The Weir Gardens, Swainshill, Hereford.
Recording work in progress during construction of the revetment. (See article on page 5).

Photo: Courtesy of Cotswold Archaeological Trust ©
EDITORIAL

Due to the plethora of varied and interesting articles we have in this issue and the extreme demand for space, I have decided to forego my usual introduction and to squeeze in one more gem.

MONUMENTAL FOUNDATION DISCOVERED IN BATH

by Peter Davenport, Bath Archaeological Trust

Premises, owned by Clarks Shoes and situated on the corner of Westgate Street and Union Street, underwent major refurbishment in September 1997. Bath Archaeological Trust carried out a watching brief during the excavation of a foundation pit below basement floor level. This measured 2.5 x 2.5 m, with a maximum depth of 0.65 m.

Very substantial foundations were recorded, extending over the whole of the trench, and beyond. They remain largely unexcavated, but at least three horizontal courses of large limestone rubble separated by bands of orange mortar were visible in the side of a later pit. They have an estimated depth of up to 1.5 m and are almost certainly Roman (they are definitely pre-12th century). They may form part of a podium supporting the monumental building which Barry Cunliffe predicted on the basis of a very large decorated cornice block found by James Irvine in 1869, beneath the south side of Westgate Street (Cunliffe 1969, 149). The building, situated to the north of the precinct of the temple of Minerva, could be a theatre or possibly another temple. Either way, it is potentially of outstanding importance. The foundations were cut by a 12th century pit which in turn was cut by the coursed stone footings of the north wall of a late 15th century cellar. The upper levels appear to have been removed by the construction of the present cellar, dated to c. 1810.
The Roman town of Salinae (Middlewich, Cheshire) originated during the second half of the 1st century AD when the Roman administration began exploiting the local salt springs. It is known, however, that salt extraction from both sea water (coastal salterns) and inland brine springs occurred in various parts of Britain during the Iron Age. Recent studies by Dr. Elaine Morris have shown that during the Iron Age the Cheshire area increased its volume of production and extended its area of distribution (the only other known inland salt production centre based at Droitwich was established later, probably during the 3rd century). Salt was produced at two other Roman sites in Cheshire – Condace (Northwich) and Nantwich. Although both of these sites have produced lead brine pans with Roman inscriptions, it is now generally believed that Salinae was the principal site for salt production in Cheshire.

Since the 19th and early 20th centuries large quantities of Roman pottery and artefacts have been recovered either side of the Roman road, King Street, on the NE edge of the present town. Evidence for timber buildings including ‘strip shops’ has also been uncovered. These buildings were long and narrow, with domestic accommodation at the front, industrial activities at the rear, and usually incorporated a small yard. The industrial evidence included iron, bronze, lead and leather working. 20th-century excavations show that these buildings had tiled roofs, were well furnished and often decorated with painted plaster. The occupied area of Salinae has been estimated to have covered about 20 hectares. Finds made this century and dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD include brine kilns, clay kiln bars and supports, nails, lead brine pans, pots – including an amphora inscribed ‘Amurco’ (‘brine waste’), faience ‘melon’ beads, leather offcuts, and the second half of a bronze discharge diploma dated to AD 105. Salinae, however, does not seem to have been a fully developed Roman town as to date no evidence of a regular street grid or administrative buildings has been found. The range of artefacts recovered does suggest that the town acted as a market for the local rural population, and that it was in use until at least the 3rd century AD.

The area continues to yield evidence of its Roman past; the most significant of the recent finds being made in 1993, when the site of a 1st-century Roman fort was discovered lying just north of the river Croco, and just west of King Street on the northern fringe of the present town.

A preliminary geophysical survey and limited excavation gave rise to an initial interpretation of the site as a marching camp. However, it is now clear the site is that of a 1st-century turf-and-timber fort, and it was subsequently scheduled as an ancient monument. No upstanding remains survive, but it would seem that the whole plan of the fort survives below ground. The fort remained as it was constructed, of turf and timber; avoiding (unlike many other such forts), a rebuilding during the 2nd century in stone. It is therefore probable that by the 2nd century the fort had been abandoned. Pottery found within the fort area indicates that it was in use during the 1st century. Although the fort lies only a short distance to the west of the Roman town, it may well have been constructed for military purposes only, having little or no connection with the contemporary Roman town. Hopefully, the area will be explored more fully in the future, though there are no immediate plans for further excavation.

