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Presidential Address

by W. H. Knowles
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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

by W. H. KNOWLES, F.S.A.

read at Banbury 9 July 1930

UNTIL a few years ago my life was spent on the borderland of England and Scotland, whose history in Roman times and during the medieval centuries was one of continual strife—a country abounding in interesting examples of military architecture.

Thereabouts is the greatest of our historic monuments, the Roman Wall, with its forts and stations, pursuing its course from sea to sea over wild and pleasant moorland, and, equally impressive in their rude strength, many castles of the Norman invader. Some of them, like Bamburgh, perched on precipitous sites by the sea combine to form pictures of supreme grandeur.

Such structures are essentially military in character and in complete contrast to the charm and variety of the ecclesiastical and domestic architecture of Gloucestershire, which harmonize so well with the quiet beauty of their picturesque surroundings.

Since my sojourn in your county you have been increasingly kind to me, a stranger within your gates, and now before I am sufficiently acquainted with its antiquities you have thrust upon me the great distinction of becoming your President. I am indeed sincerely grateful for this crowning mark of your kindness. So far I have enjoyed the fare provided by my fellow members; today I realize my unworthiness to occupy the position of my predecessors in the chair, who were able to impart useful information concerning the history of the county.

Although quite properly an inaugural address is one

of the duties imposed on a president, it would be presumption on my part—indeed I am not qualified—to attempt a discourse on the lines of past presidents. I am too young a member of your Society, but as an old member of other Societies equally prominent with your own, and in whose activities I have been intimately concerned, I propose to introduce to your notice a section of the work accomplished by some of them, with the object of stimulating in you a keener interest in field research work, so far, I think, indifferently supported by this Society.

Our newspapers constantly inform us that in half the counties of England excavations are proceeding and discoveries which add definitely to our knowledge are being made. Such work is of the greatest historical and archaeological importance; indeed it is one of the primary purposes, so our rules inform us, for which our own Society was formed.

Our near neighbours Somerset and Wiltshire have successfully engaged during past years in excavations, and incidentally in recovering evidence of a certain Celtic civilization, later displaced or overshadowed by the Romans. Mr St. George Gray and Captain and Mrs Cunnington have directed the operations, and the result of their labours provides valuable and acceptable contributions to the journals of their respective societies. In Northumberland the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle on Tyne is continuously employed at considerable cost in investigating the secrets and the problems of construction of the Roman Wall and its camps. At the moment they are engaged in elucidating the course of the wall between Wallsend and Newcastle and have received substantial assistance from the Corporations of those towns. Before the War a special committee, during eight seasons and at an annual cost of £400, undertook the excavation of Corstopitum (Corbridge), a small town or supply depot for the Wall.

It is common knowledge that with the co-operation and under the direction of the Society of Antiquaries, the Corporation of St. Albans are to engage in the exploration of Roman Verulam on a site recently acquired by them.

In Gloucestershire during the last century a limited number of British earthworks were indifferently examined, perhaps plundered would scarcely be too strong a term. Yet this observation is not to be understood as wholly condemnatory. The workers were pioneers and their investigations, frequently unrecorded, were insufficient to yield definite and precise data on the scientific lines now employed by competent excavators, who furthermore enjoy increased facilities for making comparative deductions.

Similarly several Roman sites were explored and recorded with greater care, and with superior results which testify to the wealth of the material and the exceptional quality of the details of the country houses. Such for example as the wonderful mosaics uncovered at Woodchester for our inspection four years ago, and the extensive and interesting Chedworth, now a national possession, apart from the minor examples at Spoonley Wood and elsewhere. It was your pleasure and privilege to visit last summer, under the guidance of Lord Bledisloe and Dr Mortimer Wheeler, the unique group of unusual buildings forming a posting station at Lydney. The town of Cirencester, 240 acres in extent, is a place which has yielded definite and consistent archaeological evidence of buildings and mosaics as recorded by James Buckman, Wilfred Cripps and Mr St. Clair Baddeley.

These last few sentences seem to suffice as a summary of the major items of research conducted in the county, most of them largely if not entirely the accomplishment of individual enterprise. It is indeed a fortunate circumstance for the credit of Gloucestershire that in the past there were archaeological enthusiasts to

bear the burden. But surely the time has now arrived when something should be undertaken by this Society on a sensible scale on a site of prime importance, which will materially add to our knowledge of a particular epoch—a site which will stimulate interest and warrant us in asking the assistance not only of our members but of those outside the Society.

Although a medievalist let me say that I realize that the epoch needing most elucidation from an historic point of view should be either (1) the examination of a comparative series of barrows or sites occupied during the British period, or (2) of an important Roman site.

