, the discovery of legionary tombstones at Wroxeter suggested that it too had been a legionary base,<sup>10</sup> although it was only later that Graham Webster was to locate the early fortress beneath the Roman city.<sup>11</sup>

The latest version of *Roman Frontiers* was published in 2010. Now called *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches*, it was edited, and much of it written, by Barry Burnham and Jeffrey Davies. In it we find a whole series of forts in south and mid Wales which date from this early period (Fig. 1). Some were discovered by aerial photography, but a surprising number are the result of excavations on sites which had already produced Roman material but where the nature of the occupation had been uncertain. Such sites include the first fort at Cardiff, the forts at Abergavenny and Monmouth and, most important of them all, not another auxiliary fort but a completely unexpected, full size legionary fortress at Usk (Fig. 2).<sup>12</sup>

In the north of Wales we know of fewer forts. The controlling legionary fortress was at Wroxeter,<sup>13</sup> but it appears to stand in a most improbable isolation, with only the possible fort at Whitchurch,<sup>14</sup> and the large, but still ill-understood site at Rhyn Park,<sup>15</sup> to hint at the system of forts which must have extended into the north of Wales.

What we now have is a military system designed to control the eastern half of Wales, centred on legionary fortresses at Usk and Wroxeter, with forts commanding the major river valleys. It is a system which suggests that the main route into south Wales was overland, crossing the Severn at Kingsholm and running to the north of the Forest of Dean to the fort at Monmouth, which gave access to the Wye valley and, less directly, to that of the river Usk. Large forts at Clyro and others near Clifford, which is close to Hay-on-Wye, indicate prolonged Roman activity in that part of the Wye valley. The forts at Clifford<sup>16</sup> are undated by excavation but Clyro is certainly early.<sup>17</sup> The recent discovery of a smaller fort within the larger one at Clyro suggests that once subdued the area was controlled by a regular auxiliary unit.<sup>18</sup> And new forts continue to be found. The discovery of a coin hoard of Neronian date at Cefn-Brynich Farm some 3 kilometres south-east of Brecon, led Toby Driver of the Royal Commission in Aberystwyth to look at the site from the air in 2013 and discover the outline of another unmistakable Roman fort.<sup>19</sup> Further south a fort at Abergavenny controlled the point at which the Usk valley runs between the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains.<sup>20</sup>

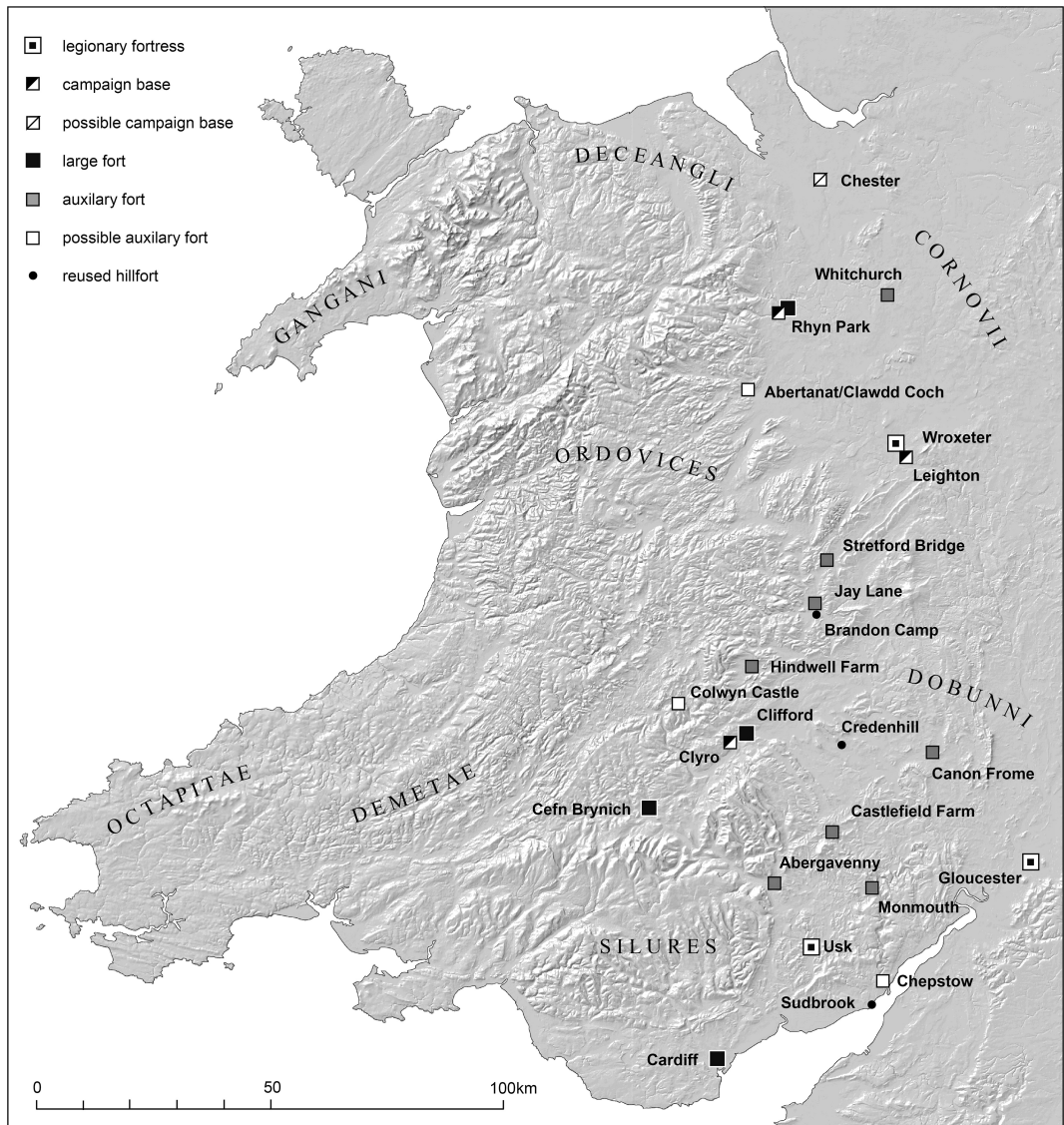


Fig. 1. Pre-Flavian forts in Wales and the Marches (after Burnham and Davies 2010, fig.2.3, with additions).

The apparently unusually large early fort at Cardiff was the first of a series of four forts on the site of the medieval castle which between them probably, and perhaps uniquely, covered the whole of the Roman period in Wales.<sup>21</sup> Its position will have allowed it to control movement along the coastal plain, but the fact that it stood on the estuary of the river Taff suggests that it also served as a base for a fleet in the Severn estuary. The Roman reoccupation of an Iron Age coastal fort at Sudbrook,<sup>22</sup> now in the shadow of the second Severn Bridge, which had almost certainly controlled the western end of a ferry crossing of the Severn, confirms that there was Roman maritime activity in the Severn estuary at this time, and no doubt



Fig. 2. Usk: the legionary granaries under excavation in 1969 showing the trenches which held the timber foundations. © *W. Manning*.

through the whole of the Roman period. Where we have dating evidence it strongly suggests that all of these forts were built in the early fifties, most probably in the governorship of Didius Gallus.

Perhaps this is the point at which to mention marching camps, many of which are found in Wales and which have been discussed by Jeffrey Davies and Rebecca Jones.<sup>23</sup> These are the temporary camps, often of considerable size, which were built by campaigning armies, used for relatively short periods and without internal buildings. Unfortunately they are notoriously difficult to date and so to link with any particular campaign. Until recently their distribution might have suggested that the Roman army avoided all river valleys and only campaigned on the moors and uplands, a manifestly improbable idea; but in recent years a few have been located by aerial photography on lower ground. A large one at Gwehelog, 3 kilometres north of the fortress at Usk, must pre-date the fortress and be linked with the earliest campaigns in the area.<sup>24</sup> Another small marching camp was discovered in 2013 at Killcrow Hill, 6 kilometres to the east of Caerwent, and the same distance north of the coastal promontory fort at Sudbrook which, as we have seen, was occupied by the Romans in the conquest period.<sup>25</sup> The evidence for early military

activity in this part of Monmouthshire raises the question, not for the first time, of whether there is an early fort at or near Caerwent. There is no material of such an early date from the excavations there, but the Victorian excavators rarely penetrated to the lower levels of the city, and a military origin cannot be entirely excluded.

