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**On the Roman Wall of Gloucester**

by J. Bellows  
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## ON THE ROMAN WALL OF GLOUCESTER.

BY JOHN BELLOWS.

In the Spring of 1873, in the course of erecting some buildings on the ground behind Eastgate House, Gloucester, it occurred to me to make a trial cutting, or pit, in search of the city-wall. Judging from the direction it takes on the other side of the street, as well as from its course as shown on Speed's Map, I thought some remains of it ought to be found in the garden I was about to build upon. Besides this, there was the name itself, East-gate House, applied to the last house in the Eastgate Street, which added to the probability of its really marking the site of the ancient entrance to the city. Such a name is not always a sure guide, but it is very often so. We have instances of this in the present exploration of Palestine by the Royal Engineers, who have, again and again, found the Arabic name of a village to be a clue to the site of a place mentioned in the Scriptures; and to cite an instance nearer home, we may take the case of *Caerwent*. This place, which was formerly a great Roman Station, has been so altered and destroyed in some parts, that the street which must once have led from its centre to the north wall has now utterly disappeared. The present incumbent was one day speaking to one of the villagers about a cottage that stands just on the outskirts, when he chanced to ask if there was any particular name by which it was known. He was told that it was called "*Northgate Cottage*." Suspecting at once what this might indicate, he went into the garden, and searching behind a little thicket of bushes, he found the ruins of the Northern Roman Gate of *VENTA SILURUM*.

So much for the chances in favour of discovering the wall on the spot in question. The chance against doing so was, that a large part of the masonry disappeared, soon after the restoration

of Charles II. Here and there, a house built actually upon the wall made the removal of a piece impossible; and as the Castle at the East Gate with its adjoining premises belonged to the Corporation, there was a possibility that the stones might not have been removed, except just at the surface.

And so it proved. In less than two hours from the time my man began digging, he found the wall; and in the course of two hours more he found what very much surprised me—several pieces of Roman Pottery.

I do not know that any one had ever ventured to hint that the *Roman Wall* of the city, or any portion of it, was in existence. Most people knew there *had* been a Roman Wall; but they fancied such traces as now exist were of mediæval origin. Even Speed, in his Map, published two centuries and a half ago, marked the eastern line of wall as “Norman.”

A remark may not be out of place here, on the danger of relying on merely *negative* evidence in these matters. Less than a century ago, an antiquary of some standing, Reynolds, who edited the “*Iter Antonini*,” wrote that there was nothing whatever about the city of GLOUCESTER, except the termination of its name, to shew that the Romans had ever had any connection with the place. Not long after, he appended a foot-note to this remark, to say that since he had written it, a young man named LYSONS, had communicated some interesting particulars of Roman objects found at Kingsholm, near the city. This young man was SAMUEL LYSONS, whose name as an antiquary afterwards became known throughout Europe, and who shewed conclusively in his papers in the *Archæologia*, in 1819, that Gloucester was occupied by the Roman forces from the very outset, and during the lifetime of Claudius himself. Perhaps in no other town in Britain, have such numbers of coins of this Emperor been found: and what is more important as evidence on the point in question, such numbers of *forged* coins of Claudius. LYSONS gives an engraving of some of them found fifty years ago, and I have one now before me, exactly matching

his drawing, which was dug up in Mark Street, Kingsholm, about six weeks since. Perhaps I should explain that Kingsholm is the name of a district about a mile off to the north of the city, and which the Romans used largely as a burial place. Remains of more than a thousand skeletons had been found at the period when LYSONS wrote, as well as numbers of cinerary urns. Roman coins have been found so abundantly there, that the manager of the Gloucestershire Bank, Frederick Jewesbury, tells me that it was a common amusement of the boys of this city, when he was at school, to go to Wheeler's Nursery Grounds after any shower, to pick up Roman coins, which were laid bare by the rain. Even at this moment, I believe that for every *English* coin found in Gloucester, there are six Roman.