A 1st-century fort had been postulated to exist in Middlewich.
since the finding, in 1939, of the bronze diploma. The diploma had been issued in 105 to an auxiliary cavalryman of the ala I Gallorum et Thracum Classiana civium Romanorum (Dr. M. Roxan's Roman Military Diplomas 1954 – 1977). At present there is insufficient evidence to know whether the retired auxiliary's unit was ever stationed at the fort. The unit was present in Britain between 70 and 122, but to date no evidence has been found to indicate its actual fort site.

In Spring 1997, a watching brief was maintained during residential development in an area close to Salinae. Discoveries made include linear slots up to 20 metres in length and probably representing the outline of timber buildings. Three complete Roman pots, including a fine intact Gaulish Samian cup, were recovered from one such slot. Additional finds include a small rectangular hearth and a fragment of a lead salt pan. The finds seem to represent industrial activity, probably of a military nature. Further to the west a series of 'V-profile' ditches, almost certainly defensive in character, was also found. The largest and earliest of these is over 30 metres wide and up to 2 metres deep. Waterlogged deposits from the largest ditch yielded fragments of a leather shoe.

Although the present town still plays a part in the country's salt industry (British Salt is based here), the link with Roman and prehistoric Britain is probably not a continuous one. Evidence suggests that the town of Salinae was gradually abandoned from the 4th century. The present town of Middlewich seems to have grown from a later mediaeval settlement which was situated to the west of the Roman site.

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**TULLIE HOUSE MUSEUM**

The latest venue to join the ARA promotion last year was the Tullie House Border Galleries in Castle Street, Carlisle. This excellent museum exhibits the archaeology of Cumbria, but notably for members the Roman past of Carlisle itself, Roman Luguvalium.

Carlisle has the distinction of having a fort from the earliest Roman period, as pottery dating from the late 1st century has been recovered here for some time, and it has been proposed that Luguvalium guarded an important crossing on the river Eden into Scotland. More recently excavations have identified the earliest timber fort, constructed under the Governorship of Petilius Cerialis in the early 70s, the site lying fortuitously between the museum and castle. Parts of one of the timber gateways, the best to have survived in Britain, have been preserved for display at the museum.

Overlooking the city to the north was the largest fort on Hadrian's Wall at Stanwix, Uxellodunum, the headquarters of the senior commanding officer of the wall forts and the base of the 1000 strong Ala Petriana.

Initially more of a Stanegate fort than one of the Hadrician Wall forts, an important cosmopolitan town later developed on the site of Uxellodunum, evidenced by the richness of artefacts, including sculpture and inscriptions. By the third century the town may have become a city-state or civitas in its own right – the civitas Carnuntorium. As a Roman town Carlisle survived very late; it has produced coinage up to the latest issues in Britain, and St. Cuthbert came here in AD 685.

The very fine and diverse collection of Roman material at Tullie House is displayed in a vibrant and illuminating series of galleries which incorporate a recreated street scene. When taking a wall tour from east to west, without question Tullie House makes a very rewarding and colourful conclusion.

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**Snippets**

**GALLO-ROMAN DENTISTRY**

A skull of a young man discovered in a late first or second century AD necropolis at Chantambre, near Paris, retains a tooth of wrought iron which had been hammered into the bone whilst he was alive. The iron tooth had been accepted by his body and integrated into the bone. It is believed that the man probably died a year or so after the operation.

*Times 01.01.98*
THE WEIR GARDENS, SWAINSHILL, HEREFORD

by Graeme Walker: Cotswold Archaeological Trust Contracts Manager

On a terrace above a meander of the River Wye, 8km west of Hereford and 1km south of the Roman town of Magna Castra (Kenchester), the landscaped gardens of New Weir House contain superb upstanding, but little known, Roman remains. A 4m high masonry ‘buttress’ projects outward from the north bank into the river, whilst a few metres downstream a second partly destroyed ‘buttress’ sits surrounded by great quantities of collapsed masonry of monumental scale. On the narrow terrace above remains have been found of walls, mosaics, hypocausts, and an elaborate stone cistern. Long believed to be mediaeval or later in origin, the true importance of the remains have been known for some time and the site is now scheduled as an ancient monument.

In recent years natural erosive action of the river has threatened the upstanding sections of masonry with collapse, and exposed further structural remains over a large area of the north bank.

In 1991 Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT) was invited by the owners of the property, the National Trust, to assist in developing a scheme of riverside protection for the remains. Preparatory work carried out by CAT, assisted by a diving team from the University of St. Andrew’s included surveys of standing structures, topography and riverbed remains. The results of previous antiquarian investigation and the more recent work undertaken by the City of Hereford Archaeological Unit in the 1970s were also examined, whilst the Ancient Monuments Laboratory of English Heritage provided an up-to-date geophysical survey. This information contributed to proposals for an engineering solution to the problem of river erosion.