The absence of any fort between Usk and Cardiff is unlikely to reflect the true position. There is absolutely no evidence for an early fort at Caerleon, but had there been a fort near the mouth of the Usk, in a similar position to Cardiff on the Taff, it would lie under Newport, and as it would have lacked stone buildings, it could easily have gone undetected in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century development of the city.

When, in 74, Julius Frontinus resumed the conquest of Wales he found a system of forts which was singularly ill-suited to the situation which actually existed. By 74 the east of the country had been under Roman control for a quarter of a century and it appears to have been thoroughly pacified. As a result there was little need to garrison that area and the decision was made, no doubt by Frontinus, to dismantle the existing system of forts and fortresses and replace it with a new one (Fig. 3). This was, anchored at its north-eastern and south-eastern corners by legionary fortresses at Chester (which will also have had responsibility for the forts in the southern Pennines) and Caerleon. Both fortresses, unlike their predecessors, could be reached by sea-going vessels, and a number of the forts, including Cardiff, Loughor and probably Caernarfon, are so placed as to suggest that they looked to the sea as well as the land. The framework of this system was a network of roads, with forts at regular intervals along them and at most of their intersections. The spacing of these forts varies with the terrain but it averages around 20 kilometres, a convenient day's march for Roman soldiers. A number of larger forts—Neath, Llandeilo, Brecon Gaer, Caersws and Llanfor—were built in a line which runs roughly north–south through mid-Wales, and Jeffrey Davies has suggested that these were used by the field armies of Frontinus and perhaps Agricola<sup>26</sup>. Most were soon replaced by smaller and more conventional forts. At various points the forts were supplemented by fortlets; the positions of which were dictated by local factors.<sup>27</sup> All of these—fortresses, forts and fortlets—were built of timber and had earthwork defences. Only their bath buildings (and most of them will have had bath buildings) were, for obvious reasons, constructed of stone.

Our knowledge of these forts has advanced greatly since 1954 when Nash-Williams could list only 21. Fifteen years later Michael Jarrett was able to add 5 more (Caerphilly, Pen-y-Gaer, Pumsaint, Trawscoed and Pen Llystyn).<sup>28</sup> But in the forty years which have passed since Jarrett wrote, the number of forts listed in Burnham and Davies's *Roman Frontiers* has risen to around 40. As new forts are discovered they have helped to create a pattern which allows us to see where others might be found, and in some cases these have been confirmed by excavation. This happened with the early forts at Abergavenny and Monmouth, and the later one at Loughor; while the fort at Llandeilo, needed to fill the gap between the forts at Carmarthen and Llandovery, was discovered by a geophysical survey in Dinefwr Park in 2003, where not one but two successive forts were found.<sup>29</sup>

Other searches have been less successful. The long sought fort at Cowbridge, on the road from Cardiff to Neath, remains elusive. But other sites have appeared where they were not expected. The fort at Caerphilly, although in a logical position between Cardiff and Gelligaer, was found by chance in the excavation of a Civil War earthwork.<sup>30</sup> Less expected was the discovery of a fort at Caergwanaf near Miskin, to the south of Llantrisant, of which there was no trace until it appeared on a geophysical survey undertaken by Tim Young when he was attempting to define a Tudor ironworks.<sup>31</sup> Its discovery raises questions on the possible locations of other forts between Cardiff and Neath, and whether they may be further inland than was previously thought.

Clearly there remain a number of gaps in our knowledge of this system. The absence of forts in the north-east of Wales and the northern Marches is obvious, the more so as the evidence for a postulated fort



Fig. 3. Flavian forts in Wales, AD 70–80 (after Burnham and Davies 2010, fig. 2.4, with additions).

at Ruthin is far from conclusive.<sup>32</sup> This absence may be real, for this area, like the south-east of Wales, had probably been under Roman control for some years before the final phase of the conquest, but it is suspiciously similar to the lack of forts in the earlier period. Nor is it likely that the whole of Anglesey was controlled from the fort at Caernarfon.

Another area where forts are conspicuous by their absence is in the south western peninsula, and all three versions of the *Roman Frontier* show a striking absence of military sites in that area. The situation can be compared with that which used to exist in Devon and Cornwall where scarcely any forts were known until field work and aerial survey revealed a whole series.<sup>33</sup> That Pembrokeshire may be similar

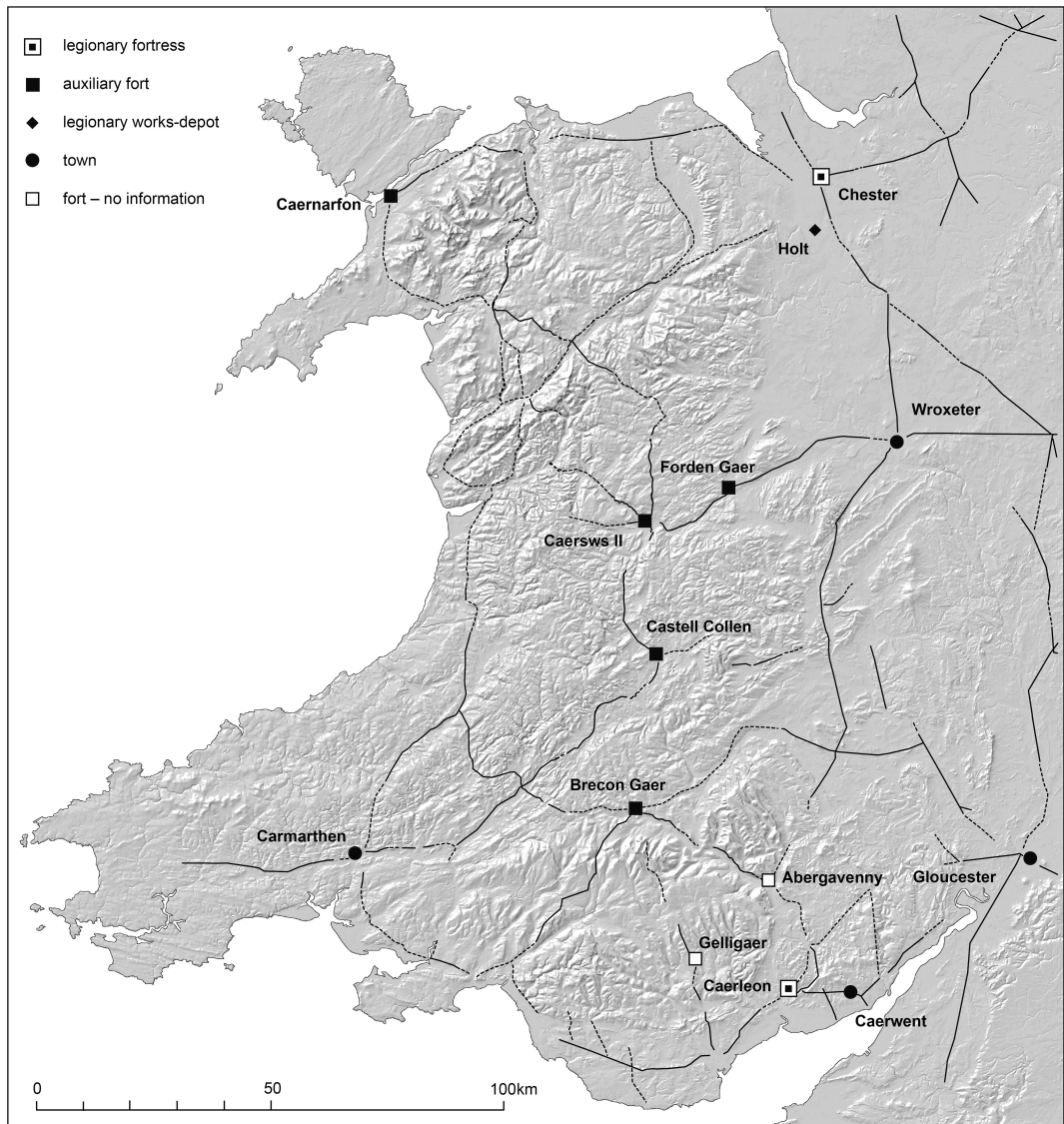


Fig. 4. Forts in Wales, AD 150–230 (after Burnham and Davies 2010, fig. 2.15).