Mark Street is a part of Kingsholm in which the remains are especially abundant. At the time I laid bare the wall which is the subject of this paper, a carpenter brought me a coin, very much crusted with verdigris, which had been picked out of a bank of earth at the end of Mark Street. Though it did not look promising, I took it home and cleaned it. I really believed it was nothing more than a halfpenny of George II; but the words came gradually into view, as I removed the verdigris, "NERO CAESAR AUGUSTUS." It was a small matter, but coming as it did, unexpectedly, it brought home to one more forcibly than anything else had ever done, the reality of the Roman rule in Britain; for this copper coin of Nero's was a witness of a time when his power was as truly felt in this city of Gloucester, as ever it was in the Palace of the Cæsars.

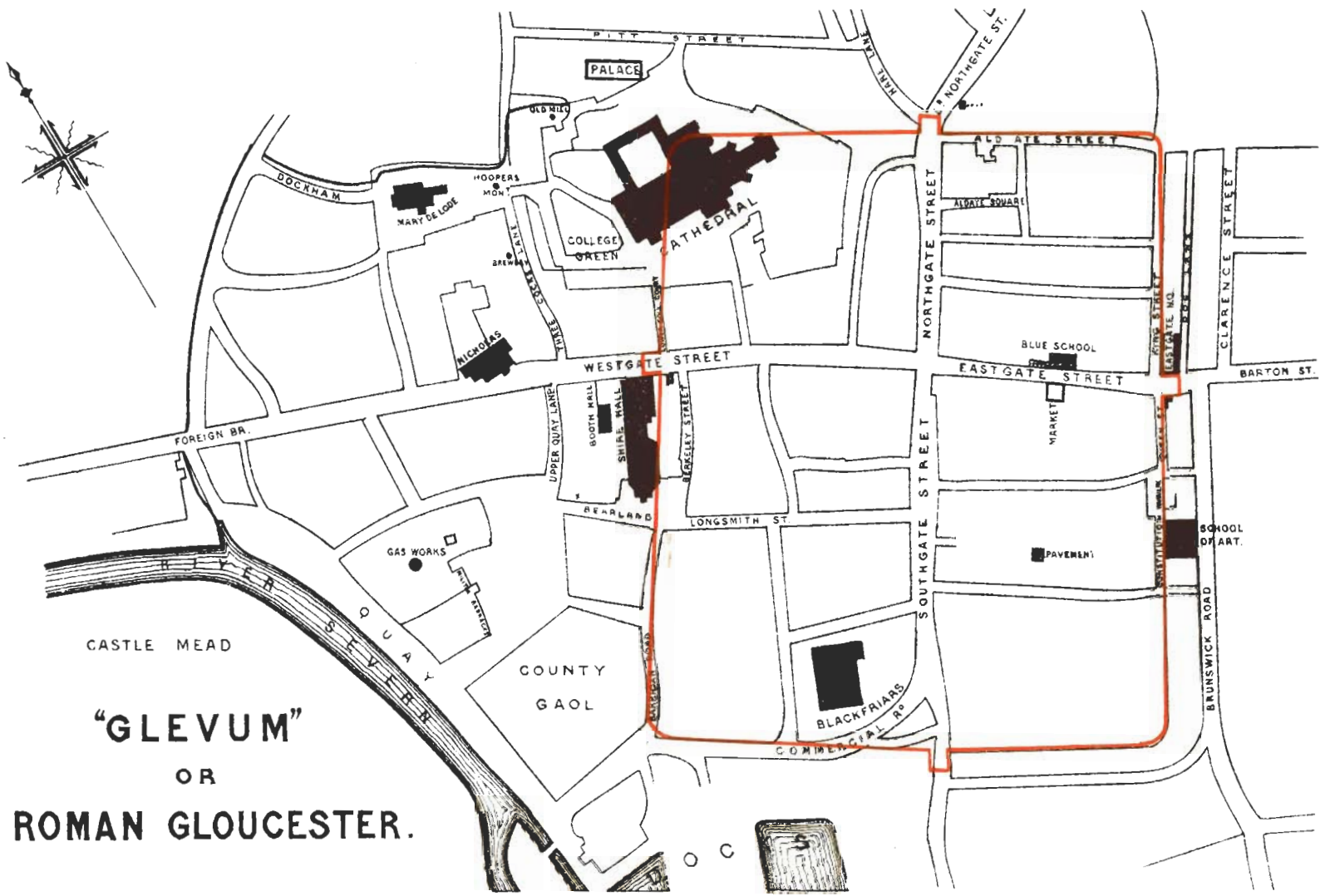
Besides the abundant evidence furnished by coins, there is the fact that Gloucester retains perhaps more accurately than any other town in Britain, the Roman lines of its streets. Neither in York, where the 6th legion was quartered, nor at Chester, where the 20th was stationed, nor at Caerleon, the head-quarters of the 2nd, is there anything comparable to the perfect streets of the Polybian camp shewn in this city. During the whole period of the Roman Empire many things in the military system