In July 1995 with the river at its summer low-point, CAT returned to the New Weir Gardens to assist with the execution of the riverbank protection works. These involved insertion of a natural blockstone revetment along the riverbed, to the rear of which many tonnes of soil would be dumped, turfed over; and the damaged bank reprofiled. In the immediate vicinity of the upstanding ‘buttresses’ a blockstone apron would replace the turf to ensure complete protection of the structures.

Before any aspect of the work could take place the line of revetment had to be cleared of collapsed masonry, which was winched from the river by floating crane. Some 241 blocks and fragments, many weighing nearly a tonne, were discovered over a 100m stretch of the riverbed. All were examined and recorded with a view to assisting a
conjectural reconstruction of the riverside structures.

A small scale excavation was conducted on top of the upstream buttress prior to consolidation of the masonry. This revealed the presence of a small concrete floored room or vestibule with a blocked doorway. This once opened onto a possible flight of steps leading up from the river, but which now only survives three or four rises high. The adherence of painted plaster to one of the external faces of the buttress revealed an original decoration of white stucco onto which a design of rectangular blocks had been traced to create the effect of ashlar facing, the first time this has been found in situ in Britain. If the entire complex was treated in this way the total effect must have been grandiose and monumental when viewed from the south bank or from the river itself.

No further excavation could be carried out on the terrace but it was possible to examine the eroded river bank in detail, which revealed further walls surviving between the buttresses and evidence that at least part of the river-frontage was roofed. Understanding of the lower buttress was more problematical, but clearly it originally extended further into the river than previously thought and might have functioned as a landing stage or breakwater, or possibly supported rooms above in the manner of the upper buttress.

Despite there being many unanswered questions about form and function, this complex of elaborate and imposing buildings was once undoubtedly very grand, and in its unusual setting compares favourably with Continental sites such as the villa complex at Wittlich on a tributary of the Moselle. For the present at least such comparisons must suffice until more can be learned about this site. Thankfully it has been safeguarded by completion of the riverside revetment in a manner which not only ensures its preservation, but successfully blends engineering necessities with the archaeological and visual sensitivity of the site. As it now enters its third winter since works were completed, we can report that the revetment has withstood the worst ravages of winter floods and more important, the Roman buttresses remain unscathed.

A LOST GRAND STAIRCASE AT FISHBOURNE

by Anthony Beeson

The West Wing of the palatial Flavian building at Fishbourne was obviously designed to impress the visitor. Raised five feet above the surface of the garden on a terrace, retained by a wall plastered and painted with a trompe l’oeil garden scene (so that nature merged with art), its colonnades framed on either side a great vaulted central aula or reception room. This chamber had once been floored with a mosaic of superb quality, as befitted its status, but only fragments survived the ploughing of later ages. The width of the West Wing’s colonnade was increased outside this room to give the impression of a projecting podium, and four great columns formed a tetrastyle portico. The pediment surmounting these columns is believed to have been plastered and painted and the whole central structure must have resembled a temple façade in appearance. The approaching visitor, crossing the great internal garden of the building by means of the wide central path edged with mixtilinear bedding trenches, would have been further impressed by the sight of a piece of large-scale sculpture which crowned a four and a half foot square tile and masonry base in the centre of the concourse, directly in front of, and framed by the lofty portico of the aula. Immediately beyond the statue, the staircase that is the subject of this article once rose to the podium of the great chamber. About ten feet in width, it occupied the space between the two central columns of the portico and was clasped by walls of greensand blocks, painted externally...
to match the garden terrace wall. The author's mind the great enigma concerning this staircase is that the original excavator assumed it was constructed of wood, notwithstanding that it was the most important flight in the palace, was obviously designed to impress, and led to the most important and lavishly decorated room. If it was indeed of timber, it would of course have been exposed to the elements and have suffered accordingly both in appearance and structurally. To have a wooden staircase here has always seemed to the author a particularly strange piece of lesemajesty in the face of the lavish expenditure seen all about it, especially considering the vast amounts of stonework used in all parts of the building, from massive guttering blocks to garden fountain basins.