is suggested by the recent discovery of a fort at Wiston, just to the east of Haverfordwest, on a Roman road running west from Carmarthen.<sup>34</sup> Such a fort cannot exist in isolation and at least one other must lie between Carmarthen and Wiston. There can be little doubt that others will be found in Pembrokeshire and southern Cardiganshire, although our ignorance is not through want of attempts to locate them.<sup>35</sup>

The aim of the Roman government will have been the same in Wales as in other parts of their empire, to encourage the natives to adopt Roman customs and ideas, and to assume the responsibility of self-government. In the countries around the Mediterranean they were dealing with a world of city states, and there the process was easy. In Britain, however, the social and political unit was the tribe, and that was

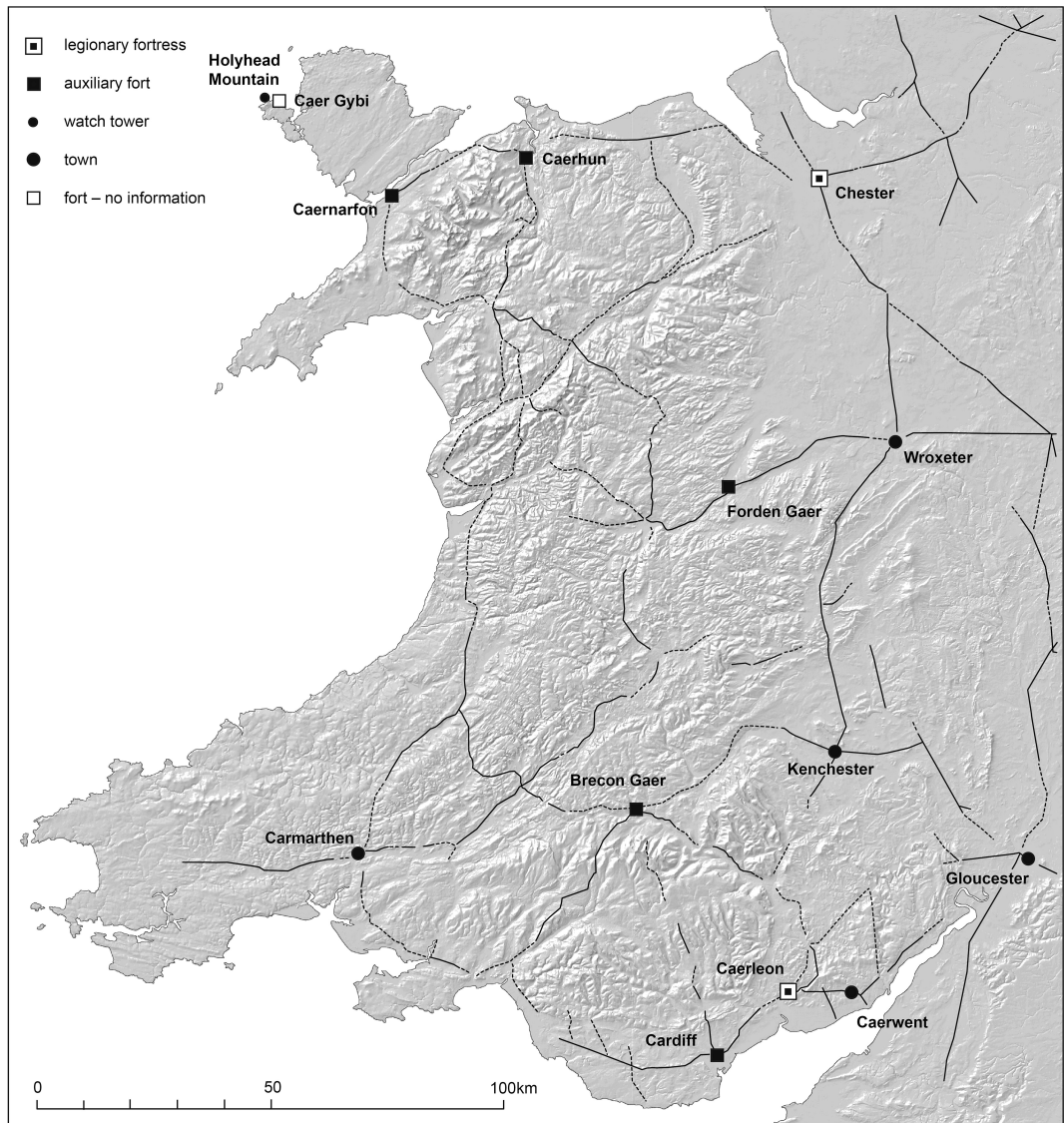


Fig. 5. Forts in Wales, AD 364–70 (after Burnham and Davies 2010, fig. 2.20).

what the Romans had to use. Their solution was to encourage the native tribes to create new cities, one of which then became the tribal capital; and, as the tribes became more romanised, the military system could be reduced and ultimately removed. But in Wales the results were not wholly satisfactory. In the south, in the territory of the Silures and Demetae, the Romanised system took root, even if it did not always flourish. Capitals were developed at Carmarthen and Caerwent, and most of the forts were closed. However, in mid and north Wales the romanised tribal administration did not flourish and the Ordovices never developed a capital of their own. Nonetheless, despite this failure, it was possible after the passage of some few years to reduce the military garrison to an absolute minimum.