In the former field Gloucestershire possibly vies with Wiltshire and Yorkshire in the number and diversity of its prehistoric earthworks. There are abundant traces of the early occupation of the Cotswold range prior to the arrival of the Romans, including, it is computed, no less than 30 long barrows of the flint implement period—among them Uley barrow, one of the most remarkable of the chambered tumuli in England—and 100 round barrows or grave mounds of the Bronze and Iron Ages, devoid of stone chambers, containing both unburnt and burnt bodies. And in addition along the crest of the hills from Clifton Downs to Bredon beyond the Cotswolds, a distance of 50 miles, there are camps and earthworks suggesting a series of ancient defences.

Canon Greenwell, Prof. Rolleston, G. B. Witts, G. F. Playne and others have variously recorded the result of their labours in the county, and Mr O. G. S. Crawford has recently published a work on its prehistoric remains in which he enumerated examples of the long barrow type.

During the past year your Excavation Committee undertook the examination of Belas Knap, under the supervision of Sir James Berry, who placed his services at the disposal of your Society. Interesting results have followed and it is possible that other sites will become accessible for exploration. If you choose to regard it

as such, Belas Knap may be considered as a beginning of a comprehensive series of excavations of the period which may rival the successes of our neighbours in Wiltshire and Somerset.

Incidentally may I remind you that about 70 of these Gloucestershire earthworks have been scheduled and placed under the protection afforded by the Ancient Monuments Act of 1913, which ensures their preservation for all time if only you will make yourselves acquainted with them, do a little weeding, and observe and report any damage they may sustain.

The other equally rich and vastly important field awaiting your attention is the extraordinary number of Roman sites, on some of which the spade has been employed in revealing the secrets which lie buried beneath the soil. Two of these are of outstanding interest and pre-eminently suited to our purpose. To one of them, Cirencester, we have referred; in respect of the other, the city of Gloucester—the Roman fortress or *colonia* known as Glevum—I wish particularly to enlist your interest because it is the primary subject both in time and place in the history of our county.

It is to be remarked that the epoch which linked our islands with a great European civilization provided the earliest chapter of the history of Britain, and extended over a period of four centuries; yet about the civilian life of those years contemporary historians record deplorably little. The neglect of the historian must be remedied by the archaeologist, who can provide supplementary and illuminating information of the period by the examination of the surviving examples of its structural and decorative remains.

To assist us in picturing Gloucestershire in Roman times may I recall how the Roman province was practically divided into military and civilian areas. The frontier region about Hadrian's Wall constituted the military portion and was occupied by the permanent army, and

to this district tumult and disorder were confined. South of York peace and tranquility reigned and here the conquerors were left in undisturbed security to conduct their beneficial work of development, and, although each city was left singularly free to make its own regulations, the elements of Roman civilization found their way increasingly into the nation. The native population gradually absorbed the language, the art and the culture of the Romans. Racial barriers were broken down, and the Romanization of the Briton was effected by granting the franchise and other privileges to those who conformed to the authority of the State. So Britain became a province of the Roman Empire, and during the occupation the Celt and auxiliaries from other lands were pleased to consider themselves Romans.

Within the civilian portion of the province the area about Gloucestershire flourished exceedingly after the conquering legions of Claudius had effected the subjection of the Silures, who occupied Monmouthshire and the country west of it. Indeed it may be claimed that it ranked among the richest districts of the province, within whose area was the singularly large town of Cirencester, second only in size to London; the *colonia* of Gloucester, to be associated in importance with Lincoln, York and Colchester; and scattered about its vast habitable plain an exceptional number of extremely luxurious country houses.

From the few observations in which we have indulged it is surely obvious that the important subject—the centre about which others radiate—is the City of Gloucester, whose site was determined by its strategic importance in the lower basin of the Severn, which commanded the principal passage into, and facilitated the conquest of Wales.

At the time of the first attempt to subdue the Silures in the middle of the first century Glevum (Gloucester) was probably built on the lines of an Hyginian camp,

but afterwards modified when the Silures had been completely overcome and the legionary fortress of Caerleon (the headquarters of the second Augusta) effectively established a quarter of a century later. Thereafter settled conditions followed and Glevum attained to the prestige and privileges of a *colonia*, a more or less self-governing municipality, whose administration extended into the adjoining territory. Here the time-expired soldiers were established, and the provincial trader or settler became Romanized.

Possessing superior advantages of land and water communications Glevum became a flourishing town.

We have stressed the fact that Gloucester was a place of consequence in Imperial times but we must not be guilty of overlooking the fact that it was none the less so throughout the Middle Ages. Indeed I make bold to assert that there is no part of the country that is more worthy of immediate attention than the capital town of our county, and none about which so little of its archaeological history has been seriously attempted. Its position at the junction of important roads, its proximity to the winding Severn, and the wide fertile plain encircled by the Cotswolds were attractive factors in the creation and continued enjoyment of the place.