The excavators assumed that the six foot walls extending from the podium actually supported these steps, but in order to make a flight fit within their confines, were forced to conclude that each had a rise of one foot in height. This would be a particularly uncomfortable height for all but the tallest and surely a difficult and an inelegant way to enter the aula, especially if heavily robed. The absence of mortared foundations for the steps no doubt promoted the wooden theory, but what has not been considered is that entrance staircases of large unmortared slabs occur often in antiquity, as they do in later eras. Given the hard compacted gravel of the area in front of the aula, the foundation flange of the portico wall and indeed the wall itself, then such a slab staircase would not require a foundation, and if the slabs were eventually robbed out, as such large, unmortared and desirable stones would surely have been, would leave no trace in the archaeological record. The painted greensand side walls can be seen not as structural elements, but as little more than a cosmetic treatment to screen the slabs, and may have resembled the side walls found by many a temple's steps, but might also have acted as low balustrades. As can be seen from the including the podium itself) and each would have had a rise of only about six or seven inches and a depth of about ten inches, a far more comfortable height and matched by many examples from antiquity. The monolithic slab stairs found at the villa at Keynsham in Somerset were similar to this in rise.

Although we can, of course, never be certain about the form of this lost staircase, the author believes that the prestige of its location together with the other circumstances listed above and the existence of ancient examples make the postulated slab construction far more likely than the currently accepted wooden one.

![Diagram of the Palace of A.D. 75.](image)

The Palace c. AD 75.

Adapted from a plan by Barry Cunliffe 1971.

Snippets A CUTTING PLEA!

ARA Members are invited to send press cuttings from local and national newspapers concerning Roman matters (indicating date and source) to the Hon. Archivist at The Art Library, Central Library, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TL.
The well preserved Roman complex found at Swindon in 1996 and reported on briefly in ARA III p. 12 and ARA IV p. 15, has been investigated further by Bryn Walters and Bernard Phillips on behalf of Swindon Borough Council. What had initially been considered to be an extensive villa, laid out on a series of terraces, is now, as a result of more detailed work, interpreted by the writer as a religious sanctuary.

Sub-soil trenches cut by the developer in 1996 produced Romano-British material including coins and pottery. Unfortunately the significance of the finds was not fully realised until side roads for the proposed housing estate were being dug and the remains of a very substantial Roman building was cut into. Work was suspended and an archaeological investigation carried out including a geophysical survey by the Archaeometry Branch of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory of English Heritage, which located several substantial buildings, ponds and other features.

The site lies on a sloping L-shaped field, part of a south-south-west facing hillside in the north Swindon expansion area. Rough grass and other dense vegetation had prevented a clear understanding of the irregular features, but as part of the evaluation the field was mown, revealing a large number of hitherto unseen details. Terracing, platforms and other earthworks are now clearly discernible over the whole area, indicating that it has never been ploughed. Several springs emerge from the upper slope and one from the ridge top. Below the springs, on a wide terrace, the boggy nature of the ground indicates a large pond. This is also suggested by the geophysical survey. It was considered essential that an archaeological evaluation should take place to determine the state of preservation and nature of the remains so that a decision on the future of the site could be made.

To this end five trenches (A, B, C, D and E), were cut where substantial resistance was indicated on the geophysical survey and where
massive stone blocks were exposed on the uppermost terrace. The most substantial structural remains were located in trenches A and D on the lower terrace and E on the top terrace.

Trench A sectioned a major stone building built at the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries, which overlay the demolished remains of a 2nd-century structure. Fragments of very fine wall-plaster were recovered, some depicting probable architectural and figured scenes. Of considerable interest was a concealed hoard of scrap 4th-century silver, referred to technically as Hacksilver (chopped silver), possibly at one time part of the sanctuary’s plate used at ritual feasting.

The hoard had been deliberately dismantled and crushed prior to concealment. Up to six vessels may be represented, including a large, crushed 38-ribbed and fluted bowl, similar to examples from the famous deposits from Mildenhall and Sutton Hoo, both in Suffolk, now in the British Museum. There were also two handle attachments from the sides of a situla (a bucket-like vessel), a pair of finely decorated drop-handles, another single drop-handle, and leaf-shaped escutcheons for carrying handles on other missing vessels. Silver of this quality and type is virtually unknown in western Britain, thus making this discovery extremely important.

Trench D revealed a wall, one metre wide and over a metre in depth, with plaster rendering on one side. This may have formed part of a range of baths, a building struck by the contractors in 1996. Trench E on the uppermost terrace helped formulate my interpretation of the site, as a well-preserved stone-lined cistern for a possible spring-head shrine or nymphaeum was located here.

ARA member and archaeological landscape specialist Mark Corney carried out a full earthwork survey concurrently with the excavations. This work revealed a number of terraces, and as his plan (page 8) shows, these were cut by ditches interpreted here as probable water conduits irrigating formal gardens stepping down the hillside. Raised platforms between them may be the sites of buildings. A possible road enters the site from the west and on the main upper terrace detached platforms may represent other structures interpreted here as shrines.