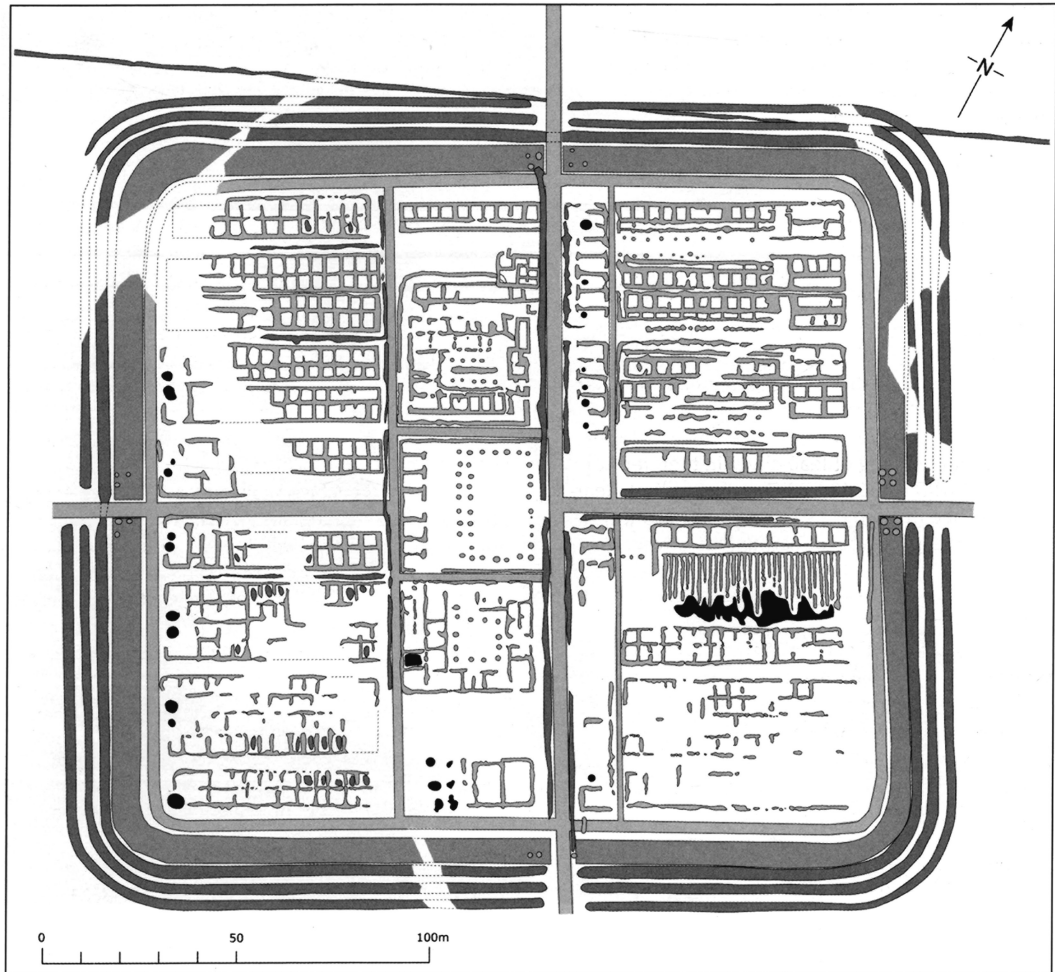


Fig. 6. Geophysical survey of Llanfor (after Burnham and Davies 2010, fig. 2.6 (p. 46).

© Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.

The details of the occupation of the forts of Wales cannot be ascertained without excavation, and not all of the forts have been excavated, or excavated sufficiently thoroughly, for their history to be clear. But where it is, we see a pattern of the reduction in size of the larger forts, as smaller units were thought to be sufficient, and the closure of others.<sup>36</sup> Relatively few forts had been closed before the end of the reign of Trajan in AD 117, but the process began to speed-up under his successor, Hadrian; in part, no doubt, because the units which garrisoned them were needed for the new forts on Hadrian's Wall. As the century progressed the process continued, with those forts which were retained being rebuilt with stone-founded buildings and stone defences. By the third quarter of the second century only a handful of forts in Wales were still occupied, and by the early third century only five forts were certainly in use, four in mid-Wales (Brecon Gaer, Castell Collen, Caersws and Forden Gaer), with one, Caernarfon, in the north (Fig. 4).<sup>37</sup> These forts are so far from one another and from the legionary bases at Caerleon and Chester,

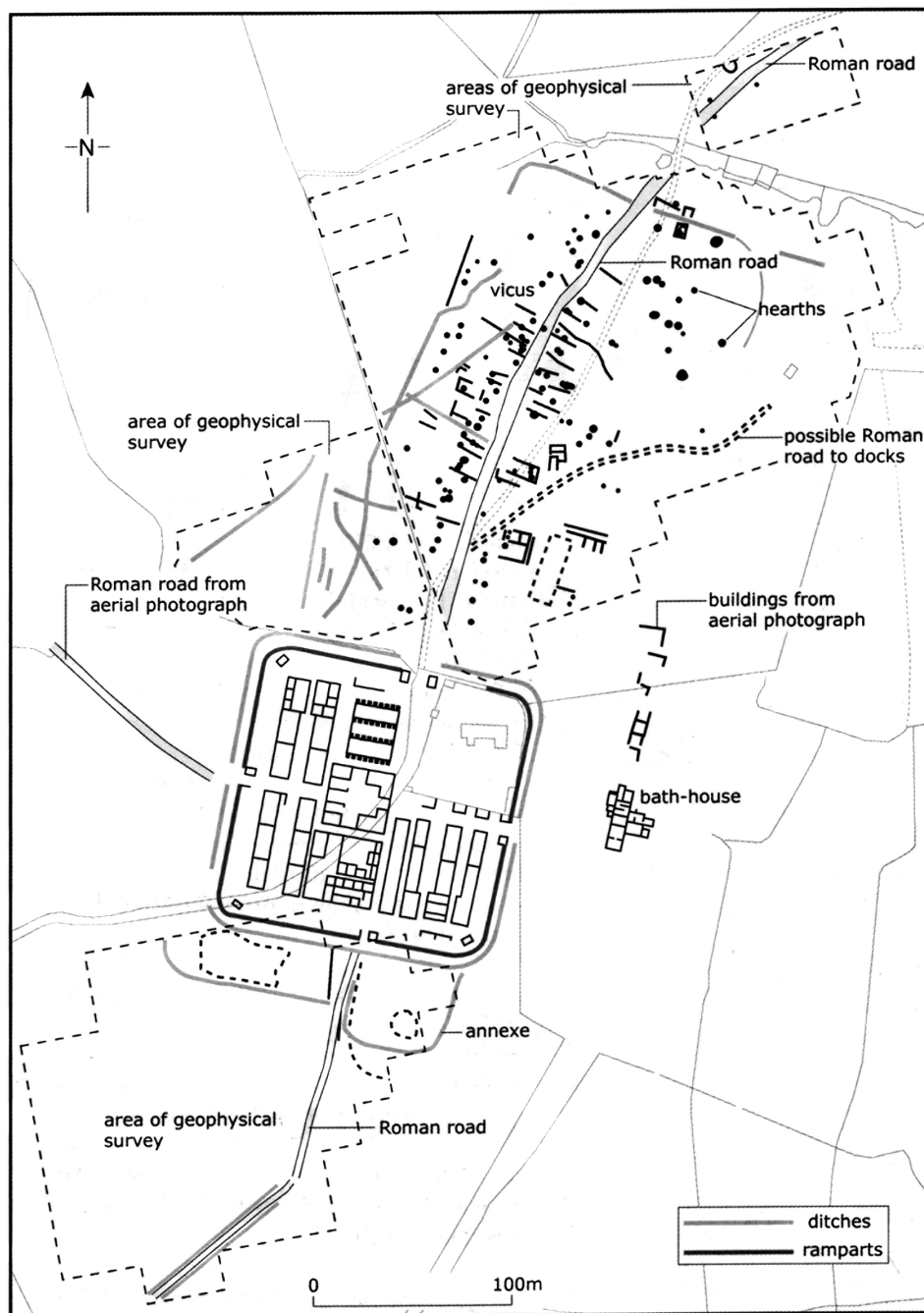


Fig. 7. Plan of Caerhun vicus (after Burnham and Davies 2010, fig. 7.44).

© Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.

that they would have been totally unsupportable in the event of trouble, a fact which suggests that their function was not primarily military. The explanation is probably that without them there would have been no official Roman presence in some two-thirds of Wales, for the failure to develop the system of towns in those areas meant that the normal methods of administration could not be applied. By keeping a few forts in existence the Roman authorities were able to maintain the structure of government, which will certainly have included taxation, quite probably the recruitment of young men for the *auxilia*, and, no doubt, contact with the local tribal aristocrats.

By the end of the third century only Brecon Gaer, Caersws and Caernarfon were still occupied, although the forts at Loughor and Cardiff had been rebuilt.<sup>38</sup> But these last two will have had a different function for they lie on the coast and probably reflect a concern with the sea and raiders, real or feared, from Ireland. A similar need for maritime defence in the fourth-century is seen in the far north-west of Wales with the small, and rather enigmatic, fort at Caer Gybi in Holyhead (Fig. 5). The form of its walls strongly suggest a late Roman date, but more conventional dating evidence is lacking.<sup>39</sup> However, excavation has confirmed that a rectangular tower on Holyhead Mountain was a watch-tower and signal station which dated to after AD 340,<sup>40</sup> and if it did not signal to Caer Gybi, one wonders what it did do. Significantly the fort at Caernarfon was extensively rebuilt in the mid-fourth century, and we know of no internal threat which could have led to its being so extensively refurbished.