underwent radical changes, so that a legion in the time of Cæsar and a legion in the time of Hadrian were very differently constituted bodies. Similarly a radical change took place in the whole system of castrametation between the time of Polybius and that of later writers on the subject. The Polybian Camp presents an arrangement of extreme simplicity and order, which he says was carried out by the Romans in every time and place, so far as the nature of the ground would admit; so that a soldier, drafted from one end of the world to another, on entering a camp he had never seen, at once knew the station of every regiment, (I purposely use the modern word) and of every officer in it.

About the time of the Antonines all this was changed; and Hyginus, who describes a camp of this period, makes it crowded and ill-arranged to a degree that drove General Roy almost to despair. General Roy wrote a very exhaustive work on the Roman Military Remains in Britain; a subject upon which he was able to bring to bear his actual professional knowledge. He notices one remarkable thing: and that is that the general plan and dimensions of the Roman Camps in Britain, while they do not exactly correspond with those of Polybius, yet are very much nearer to the Polybian than to any later description of Camp.

Now compare for a moment the plan of a Polybian Camp, given in Smith's Dictionary of Antiquities, with the main streets of this city of Gloucester as they stand at this moment.

The Camp was a square, or nearly so, crossed by two principal ways. The front, facing the enemy and embracing the longer arm of the cross made by the streets, formed the quarters of the private soldiers—infantry, cavalry, and so on. The shorter arm contained the quarters of the general and his staff, and of the paymaster; and the baggage and stores. Along the part called the *Via Principalis*, were the quarters of the Tribunes of the Cohorts, or in modern phrase the Colonels of the several regiments composing the Army Corps.



CASTLE MEAD

**"GLEVUM"**  
OR  
**ROMAN GLOUCESTER.**

In the centre of the cross, at the highest point, and in front of the general's quarters was the depository for the Eagles and Standards. This is precisely the culminating point in our own streets.

Now let us take the present streets of Gloucester. At the very spot marked by Polybius as the general's quarters, and under the existing Blue-coat School, as well as two houses west of it, there have been found lines of tessellated Roman pavement extending for 70 to 80 feet in length. One of these floors measured 30 feet long by 20 feet broad. The others I have no details of beyond their linear run. The use of tesserae seems to have been a mark—I do not say an exclusive mark—of official occupation, for Suetonius mentions in his life of Julius Cæsar, that that General never marched without the materials for making tessellated pavement, as part of his baggage.

Only a few months ago in company with our president, I found some tesserae with the mortar attached to them at the Roman Signal Station at the top of Stinchcombe Hill.

The pavement you visited this afternoon, stands at the point where the lieutenant-generals of the legion had their quarters.