Among other exciting discoveries, finely carved stones from architectural embellishments...
and finds of loose, very fine and small mosaic tesserae suggest that buildings of high quality may have graced this hillside. In view of the small area actually excavated, the number of coins recovered was very high, particularly from trench A, which also produced a small coin hoard and the hoard of silver plate. Indeed, the large number of coins is more reminiscent of what one would expect from a town site. Furthermore, there is a high proportion of samian and vessel glass, some of the finest quality.

My interpretation of the whole site as a large and exceptionally well preserved Roman rural spring-line sanctuary, is based on the excavated evidence, combined with the geophysical and earthwork surveys. The site probably reached its zenith in the first half of the 4th century. If shrine structures existed, they would have been accompanied by ancillary buildings such as baths and accommodation for priests and pilgrims. The remains traced so far cover an area in excess of any other Roman religious complex in the west of Britain with the exception of the great temple temenos and baths of Sulis Minerva at Bath, and places the site as potentially one of the largest and most complete sanctuaries in Britain.

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**THE ROMAN ARMY IN OXFORDSHIRE:**
the winter quarters and the parade ground at Alchester

*by Eberhard Sauer with an introduction by Simon Crutchley*

The site was first discovered by the writer in December 1990, during a larger project examining features in the vicinity of the Roman town of Alchester. Vertical photographs taken by the RAF showed a ‘playing card’ shaped enclosure in nearby fields. The appearance of the enclosure, with the apparent discolouration of both its interior and the approaching double ditched feature, suggested the presence of a large enclosed area with internal metalling, with a road leading to it. Together with its shape and proximity to the town, this led to the consideration of Roman military parallels. Before we could propose a Roman date, however, it was necessary to rule out other possible sources. Consultation of other photographs, a variety of maps dating back to Davis' county map of 1797, and documentary sources including Stukeley, revealed no evidence for any known structures. The same was true of both the national and local monument records, which also unearthed the fact that eight Roman coins had been found in these fields during the last century.

Having gone as far as we could from indirect evidence, a field visit was made to the site on 24th April 1991 by myself and Grahame Soffe. We confirmed that there was a distinct difference in the nature of the soil, which contained a far greater concentration of small stones in the given position of the enclosure.

After the production of a brief report in 1992 no further work was undertaken until the dry summer of 1994, when new photographs revealed that there was more to the feature than had first been visible. Another two years passed before we made contact with the Oxford University Archaeological Society (OUAS).

(S.C.)
Excavation and continuing research

In order to uncover the history of the site the OUAS excavated in summer 1996 and 1997 eight trenches, totalling 140 m², and Lindsey Shepherd carried out a resistivity survey, covering 18,000 m². The excavations proved our assumption that these installations were Roman to be correct. The excavated section of the ditch surrounding the central smaller enclosure near its entrance yielded exclusively Roman coarse pottery (down to the very bottom).

The location of this enclosure within a larger enclosure, whose southern half is clearly visible on aerial photographs, indicated that this was not the first monument to be constructed on the site. There are several examples for the Roman army using the same site during the time of the military occupation of the central parts of Britain (mid AD 40s - AD 70s) successively for different installations. Existing ditches were sometimes re-used, such as at Longthorpe (near Peterborough) where the ground-plan of a smaller fort within an earlier vexillation fortress for c. 3,000 men closely resembles that of the enclosures at Alchester.

Was the larger enclosure in Alchester such a vexillation fortress as well? Its exact size is not yet known, but it could be just right: approximately 10 ha. However, the surrounding V-shaped ditch is too shallow (0.95 m) for a permanent army base. One might wonder whether the shallowness is due to the fact that the area used to be very wet and liable to flooding (even within living memory), preventing the construction of very deep ditches. The position between the courses of ancient streams may have provided additional protection. However, though the ancient surface has been lost, and the ditch thus may have been slightly deeper in antiquity, the surface loss cannot have erased the traces of internal buildings, and their absence suggests that it was only a camp. The absolute quantity of finds from the area of the camp was small, compared with finds from other fields in the region, and they would have been far fewer if we had not had the kind help of M. Whitford who invested a great deal of time in exploring the area. The predominance of early objects amongst his finds was exceptional. Six pre-conquest Roman coins and four brooches, datable to the period from AD 43 to the AD 70s (none of them needs to date to the later part of this period), render it unlikely that the camp only existed for a few days; its occupation lasted quite possibly for several months (for one winter?).