The military sites on Anglesey and at Caernarfon strongly suggest the existence of a Roman fleet in that area in the late Roman period, if not before. The raiding activities of the Scots (who illogically were an Irish people in the mid-fourth century) are recorded by the late Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus,<sup>41</sup> and if they attacked England, Wales would not have been immune.

When Nash-Williams wrote, only a handful of sites had been sufficiently thoroughly excavated for their internal plans to be known in some detail. These included Caerhun, Caernarfon and Gelligaer, and, less thoroughly, Caersws, Castell Collen, and Brecon Gaer. In all cases this work had been done before the Second World War when labour was cheap, and in all cases what we have is a plan of the later, stone phase of the fort. By 1969, when Michael Jarrett published his edition of *The Roman Frontier*, only one plan was new, that of Pen Llystyn, a short-lived fort in north-west Wales.<sup>42</sup> The important thing about Pen Llystyn was that it was built entirely of timber; the only timber fort to have been excavated in Wales. It is interesting to see that the most recent version of *Roman Frontiers* has the same series of complete fort plans as its 1969 predecessor, although geophysical surveys have added more or less complete plans of Llanfor (Fig. 6) and Tomen-y-Mur,<sup>43</sup> and significant details of several others. Why has there been so little change in the last 70 years? The answer lies in several factors. Professional archaeology in Wales, as elsewhere, has turned to rescue work where 'developer funding' means that finance is usually available, and the scheduling of major sites by Cadw and its predecessors means that known forts are rarely seriously threatened by development. Universities and the National Museum of Wales lack the resources for major research excavations. Modern excavations are far more thorough than in the twenties and thirties of the last century, let alone before the First World War when Gelligaer and Castell Collen were dug. Most of the Welsh forts have complicated histories; almost all had timber phases, and all will produce a myriad of finds which require lengthy study and expensive publication. Excavators can no longer ignore most of the pottery and animal bones as they often did in the past. As a result the excavation of even a relatively small fort would be the work of years and be extremely, perhaps prohibitively, expensive.

Fortunately geophysical survey has allowed us to fill in some of the gaps, not only in the forts but in the *vici*, the extramural settlements which extended along the roads which led to the forts. Long known from such northern sites as Housesteads and *Vindolanda*,<sup>44</sup> we now have the basic plans of several from Wales, including Caerhun (Fig. 7).<sup>45</sup> Most suggest that they are similar to the *vici* of the northern forts but it would be interesting to see the results of excavations on some of them.

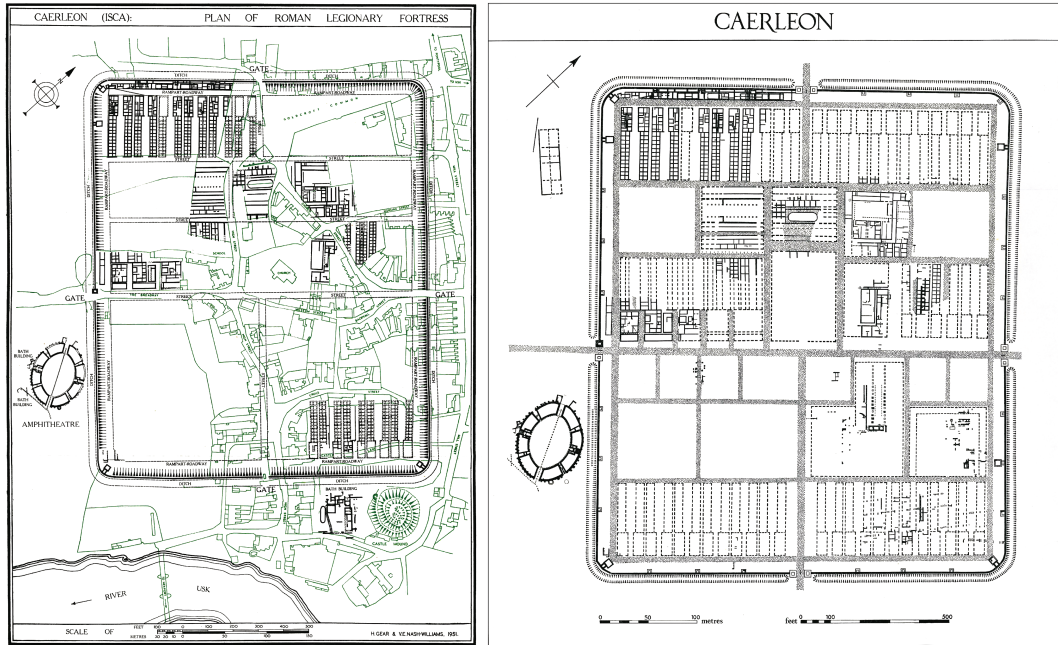


Fig. 8. Comparative plans of Caerleon from Nash-Williams' *Roman Frontier in Wales* published in 1954 (left) and Michael Jarrett's revised edition of 1969 (right). © *National Museum of Wales* (left) and © *University of Wales Press* (right).

No major site in Wales shows a greater increase in our knowledge since Nash-Williams wrote than does Caerleon. In 1954 we had some information on perhaps a third of the buildings within the fortress, and of two outside it, the arena and the Castle Baths (Fig. 8, left).<sup>46</sup> By 1969, fragments of the basilica of the fortress baths and what is thought to have been the hospital had been excavated (Fig. 8, right).<sup>47</sup> In the late 1970s David Zienkiewicz excavated a large part of the main bath building,<sup>48</sup> and at much the same time he was able to show in his excavation on the Museum site that the stone buildings of the fortress had replaced timber ones of the type seen in the earlier fortress at Usk.<sup>49</sup> Slightly later the Glamorgan–Gwent Archaeological Trust did important work on the *cannabae*, or civil settlements, on the eastern side of the fortress where development had been permitted.<sup>50</sup> But, with the exception of the fortress baths, most of this work was on a relatively small scale, for here again Cadw has been able to prevent large scale development within the fortress, and, as we have seen, today large scale development is usually a necessary prelude to large-scale excavation!

If we look at Cadw's Caerleon guide book published in 2003 we see very little change in the plan of the site since 1981 when the work on the fortress baths was completed.<sup>51</sup> But this was to change between 2006 and 2008 when the Department of Archaeology at Cardiff University, under the direction of Tim Young, undertook geophysical surveys of most of the unexcavated areas within the fortress.<sup>52</sup> The results were dramatic revealing a major new works area or *fabrica* and probably a second, as well as three great granaries and a series of barrack blocks on the edge of the fortress (Fig. 9). As a result of this work Peter Guest and Andrew Gardner excavated a stores building between the granaries and workshops, which had survived until the second quarter of the fourth-century; the first major excavation within the fortress for some 30 years.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 9. Caerleon: recent plan with the results of the geophysical survey shown in red. © *Tim Young*.

These discoveries, important though they are, largely confirmed rather than changed our assumptions on the internal buildings of the fortress, but subsequent work was to have more dramatic results. Although most of Nash-Williams excavations were within the fortress, he did some work in the area on its western side where he located some of the buildings of the extramural settlement. In view of this it was decided that Tim Young would undertake a geophysical survey in that area. The early results produced relatively little and much of the area was found to be devoid of buildings. However, to complete the work the survey was extended into the area between the amphitheatre and the river Usk. Nash-Williams had found a fragment of a building close to the amphitheatre, but it was generally assumed that there were few other buildings in that area, an assumption which could not have been more ill-founded! As the work progressed it became clear that Nash-Williams' building was actually one corner of a group of huge courtyard buildings which filled the entire area between the amphitheatre and the river (Fig. 9).<sup>54</sup> In 2011 Cadw commissioned Peter Guest and Andrew Gardner to cut a series of evaluation trenches across these buildings.<sup>55</sup> They found that most of them are extremely well preserved; in fact they are probably much as they were after the Romans dismantled them, apparently at the end of the third century AD when many of the major buildings within the fortress were demolished. The date of their construction has not been ascertained in all cases, but some of those near the river may have been built when the fortress was founded in the 70s (Fig. 10). Their function remains uncertain, although those nearest to the amphitheatre, which include another bath-building, could



Fig. 10. Caerleon environs excavation: quay wall. © Peter Guest.

perhaps be a *mansione*—a rest-house for travellers on state business. But the function of the great courtyard building close to the river remains uncertain and only large-scale excavation is likely to resolve the question. What is disconcerting is the fact that the one major military site in Wales which we thought we understood has produced one of the greatest enigmas of recent work on Roman Britain (Fig. 11).