Negative evidence, as I have already remarked, should be received cautiously; but there is a singular piece of negative evidence with respect to the pottery found in this city, which I cannot pass without mention. "Samian" ware was the most expensive sort used by the Romans, and therefore its presence indicates a certain social status on the part of its former possessors. The late Henry Arkell, a builder of this city, who was a careful preserver of the Antiquities with which he met in course of digging foundations etc., has told me that he had never known Samian ware found more than a hundred feet *west* of the Cross. He knew no reason for this; but the reason will be perfectly clear if we keep the plan of the camp before us. The western gate was the one facing the enemy, for the enemy were the Silures, over the Severn, and therefore the western end of the city was the quarters of the private soldiers, who could

not indulge in such expensive tastes, as costly earthenware any more than a private soldier of to-day could indulge in Worcester China, to use for his cooking utensils.

Conversely, I have found in my own excavation, and lying against the wall at the Decuman gate, at the back of the Camp, and therefore close to the quarters of the general and his staff, the remains of such rare and beautiful pottery, that they would by themselves make a fair museum. The entire collections of Caerleon and Caerwent cannot shew such a variety as this one pit offers.

Take for example these two cards. Let me remark that a mortarium is a kitchen utensil frequently found with Roman Remains: a sort of bowl made of coarse clay, with quartz crystals imbedded in it to afford a grinding or tritulating surface. It is almost always met with made of this coarse, yellow clay. A specimen at Uriconium is made of Broseley Clay: here is a fragment of one of the same precise sort and shape. At all events a mortarium is a *kitchen pot*. At Caerleon, they have found pieces of two mortaria made of Samian; a very unusual thing, so far as I have been able to ascertain. The authorities at the British Museum assure me they have no specimen of a mortarium made of Samian; though Roach Smith figures some in his "Roman London." Now here, on these two Cards, are pieces of no fewer than seven different mortaria *all* made of the finest Samian. I take this as a case parallel to that of discovering such things as colanders made of the rarest Oriental porcelain, in a gentleman's house of the present day: that is, it would be a fair inference that he is on comfortable terms with his banker. The reason then, for such a quantity of costly ware being found at this particular spot was, I would venture to suggest, because the East Gate was the one next the officers' quarters; and this was their waste heap.

As I went on excavating, day after day, and found all along the lower part of the wall, a continuous heap of Roman pottery, Roman bone pins, and Roman remains of all kinds, and this

- FRAGMENT OF "SAMIAN" WARE -

- FOUND AT EASTGATE, GLOUCESTER -



• J. P. Moore A.R.C.T. •  
• Gloucester •

without discovering a single scrap of anything mediæval or modern amongst them, the conviction forced itself upon me that the wall itself must be Roman. But some of my visitors said, "No. Roman mortar has always powdered brick in it. This mortar has none. Roman walls are always bonded with courses of brick or tile, and this is not; therefore, this wall cannot be Roman." It was in vain that I pointed to the hundreds and hundreds of unquestionably Roman articles. They shook their heads and fell back upon their pounded brick and their courses of tile. But while most Roman walls in South Britain are distinguished by one or both of these marks, it must not be forgotten that the greatest work ever built by the Romans in this land—the wall from the Tyne to the Solway has *neither*, but simply consists of stone set in mortar, or grouted with mortar of lime and sand and gravel only. That wall is known to have been built by Hadrian and, therefore, considerably within the first century of the Roman occupation. Common sense alone would shew that the invading armies would hardly make bricks, merely to pound them up for mortar, or even wait to wall their cities until they could put in courses of artificial stone, where they had abundance of natural building material ready to hand, as in our own district; but we look back upon the long period of their rule in Britain from a distance that really may be said to foreshorten it. They were here nearly four hundred years—say as long as it is back from our own time to the days of Henry VII: and they saw not a few even of their temples fall into decay and re-built in that period. After a long occupation then, and when they had old materials to use up, they naturally enough used pounded brick in their mortar; but not till then. We may, therefore, venture to lay down as a rule, that the presence of this material in a Roman Wall helps to fix its date as a somewhat late one. I have taken it for granted that the Britons did not make tile before the Roman period, and even after it, all the marks that are stamped on tiles or bricks are, I believe official or military ones, and not the names of private makers like those we see on pottery. On the Kentish coast, for instance, the tiles seem

to be stamped as made by the marines of the fleet—at Chester by the 20th Legion—at York by the sixth Legion—at Caerleon by the 2nd Legion,—and so on.