A denarius of the emperor Tiberius (RIC II Tiberius 30) found fresh from the ground, minted in Rome in AD 36-37 (discovered by M. Whitford). Photo: Eberhard Sauer

Amongst the few coins a denarius of Tiberius, minted in AD 36-37, is worth mentioning. It was found within the camp, outside the smaller enclosure (51 m SSE of its NE corner). It is almost in mint condition, and is unlikely to have been in circulation for a long time. I am tempted to assume that this is one among other indications for an early date of the camp (mid AD 40s?), but there are not enough finds to rule out that the construction took place only in the AD 50s or 60s.

After its abandonment, the smaller enclosure (1.9 ha) was constructed. Our research has proved that the interior once consisted of a platform, presumably with a level surface. Unlike the defensive ditch around the camp and the drainage ditches along the road, which slowly silted up over a long period, the ditch surrounding the
parade ground rapidly filled up. In one section it was clearly filled in intentionally a short time after its construction, which Dr. Mark Robinson (Oxford University Museum) estimates at only approximately two or three years. In other sections the material from the platform eroded into the ditch. It is hoped that Dr. Robinson’s investigation of soil samples will establish whether the presence of water snails in the ditch was due to episodes of flooding. The wet environment may well have necessitated the raising of the ground to allow regular training without risking the health of men (and horses?). Whether it was also the reason why the installation was soon abandoned, or whether the troops were withdrawn for strategic reasons alone, is not yet established. The total quantity of finds from the ditch as well as from all the trenches we excavated, was exceedingly small. This confirms the results of the excavation of the surrounding ditch: the enclosure, whose construction had evidently involved large-scale earth-moving operations, was abandoned after a short period of use.

What was the function of this enclosure? Similar installations have been found near the fort of Hardknott (Cumbria) and the fortress of Lambaesis (Algeria), both connected with their respective bases by a single road. They were parade grounds, used for military exercises. The enclosure cannot be a fort, not even an uncompleted one, as it lacks gates and the corners are not distinctively rounded, which the corners of forts of this period uniformly are. (The parade grounds in Caerleon and Lambaesis equally have square and almost square corners). The enclosure consisted of a wide, empty, presumably level space, as one would expect in the case of a parade ground but not for any type of civilian installation. In the early years after the invasion of Britain one would not in any case expect civilians to have constructed a complex of distinctive foreign architecture on this scale.

The history of the site can therefore be summarized as follows. First the camp was erected, later a large Roman fort was built nearby. Aerial photography has recently revealed the position of its western defences, W of the (later) Roman town of Alchester. I estimate its size at 3.8-8.6 ha. New indications are emerging to suggest that there was a second (earlier or later) large fort (a ‘vexillation fortress’) below the town, covering presumably a large part of the area later surrounded by the town walls. A parade ground for this fort was constructed, re-using a section of the ditch of the abandoned camp.

This exciting excavation has given us a new insight into the history of the Roman conquest of central Britain and its aftermath, one of the most decisive, yet least known episodes of the history of central Britain. Furthermore, it has demonstrated visibly that the very existence of the Roman Empire was based upon weapon training, much of which took place on parade grounds. This gave the army the military power and superiority necessary to maintain a gigantic Empire over centuries. (E.S.)

The last campaign will take place this summer. Besides the camp two other monuments (presumably early Roman as well) will be investigated for the first time. There will be direct transport daily from Oxford to the site and back. Transport and excavation are, of course, free, but unfortunately accommodation cannot be provided. All who are interested in participating, are invited to contact me: Eberhard Sauer, Keble College, Oxford OX1 3PG.

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The Verulamium Museum, which had been a reduced entry venue with the former RRT Friends became a full Free Entry venue in 1997. David Thorold, Deputy Keeper of Archaeology, has sent in this review of one of the best Roman Galleries in the country.

**Verulamium Museum**

Situated to the south-west of modern St. Albans, Verulamium Museum stands on the edge of a large public park, purchased by the district council in the 1920s. This covers half the total expanse of what was the third largest city of Roman Britain. The Museum itself stands just outside the point where the Roman Basilica and Forum complex once stood.

Within the park, other than the third century city walls that still stand to the eastern end, there are few visible remains of the houses and streets of the Roman city, a result of the heavy robbing of the site that occurred when building material was required for the Norman tower of the abbey of St. Albans. Fortunately, preservation below ground level is much better, with walls, floors and cellars surviving throughout the city, as the cropmarks that appear through the parched earth in the summer will testify.

Although the earliest excavations of Verulamium date back to the previous century, it was Sir Mortimer Wheeler's work in the 1930s that led to the Museum's construction, after his temporary museum—a large wooden shed—proved to be inadequate for the quantity of finds being made. Since then the museum has grown again, when material excavated in the 1950s and 60s by Sheppard Frere was added to the collection, and is intended to expand once more in the next few years.