If I have devoted so much time to the details of the Roman military system in Wales, it is because that system has largely dominated the study of Roman Wales. But there are other aspects of the Roman period which require discussion.

As we have seen both the Silures and the Demetae accepted the basic concepts of Romanisation, and established cantonal capitals, the Demetae at Carmarthen (*Moridunum*) and the Silures at Caerwent (*Venta*). *Moridunum* was one of the most remote cities in the Roman Empire and probably one of the smallest. None the less it was the capital city of the *Demetae*. Until well after the Second World War there had been relatively little archaeological work at Carmarthen. Then, in the late 1960s Barry Jones undertook a series of excavations which included sectioning the defences and work on the amphitheatre.<sup>56</sup> But the bulk of the work on the Roman town has been the rescue excavations directed by Heather and Terry James.<sup>57</sup> What they have shown is the growth of a small town in which the buildings were of Roman types, including rectangular, multi-roomed houses, and a Romano-Celtic temple. The defences were similar to those of other Roman cities in Britain, including Caerwent, beginning with an earthwork to which a stone wall was added, probably in the later third century.



Fig. 11. Reconstruction of Caerleon with extramural buildings. © *7reasons*.

Caerwent is one of the most familiar Roman sites, not only in Wales but in Britain as a whole. The major excavations which trenched about two-thirds of the area within the walls were undertaken between 1899 and 1913, and, as at Silchester, which was excavated at the same time, the excavators' primary concern was with elucidating the plans of the stone buildings, which were all they were capable of detecting. Most of the work undertaken between the two world wars was directed by Victor Nash-Williams, and was largely confined to the defences which were then being conserved by the Office of Works.<sup>58</sup> After the war a shop, workshops and part of a large courtyard house in Pound Lane on the main road through the city were excavated, although they have never been adequately published.

What these excavations revealed were the public and private buildings which one would have expected to find in such a town. The city plans of Caerwent and Silchester became the textbook models for the Romano-British city, although as time passed it became increasingly clear that both were an amalgam of buildings of different dates, primarily of the final centuries of the Roman period. In 1981 a new series of excavations began with Richard Brewer's work on a courtyard house in one of the unexplored *insulae* of the city (Fig. 12).<sup>59</sup> This was followed by a re-excavation of the Romano-Celtic temple and a large part of the forum and basilica in the centre of the city (Fig. 13); excavations which have provided firm dates for these buildings. The critical one is the forum and basilica, which was the physical and ceremonial centre of the Roman city, the building which proclaimed the Silures to be a Roman state, or, as they would have (and did) term it, the *respublica civitates Silurum*—the Republic of the Silures.<sup>60</sup> It was erected in the



Fig. 12. Plan of Caerwent with recent excavations (after Brewer 2006). © Cadw – Welsh Government.

earlier part of the second century, a period when many of the cities of Roman Britain were developing a Romanised municipal structure. Late in the third century it was found necessary to rebuild much of the basilica, but by the middle years of the fourth century the great hall was being used by metalworkers, before being demolished around AD 360. The late Roman city had no use for such a grandiose building; indeed we may wonder if it was ever really needed, except as a majestic statement of the Silures acceptance of the idea of *Romanitas*.

The typical Romano-Celtic temple which stood beside the forum within its own enclosure, or *temenos*, was also re-excavated and shown to have been built around AD 330, a period when the Roman state was, at least theoretically, becoming increasingly Christian.

The stone-walled house which Richard Brewer excavated in the north-western part of the city was not built until late in the third century, replacing a similar house of late second or early third century date, before which the plot was thought to have been vacant. And that is one of the problems. At the moment the only buildings which we know with certainty to have been built before the end of the second century were the forum and basilica, which cannot have stood in splendid isolation in the middle of the coastal plain; an imposing but improbable monument to the acceptance of Rome by the Silures. At Silchester, the Roman city in Hampshire which was excavated at the same time as Caerwent, there was a similar problem. But there a long programme of excavations by Michael Fulford, which began in 1974, examined the defences, the amphitheatre, the forum and basilica, before culminating in the complete excavation of an *insula*. This work has revealed in detail the long and changing history of the site from its foundation in the late Iron Age. It is only excavation on this scale that we will enable us to elucidate the history of Caerwent.





Fig. 13. Caerwent basilica excavations. © *National Museum of Wales*.

Most of the leading families of both *Moridunum* and *Venta* will have been members of the native aristocracy and, like the gentry of an eighteenth-century county town, they will have had country estates, even if these were little more than farms. No doubt the same applied to the less Romanised aristocracy of mid and north Wales, but they did not remodel their farm buildings in the Roman manner. A number of villas were dug before the Second World War, most notably Ely on the edge of Cardiff which was excavated by Mortimer Wheeler,<sup>61</sup> and the villa at Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan, which was dug by Nash-Williams.<sup>62</sup> Both sites revealed a mixture of domestic and farm buildings. Llantwit Major is one of the largest and most elaborate villas yet dug in Wales, but it remained the centre of an agricultural estate, rather than developing into the kind of elaborate rural show house seen in Sussex or the Cotswolds.

The known distribution of villas, or likely villas, shows that, with the occasional exception, the majority are clustered in the area between Caerwent and the Vale of Glamorgan. Others are known as far west as Carmarthenshire, and more may lie in the area between, but the main concentrations were probably associated with the two tribal capitals; a phenomenon seen around many of the Roman cities in southern England. Many of those in the Vale of Glamorgan are under the plough and gradually being destroyed, and it was the recognition of that fact which led the Ministry of Works in the 1960s to commission Michael Jarrett to completely excavated one of the better-preserved ones, that at Whitton not far from Barry. It had been known since the 1930s that some of the English villas had a long and complex development which had begun in the late Iron Age and continued more or less through the Roman period, and Jarrett was able to show that the development of the Whitton villa was similar.<sup>63</sup> It had begun as a late Iron Age farm with three round houses enclosed by a ditch and bank (Fig. 14, top), and it was not until early in the second century AD that a new hut was built, using the same techniques as in the Iron Age, but with