But not only has the wall of *Hadrian* no brick in it. The same may be said of the wall of many other Roman Stations such as Cirencester, Kenchester, Chester, &c. Yet more than this. The wall of Gloucester presents three different sorts of masonry in different parts. First there are the lower courses of hewn stone in large blocks, about 16 inches in depth, and measuring from 2 feet 6 in. to 4 feet 6 in. in length. Near the Gates they are much larger still. I intended to have gone all the way down to the foundation in my excavation, but was stopped at the second course of this hewn stone, by coming to a spring of water, strongly saline, as it happens, like those of the Cheltenham and Gloucester Spas. Wherever this spring reaches, the stones are laid without cement of any kind, allowing the water to play freely between the joints. I find from the Secretary of the Archæological Society at Chester, who has kindly answered my enquiries on this point, that the part of the walls of that city which faces the meadow called the Roodee, the drill ground of the 20th Legion, and which is liable, like our own meadows, to floods, is built in exactly the same manner, that is, with large squared blocks of stone, laid without mortar, so as to allow free ingress and egress for the water.

Above these courses of hewn stone, comes, in my own premises, a solid mass of masonry formed by two lines of facing stones, flat-pointed with mortar, and filled in in the interspace with rubble 5 feet in width, laid dry and grouted; that is, with liquid mortar poured in upon the stones to fill up the interstices. The mass so formed is as hard as a solid rock, and well justifies the saying they have in France, to express durable masonry, that it was “built by the Romans.”

About fifty yards from my part of the wall, however, and on the same side of the street as this museum, the upper part of the structure is built with facing stones, but filled in with

herring-bone work, that is, a row of stones laid aslant against each other like the volumes in an untidy book-case: and then a couple or three inches of mortar laid along the top. On this comes a row standing the reverse way—and so on to the top. It is not such good work as that at Eastgate House, but it is common in Roman masonry.

Now the wall of Hadrian presents us with both the solid and the herring-bone masonry, in different parts of its course, and Collingwood Bruce, who has devoted a large part of his life-time to the examination of this monument, draws particular attention to the way in which the facing stones in it are cut, so as to form a good bond with the centre mass. It will be evident that if these stones were squared, or very nearly so, that they would form, as it were, a separate wall of themselves, very slightly connected with the mass in the centre; and consequently, that a few blows of a battering-ram, or an attack upon the wall with crowbar and pick-axe, would loosen the face away from the rest without much difficulty. By cutting the facing-stones in the form of wedges, however, this weakness is obviated; for as the row of wedge-shaped stones are placed with their broad parts outwards, the grout, or fluid mortar of the centre, runs up between their thinner edges, and binds the whole, both centre and facings, in one homogeneous mass.

Exactly as the facing-stones are cut and set in the wall of Hadrian, they are cut and set in the wall of Gloucester. Here is a stone from the Eastgate, and another from near the Northgate, to shew what I mean.

Should anyone desire still further evidence that the wall is really *Roman*, and not mediæval, I would call his attention to a row of holes running along one of the courses at irregular intervals of three or four feet, and passing right through the structure. Many of my friends who have examined them say that they are of very frequent occurrence in Roman walls; but I was for a considerable time unable to obtain from them any satisfactory reason for their existence. Some said they were for

draining; but inasmuch as the level of the street, at the time the wall was built, would have been about two feet below them, this would not do. That they were never intended as loop-holes for observation, or for shooting through, was sufficiently clear from their being crooked; for even the Romans, sharp as they unquestionably were, could not see round a corner in the middle of masonry five or six feet in thickness.