The museum's aim is to provide an understanding of the daily life and activities of the people who lived in Verulamium, and their predecessors, the Iron Age people of the Catuvellauni, whose tribal capital of Verlamion is also partially buried by the later Roman city. After walking through a brief scene-setting introductory area that explains the rise and fall of both the Iron Age and Roman cities, visitors reach a central area; from here it is possible to choose your own route through the museum as there is no single linear path. Areas are themed into topics that relate to different types of activities that occurred within the Roman city—recreation and rites, merchants and markets, making a living, and food and farming. These four themes are displayed in 'discovery areas' that are accessible from the central gallery, as is a fifth section concerned with the burial of the dead of Verulamium. The approach taken for each theme varies considerably depending on what was felt to be the most effective; each section shares a number of themes. However, the excavated artefacts themselves are always at the core of the display, and information concerning life in Roman times relates directly to the objects themselves. Throughout the Museum, further objects not on traditional open display can be viewed by pulling open the drawers located below each display case.

A variety of multimedia has been incorporated into these areas of the museum at different points, so it is possible to hear Seneca's view of the problems of living over a bathing establishment, or a quote from Plautus' play, *The Prisoners*, or view a selection of Roman coins in close up with the aid of a microscope and TV monitor. Verulamium Museum also uses four touchscreen computers. These function in the same way as the rest of the multimedia formats as a source of additional information to the themes presented within the standard displays. A touchscreen providing details of Roman food is included with the food and farming area, and another concerned with the discovery of the Roman City stands by the mosaics at the far end of the main gallery. It is these mosaics that form possibly the most dramatic displays within the museum. Three 2nd century mosaics have been set into the eastern wall of the museum and present the first view of the museum after leaving the introductory section and entering the central area. Excavated by Wheeler in the 1930s, they have been on display since the museum's opening. Pride of place goes to the magnificent 2nd century scallop shell mosaic, with surrounding wave pattern. It is a particularly unusual design as it is semi-circular in shape, designed to cover the floor of an apsidal room in one of the city houses. Verulamium also houses a particularly good selection of naturalistic figure mosaics that incorporate two dolphin designs, a lion with the head of a stag in its mouth and a bust of a sea (or woodland) god. The first view of these is normally enough to bring gasps of amazement from even the rowdiest children!

From the mosaics, the visitor enters the gallery built in the 1960s to house the extra material recovered by Frere in his
excavations. Displayed are two different houses separated by a street; one the home of a wealthy merchant, the other a carpenter’s workshop with a kitchen behind. Both are reconstructed using evidence acquired from excavation of the originals in the park, so we see the carpenter using a range of tools to make his goods, while next door, the kitchen is filled with the equipment necessary to prepare food – querns, knives and pots, as well as the food itself. Across the street, where a section of Roman veranda and tiled roof can be viewed, stands the merchant’s house. In one room the merchant sits working out his accounts, accompanied by his hound, while next door his wife and young son are occupied with weaving. Further information on the artefacts, people and animals within these displays for both houses is available on touchscreens that explain the available evidence for both reconstructions. As the visitor moves through the different rooms, it is also possible to see how these were constructed in cross section, allowing construction from wood and flint to be displayed. Most of the artefacts on open display within this section are modern replicas of the originals which are, where possible, displayed alongside in cases. The main exceptions to this are the pots in the kitchen setting and much of the plaster that runs through the merchant’s house. Large sections of wall painting from different buildings and rooms have survived at Verulamium and these are displayed within the room settings. Visitors often find it hard to believe that they are the originals, thanks to their vivid colours and fine artistry contained within the designs.

Verulamium Museum also maintains one of the mosaics and its associated underfloor heating system still in situ within the park, while the remaining wall sections and the reconstructed foundations of the London gate, all in the park, are maintained by English Heritage. The Museum is open 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday to Saturday and 2 p.m. – 5 p.m. on Sundays.

The Museum’s displays attract over 75,000 visitors a year, 35,000 of them school children. It has recently been awarded a grant of £622,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards an ambitious £1.2 million extension which will provide a new entrance, shop, introductory displays, public and workshop facilities. The Verulamium Museum Trust has been established to help raise funding (Registered Charity No. 1051868). If you are interested in helping this major Roman Museum progress into the next century, please contact: Mark Suggit, Verulamium Museum, St. Michaels, St. Albans AL3 4SW. Telephone (01727) 819339.