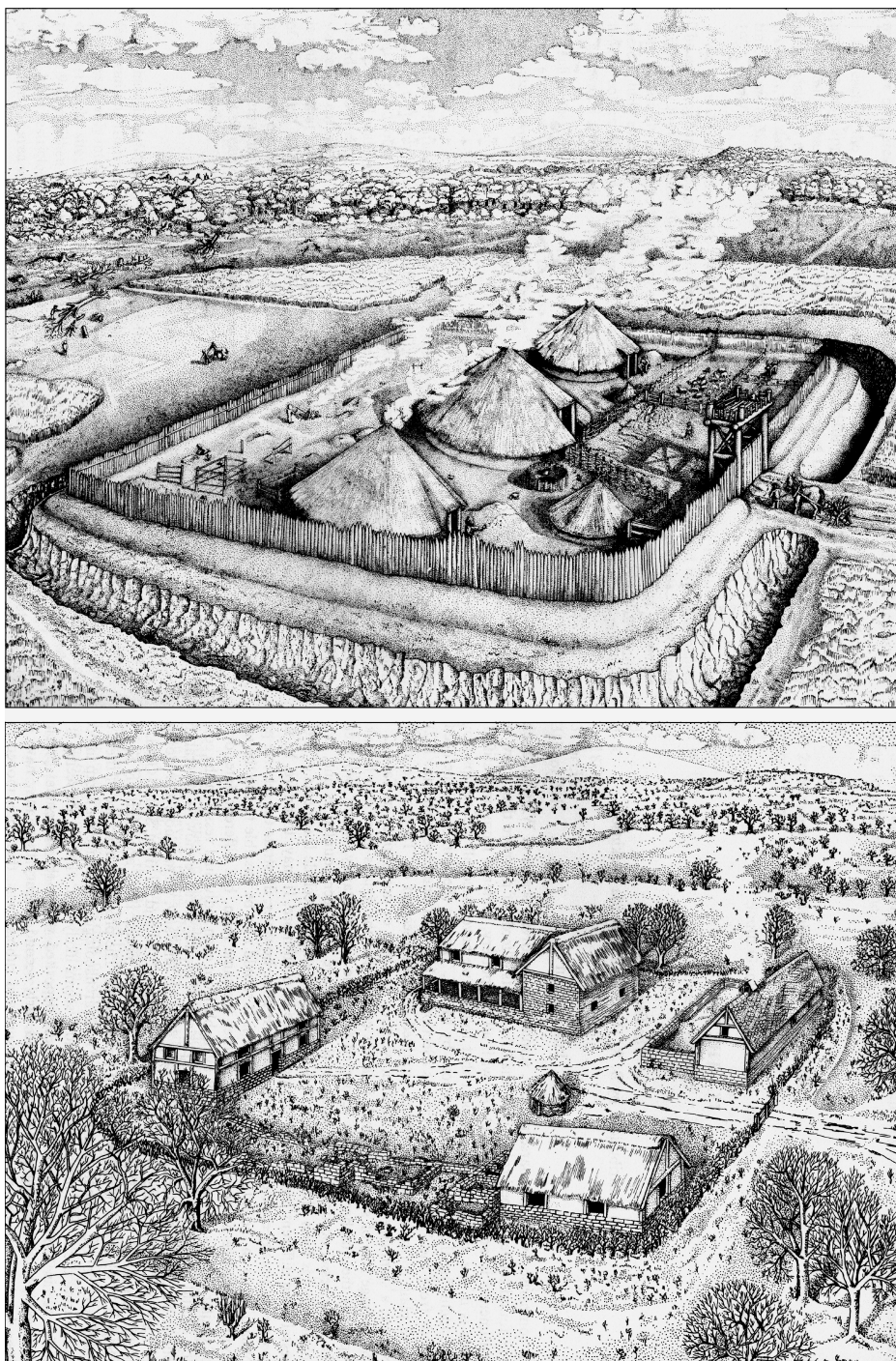


Fig. 14. Reconstruction of Iron Age (top) and late Roman (bottom) phases of the Whitton villa (after Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981). © Howard Mason.

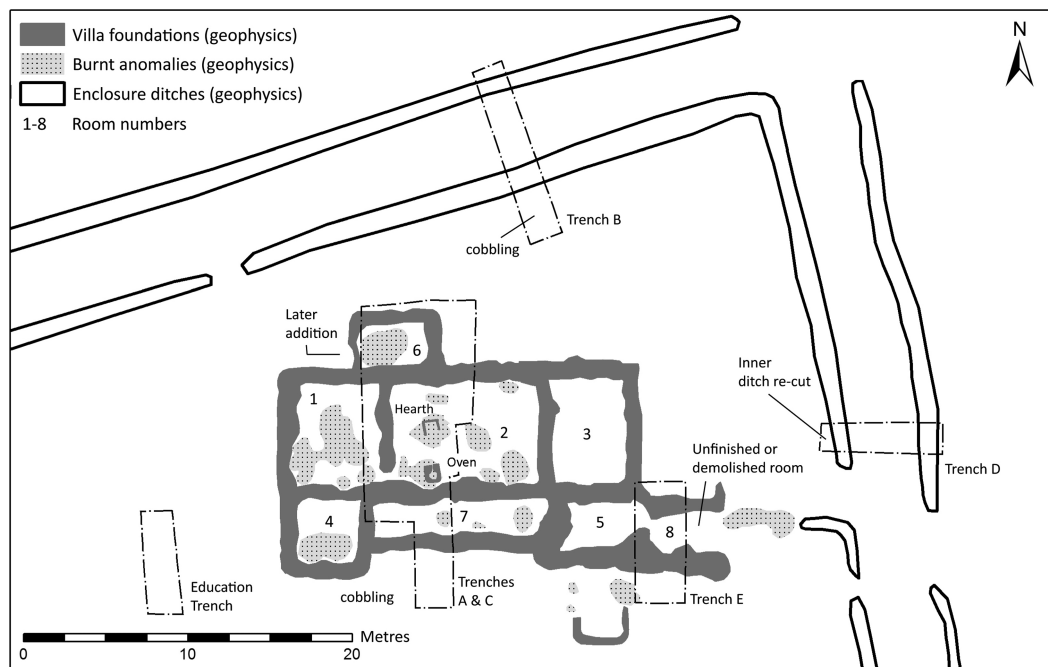


Fig. 15. Plan of Abermagwr villa (after Driver and Davies 2011, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* vol. 160).  
© Crown copyright, RCAHMW.

a rectangular plan. Some twenty years later Roman ideas were fully embraced with a stone-founded, rectangular building. With time a series of relatively simple, rectangular buildings were added but none had any pretension to luxury. It was, and it remained, a successful farm (Fig. 14, bottom). A similar, but smaller, villa was subsequently excavated at Llandough between Cardiff and Penarth.<sup>64</sup>

Relatively little is known of the villas around Carmarthen, although one at Llys Brychan was partially excavated, also by Michael Jarrett and later by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust, and shown to have a hypocaust system—an infallible indication of Romanisation.<sup>65</sup>

This distribution is what one would have expected, Romanised rural buildings in the areas where we have Romanised cities, but there are two sites which show that the situation was rather more complicated. The first was discovered in 1783; a large Roman bath-house, resplendent with mosaic floors at Maesderwen, in the Usk valley about 3 kilometres south of Brecon.<sup>66</sup> The coins from the site suggest a late third or fourth century date and a military origin can certainly be excluded. The building is more reminiscent of the villas of the Cotswolds than of any of those known in other part of Wales, but without further work (and after 230 years further investigation is surely due) we can only note it as a total anomaly.

The second anomaly is a more recent discovery, made from the air in 2010, of a small, but absolutely characteristic villa at Abermagwr in the Ystwyth valley just south-east of Aberystwyth, far to the north of the concentration of villas around Carmarthen (Fig. 15).<sup>67</sup> In its plan it is manifestly related to similar sites in England, such as the well-known villa at Ditchley in Oxfordshire.<sup>68</sup> The site has been excavated by Jeffrey Davies and Toby Driver. The villa itself lies in one corner of a large, rectangular, double-ditched enclosure. Its position, and the fact that it is set at a slight angle to the axis of the enclosure, might suggest that it is later than the enclosure, but the excavators have found no signs of earlier structures, nor of the

Iron Age origins for which they hoped. It lacks any degree of pretension, with clay floors and no sign of painted wall-plaster. The dating evidence suggests that it began and ended in the later Roman period. Although an anomaly it does suggest that Romanisation had taken deeper roots in rural Wales than has been thought in the past.

## CONCLUSIONS

In talking this evening I am only too well aware of how much I have omitted. I have said nothing of the many minor sites dug in the past fifty or so years; of the work at Dolaucothi, for example, or on the rural settlements of mid and north Wales, or on tracing the Roman roads which made Roman rule possible in Wales. But I have tried to give some idea of some of the larger themes.