I turned to Vitruvius, in the hope that he might throw some light upon the matter; and he does. This is what he says in his chapter on "the foundations of walls and towers:"

"The walls ought to be tied, from front to rear, with many pieces of charred Olive-wood; by which means the two faces, thus connected, will endure for ages. The advantage of the use of the olive is, that it is neither affected by weather, by rot, or by age. Buried in the earth, or immersed in water, it lasts unimpaired; and for this reason, not only walls, but foundations, and such walls as are of extraordinary thickness, tied together therewith, are exceedingly lasting."

Here was the clue, plainly enough, to the holes: for as Olive did not grow in Britain, the Roman carpenters took Oak instead, and, as all men are the creatures of habit, they sawed it to the size they had been always accustomed to—that is, Olive quarter-stuff—and built it in. The Oak has decayed, and the holes are filled with fine vegetable mould in its place.

We now have some data before us, which may enable us to form an idea of the age of the wall of Gloucester; for while it differs from the wall of London, for example, in having neither pounded brick in the mortar, nor bonding courses of tile, in both these respects, as well as in the shape of its stones and the manner of setting them, it agrees with the wall from the Tyne to the Solway, which we know to have been built about the year 120.

Besides the evidence of coins, which shows the city to have been occupied during the life-time of Claudius, (for no forger would select the money of a by-gone reign for his purpose) we have the presence of pottery of a very fragile sort, made in the

*second* century, and lying against the wall. It is pretty clear that the wall must have been built *before* the ware could have been thrown against it.

But in the case of Hadrian's wall we have actual lapidary inscriptions stating that portions of it were built by the *Second Augustan Legion*. May I be excused for a few moments digression with regard to this force. I do not recollect having seen it noticed in any of the few works I have been able to read upon the subject of the Roman Invasion, that a large part of the army that landed here under Aulus Plautius consisted of the troops that had been serving in Germany; yet it is clear from Tacitus that this was the case.

When Germanicus went down the Rhine to retrieve the loss the Romans had suffered by the destruction of the three Legions under Varus, his army consisted in all of eight Legions.

One of these, the *twentieth*, was part of the force under Caecina, stationed at what is now Bonn (then the Ubian Altar), the *second* and *fourteenth* were part of the division that sailed down the Rhine to Holland (I purposely use modern names for clearness sake) under Publius Vitellius, the Uncle of the Emperor of that name. It will be remembered that at the outset of the Roman power in Britain, four Legions in all were employed here,—that is, the three I have mentioned, with the addition of the *ninth*, which, at the time Germanicus was on his campaign, was quartered in Hungary (Pannonia).

When we consider the size of a fleet required to transport an army of thirty or forty thousand men, with several thousand horse, and all the necessary *matériel*, the reason for the troops on the Rhine being ordered on this particular service is clear. They were already in possession of the necessary ships; and they had had some experience, not only of the navigation of the River, but of the shores of Holland as well. They had only to coast along to Calais or Boulogne to make the descent on Britain comparatively easy. Their coming from North Germany explains why the fourteenth Legion was accompanied by the *Batavian*

Auxiliaries, who stormed the Isle of Anglesey by swimming the Straits. This was the Legion that defeated Boadicea, and which bore the title of "the Conquerors of Britain."

I have made this brief digression about the Legions, because a clear idea of the general military movements of the Romans at the outset of their power in Britain, is the only foundation-stone for a clear idea of what they did in this particular locality.