### Snippets

**OLD KILPATRICK**

Villagers at Old Kilpatrick near Dumbarton are attempting to persuade the local council to block re-development on the site of a derelict bus garage at Gavinsburn which straddles the site of the Roman fortress there. Chances finds from the area in this and previous centuries include altars, sculpture and coin hoards.

*Scotland on Sunday 15.02.98*

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**ABBESS FARM ROMAN VILLA**

*by David Perkins*

A second training excavation was held at Abbey Farm near Minster on the Isle of Thanet between the 2nd and 15th August 1997. For this second phase of the project two areas of the site were cleared. The first of these exposed the western half of the main range of Building 1, the villa house, and part of its west wing. The foundation plan was found to constitute a more or less mirror image of that recorded in 1996. A second area of topsoil removal exposed a floor with tiled sluces, discovered by trenching in 1996. This was revealed to be a rectangular structure, Building 2, measuring 3.3 x 5m and was set against a buttressed chalk foundation that could be traced for more than 20m. The latter is tentatively interpreted as the foundation of a garden wall, with Building 2 attached on the outside.

Evidence of Belgic occupation turned up in the form of a shallow pit close to Building 2. This contained midden materials and large sherds from two storage jars.

### Building 1: The Villa House

As had been anticipated, parts of the west wing had suffered less plough damage than the east wing, with occupation and demolition horizons preserved in places, particularly in Room 17. Considerable modification had taken place to the original chalk-foundation building, with the addition of masonry wall foundations creating Room 15b with 15a. Moreover, sections cut to the west and south of the chalk foundations to Room 18 disclosed the presence of the deep-sunk floors and surviving walls of Rooms 19, 20 and 21.

Subsequent to the discovery of Rooms 20 and 21, a re-examination of the cropmark aerial photograph suggests the true width of the west wing may be double that of the east wing, perhaps a result of a massive re-building operation which may have included Rooms 5, 10 and 11.
and Room 15. Room 19 is of particular interest, in that it appears to be an angled corridor entered by steps and descending to a below ground-level chamber.

**Building 2:**
This small, one-room structure has two tiled sluices, at about a 4 degree slope to the horizontal, which join another similarly angled sluice that empties through a buttress at the north-west angle of the building into the end of a ditch 1.55m wide and 0.70m deep. A possible interpretation for this building is that it may have functioned as a latrine, although these are very uncommon on villa sites.

With about two thirds of the villa house excavated many questions remain unanswered, including dates of construction and demolition. Finds of window glass, mosaic fragments and painted wall plaster continue to reinforce the impression of a high quality building. The discovery of well preserved remains extending from the west wing seems to hold great promise for a further season in 1998. Excavation of the hatched area on the plan should complete investigation of the main villa building, leaving its infrastructure as the subject for further research. Field scatter suggests the presence of at least one other masonry building within 200m of the main house, and a search by trenching might well reveal less substantial outbuildings, trackways, gardens and field systems.
SPECIAL BOOKS OFFER
ONLY TO ARA MEMBERS

The Cotswold town of Cirencester is unquestionably a key site in the understanding of late Roman Britain. As the second largest city in the province, Corinium had a major role to play which is only now being acknowledged. It lies central to the most prosperous areas of 4th century Roman Britain and has evidenced expansion and development which contrasts sharply with the decay of Londinium. The two special offers made this month provide scholarly insights into this ancient town.

Town and Landscape presents the results of innovative research into the structure of archaeological records appropriate to urban sites. Chapters examine Prehistory, Roman and Mediaeval Cirencester and its environs, compiling an overview of the archaeology of the town.

Houses of Roman Cirencester covers excavations carried out on some of the domestic buildings of Corinium and incorporates the report on the important Beeches Road site excavated between 1970-73. Considerable detail is afforded to the mosaics found in the town, making this extensively illustrated volume essential for all those readers interested in our Roman urban centres.

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ARCHAEOLOGY COURSES IN 1998

SUMMER COURSES AT BIGNOR ROMAN VILLA
The Field Archaeology Unit of The Institute of Archaeology, University College, London, will be holding a further season of training excavations on this famous British villa throughout July and August.

Courses incorporate Excavation Techniques, Surveying, Planning and Drawing. For more detailed information and application forms please contact, as soon as possible, Mrs. Sheila Maltby, The Field Archaeology Unit, 1 West Street, Ditchling, Hassocks, West Sussex, BN6 8TS.

PRACTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY DAY SCHOOLS IN KENT
A series of Saturday day schools in practical archaeology, including maritime subjects, will be held in Faversham during September, October and November. For more detailed information contact: The Kent Archaeological Field School, School Farm Oast, Graveney Road, Faversham, Kent. Tel: 01795 37883 or 0585 700 112.