So much for the past and the present, what of the future? I could easily devote the rest of the evening to suggesting future projects, which if executed would revolutionise our knowledge of the subject. But reality must intrude. Above all we must accept that as the techniques of excavation, and of the study of the material which results from excavation, have improved so have the costs. We may, rightly, deplore the destruction of sites by development, but, in all truth, at the moment it is only on sites where the developer pays for the excavation and post-excavation work that we are likely to see work on a large scale. Which, unfortunately, means that it is developers not archaeologists who chose where such excavations take place, and the priorities of developers are rarely the same as ours.

But although large-scale excavation may be limited in the future, as, of course, it has been in the past, it is likely that aerial photography, and, increasingly, satellite survey, will continue to locate major sites in Wales. One dry summer, admittedly not that common in Wales, can work wonders in this respect. Here the work of the Royal Commission has been invaluable, but can we not do more to encourage other pilots who are not professional archaeologists to take an interest in aerial survey? And what part will drones play in future aerial surveys?

Geophysical surveying is probably the most important development in field archaeology of the past half century, and its potential for elucidating the details of known sites is obvious. It also has the great advantage of enabling excavation trenches to be placed in the best position to solve problems without the time-consuming and expensive trial trenching of the past. Could such surveys be used, for example, to locate the rubbish pits, and the pottery which they probably contain, in the undated marching camps of Wales?

Taking all of these things together, I do not think we are being unduly optimistic if we suggest that the great advances in our knowledge of Roman Wales which we have seen in recent years will continue into the future.

And there are projects which can be undertaken, with relatively small resources. The excavation of the Abermagwr villa, which has been received consistent financial support from the Cambrian Archaeological Association, is a case in point. Nor do all areas of research involve excavation. Work on the finds from earlier excavations, for example, can produce important results, and we certainly do not lack suitable material. Most of the artefacts found in the Caerwent excavations of the early twentieth century remain unpublished and largely unstudied, as does much of the material from other excavations of that period. An excellent example of such work is Peter Webster's project to study, with the aid of skilled volunteers, the samian ware from Caerleon and other sites in Wales. Work such as this will enable us to refine the dating of the phases of the sites which are being and have been excavated. It was the re-examination by Peter Webster of the unpublished (and unwashed) pottery from Nash-William's excavations of the defences at Caerwent which helped me to redate the construction of the city wall there to the third rather than the fourth century.<sup>69</sup>

But let me conclude with a final tribute to the ‘Cambrians’, for without *Archaeologia Cambrensis* how much work on Wales completed since the first volume appeared in 1846 would have remained unpublished and unknown.

## NOTES

1. This paper is the text of a lecture and inevitably reflects the limitations of a lecture. No one is more aware than the writer of what has been omitted.
2. The relevant passages are given, with translations and discussion, in Manning 1981, 241ff, and more succinctly in Manning 2001, 8ff.
3. Tacitus *Agricola*, 17ff.
4. N. Holbrook in Burnham and Davies 2010, 184ff.
5. P. Guest in Burnham and Davies 2010, 305.
6. Nash-Williams 1954, 4.
7. Nash-Williams 1954, 80ff.
8. *Ibid.* 4.
9. Jarrett 1969, 116ff, 77ff.
10. *Ibid.* 179ff.
11. R. H. White in Burnham and Davies 2010, 194.
12. Burnham and Davies 2010, 230ff, 196ff, 264ff, 187ff.
13. R. H. White in Burnham and Davies 2010, 193ff.
14. P. V. Webster in Burnham and Davies 2010, 289.
15. R. J. Silvester in Burnham and Davies 2010, 281. The fort at Leighton is too close to the fortress at Wroxeter for the two to be contemporaneous, and we must assume that it pre-dates Wroxeter.
16. R. J. Brewer and J. L. Davies in Burnham and Davies 2010, 237ff.
17. *Ibid.* 239ff.
18. Davies and Burnham 2012, 5.
19. Driver 2014, 169, fig.18.
20. F. Olding in Burnham and Davies 2010, 196ff. Other forts of this period are known in south Wales at Castlefield Farm (Kentchurch), Colwyn Castle and Hindwell Farm (Burnham and Davies 2010, 237, 241, 248). To these should be added the forts which lie further east in what is now England but was then the territory of the Dobunni and Cornovii. Such forts are known in the southern Marches at Canon Frome (Stretton Grandison); Jay Lane (Leintwardine), and Stretford Bridge (although an early date for this fort has not been established by excavation) (Burnham and Davies 2010, 229, 249, 282). It has been suggested that there may be an early fort at Chepstow, but the evidence for this is far from conclusive (Burnham and Davies 2010, 304). In the same area the hillforts at Credenhill and Brandon Camp, near Leintwardine, are known to have been utilised by the Roman army (Burnham and Davies 2010, 242, 199). In the northern Marches there are forts at Leighton near Wroxeter and, less certainly, Whitchurch (Burnham and Davies 2010, 250, 289). There is evidence of two phases of pre-Flavian occupation at Chester, the first possibly associated with Paulinus’ campaigns of AD 59–60 in north Wales; the second with Cerealis’ campaigns against the Brigantes in AD 71–72 (Burnham and Davies 2010, 172). Two successive Roman forts have been claimed at Abertanat but the evidence for them is very far from conclusive (Burnham and Davies 2010, 310).
21. P. V. Webster and A. Marvell in Burnham and Davies 2010, 230ff.

22. E. M. Evans in Burnham and Davies 2010, 309.
23. Davies and Jones 2006.
24. Davis and Driver 2015.
25. Driver 2014. 158, fig. 4.
26. Burnham and Davies 2010, 44.
27. Ibid. 291ff.
28. Jarrett 1969.
29. G. Hughes in Burnham and Davies 2010, 251ff.
30. E.M. Evans in Burnham and Davies 2010, 224.
31. T. Young in Burnham and Davies 2010, 214ff.
32. Burnham and Davies 2010, 103.
33. Manning 2002, 36ff, fig. 2.2.
34. Meek 2013.
35. In 1960 I received a postcard from Sheppard Frere, who, together with Ian Richmond and Kenneth St Joseph, was looking for Roman forts in Pembrokeshire, in which he complained that every time they found a promising site it had a medieval castle on it.
36. The sequence can be traced in the maps in Burnham and Davies 2010, figs 2.4, 2.7, 2.8, 2.12, 2.15, 2.16, 2.18, 2.20 and, 2.23.
37. Burnham and Davies 2010, 55, fig. 2.15.
38. Ibid. 57, fig. 2.16.
39. D. Hopewell in Burnham and Davies 2010, 216.
40. P. Crew in Burnham and Davies 2010, 301.
41. *History* XX, 1.1.
42. Jarrett 1969, 101ff.
43. Burnham and Davies 2010, 257ff, 282ff.
44. Breeze 2006, 246, 433.
45. Burnham and Davies 2010, 103ff; Caerhun: D. Hopewell in Burnham and Davies 2010, 217ff.
46. Nash-Williams 1954, 18ff.
47. Jarrett 1969, 29ff.
48. Zienkiewicz 1986.
49. Zienkiewicz 1993.
50. Evans 2000.
51. Knight 2003.
52. Guest and Young 2006; Burnham 2007, 250ff; Burnham 2008, 266ff.
53. Gardner and Guest 2007, 143–4; Chapman 2011, 323ff.
54. Chapman 2011, 324ff
55. Chapman 2012, 279ff.
56. Jones 1969; Jones 1970; Little 1971.
57. James 2003.
58. Nash-Williams 1930.
59. The results of these excavations are summarised in Brewer 1993; Brewer 2004; and Brewer 2006.
60. RIB 311.
61. Wheeler 1921.
62. Nash-Williams 1953.
63. Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981.
64. Robinson 1988.

65. Jarrett 1962; *Archaeology in Wales* 49 (2009), 109ff.
66. RCAHM Wales 1986, 179ff.
67. Driver and Davies 2011; Davies and Driver 2011.
68. Radford 1936.
69. Manning 2003.

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