Flavius Vespasian was serving in Germany, when he was ordered to take part in the invasion of Britain, with the Second Legion, of which he was the commanding officer. As Dion Cassius tells us they sailed *westward*, and as Suetonius says that Vespasian conquered the Isle of Wight, it is most likely that the Second Legion landed there, and afterwards moved north-westward on the main-land. We find the first conquest mentioned here to be that of Boduni, in whose town a garrison was left. Ptolemy tells us the town of the Boduni was Corinium, that is, Cirencester. Dion Cassius, continuing his narrative of the course of Vespasian, tells us he went *further*, and describes his coming to the banks of a large river, on the opposite shore of which the Britons lay in careless security because they thought he could not pass it without a bridge. This river, HORSLEY considers to have been the SEVERN; and as we have no other river in this part of the land large enough to prove an obstacle to a Roman army, there is good reason to think he is right. Be this as it may, it is clear from Tacitus that at this very boundary the invaders stopped; for they did not overcome the Silures until long after. Ho tells us that "the Silures were not so easily quelled,.....and that Ostorius judged it expedient to form a camp for the Legions in the heart of their country." A little further on he tells us "A Camp had been formed in the country of the Silures, and a chain of forts was to be erected." We know from Ptolemy, and the Antonine Itinerary, as well as from every saw-pit dug in the place, that the spot where that camp was placed was Caerleon, and that it was occupied for many generations by the Second Augustan Legion—the same Legion

that fought under Vespasian, and, therefore, the one which left a garrison in Cirencester, in its first march over the Cotteswold Hills.

I have pointed out the exact correspondence in the masonry of the wall of Gloucester and the wall of Hadrian; and the fact that vexillations of the Second Augustan Legion built considerable portions of the latter, as is testified by their own inscriptions.

I have somewhere met with a statement, which I regret I did not note down at the moment, and which I cannot, therefore, quote as an authority, that the pottery and ware found at Rutupiæ (Richboro' in Kent), and that at Caerleon, show special points of similarity.

Now the last mention we have of the Second Legion in Britain, is in the *Notitia*—a Roman War-office document, dating as late as the beginning of the 5th century. We find there that the officer in command of the Second Augustan Legion is down in the list of those who were under "the Count of the Saxon Shore," and that he is quartered at "*Rutupiæ*."

I have already mentioned that two unusual pieces of pottery have been found at Caerleon—namely, of Samian Mortaria; and that I have found fragments of precisely the same sort at Gloucester. This identity of pottery in the Station known to have been built by the Second Legion—Caerleon—and in the Station whose walls I have shown to have been built in every respect like those of Caerleon—should, I submit have some little weight, where we can have but very little to guide us.

Each Legion in the Roman army had its peculiar badge, commemorative, either of its origin, or of some memorable event in its history. Thus the Twentieth, stationed at Chester, had for its emblem the boar: while the Second, stationed in our own district, carried the badge of the *sea goat*.

Need I say that in all my digging I have looked out eagerly for anything in the shape of an inscription, in the hope that I

might get a confirmation of the point, whether the Second Legion, or a detachment of it, had really built this wall, and been quartered in Glevum.

Up to this time I have found none. There still remained the possibility of some of the Samian ware shewing their *badge*. If that badge had been a cock, or a rabbit, or a statue of one of the gods, I don't know that finding it on the Samian ware would have been worth much; for these were stock ornaments used by all the makers, as freely as grocers of the present day use the Royal Arms to ornament their tea papers.

The probability was, however, that besides these common patterns which might be bought as a matter of course, that a great brigade like the Second Augustan Legion would at least have some ware made specially for it, stamped with the figure of the sea-goat; just as a regimental mess of the present day might have plate and linen marked with its own crest.

And this I have been fortunate enough to find. I have found a piece of Samian stamped with the sea-goat, the emblem of the Second Legion, in the same pit with the rest. Let me repeat. The sea-goat is not an every-day ornament like some of the other marks,—it is a special mould cut on purpose; as really as a land goat would be if stamped on the ware or the plate of the Welsh Fusiliers.

And *why* was the sea-goat the emblem of this particular force?

We must recollect that the Roman Legions were numbered for some official purpose, but that they were generally known by some specific name—like the 92nd Highlanders for instance.

This was because there were often two or more of the same number. For instance, *legio sexta victrix*, stationed at York; called so to distinguish it from *legio sexta ferrata*, serving in Syria.

The reason, then, why this fragment of pottery bears the stamp of the sea-goat, is this: Augustus Cæsar was born under the sign of Capricorn; and, therefore, chose it for his own special emblem; and as he himself raised this particular Legion, it took his personal badge along with its title of *Legio Secunda Augusta*.

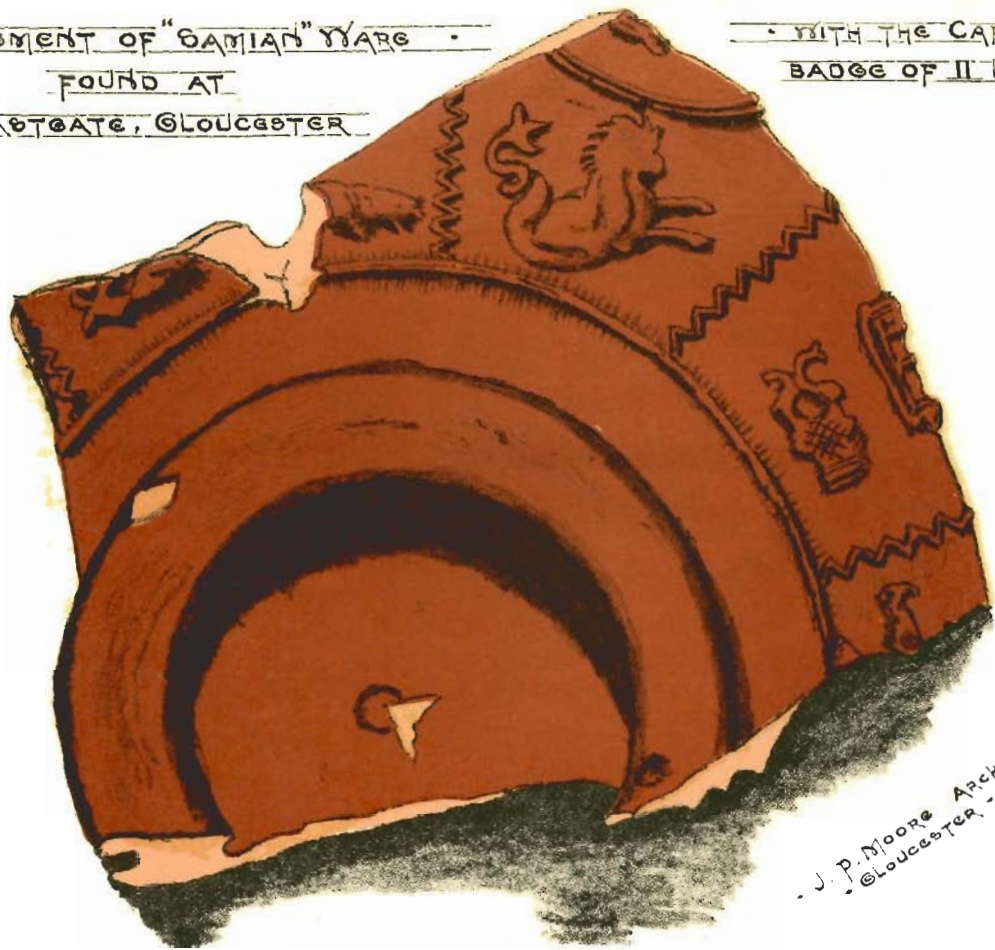
· FRAGMENT OF "SAMIAN" WARE ·

FOUND AT

CASTLE, GLOUCESTER

· WITH THE CAPRICORN

BADGE OF II LEGION



*J. P. Moore Archt.  
GloUCESTER.*