After the fall of the Romans, Gloucester became one of the chief cities of Mercia, a stronghold of the Normans where William the Conqueror held his courts, where parliaments met, where Henry III was crowned and the murdered body of Edward II was interred. Here also the great Benedictine monastery of St. Peter, founded in the 7th century, attained in the 11th and 12th centuries vast ecclesiastical importance which it has since retained as abbey and cathedral. Its medieval monuments pertaining to the Middle Ages alone offer fascinating fields for investigation. There may yet remain Saxon foundations within the precincts of the cathedral. The plans of the lesser houses of Llanthony and St. Oswald's

are yet unexplored and there is much to record about the three friaries, necessarily in these changing commercial days a diminishing quantity. All of them could be profitably attacked with the spade, the best method of

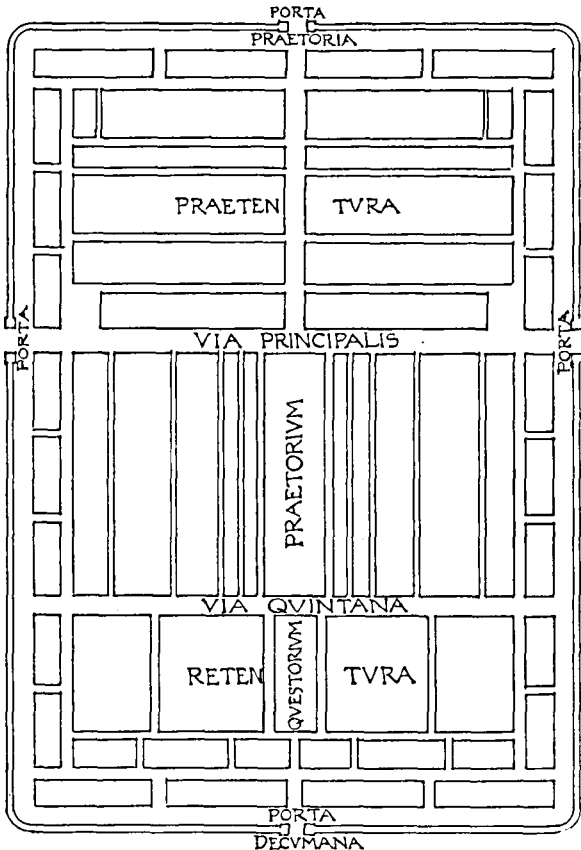


Fig. 1. Camp of Hyginus

gaining knowledge. But I think our duty is with the earliest and most obscure period, in the operations attending which later items may be revealed to us.

To return to Roman Gloucester I am conscious of the

difficulties and the inconvenience attaching to excavations in the city because it is so largely overbuilt, and that its floors and roads lie possibly 8 or 10 feet below the present street level. But we know the position of the enclosing defences of Glevum and of the gates which pierced its walls (fig. 2). Its area, approximately 509 by 437 yards—equal to 46 acres—was almost identical with those of Eboracum (York) and Lindum (Lincoln). The circumference (one mile) of the fortress can still be followed. Its eastern boundary extended from Parliament street to St. Aldate street, by way of Brunswick road, Queen and King streets. The northern is represented by St. Aldate street, and a line in continuation of it in the direction of the cathedral which overlies the northwest angle of the town. The western boundary proceeds from the cathedral (south porch), along College street, Berkeley street, and Barbican road. The southern is indicated by Commercial road and a line north of and parallel with Parliament street. We have insufficient basis upon which to rest safe conclusions as to the arrangement of the buildings of Glevum, but we may derive some assistance by reference to the plans of Caerleon and Caerwent, and the form laid down for the camps of Polybius (c. 203–121 B.C.), and Hyginus (c. A.D. 98–117). The known facts seem to favour the latter form (fig. 1).¹

¹ The suggested analogy is merely a tentative one. The camp described for Polybius was a square with a wide intervallum all round inside the ramparts of the camp. That of Hyginus (fig. 1), was an oblong, and the intervallum half the width of that of Polybius. The *via principalis* crossed the shorter axis of the camp, whereon the forum was centrally placed, opposite to and approached from the *porta praetoria*. Parallel to the *via principalis*, streets are shown between it and the rampart pierced by the *porta praetoria*, and another, the *via quintana*, to the rear of the forum. The Glevum features resembling the plan of Hyginus are the Eastgate and Westgate streets, which suggest the *via principalis*, the parallel Mitre street and New Inn lane (and their assumed continuations to the western rampart) which occupy the relative positions of the streets on the plan (fig. 2) and the Grey Friars corresponding with the *via quintana*.

There can be little doubt but that the modern thoroughfares now intersecting at the Cross represent those of Glevum (fig. 2) and that the position of the present Eastgate and Westgate streets as related to the traditional lines of a Roman fort represent the transverse road known as the *via principalis*, on the side of which, and in a central position astride of Southgate street, the praetorium, the administrative centre (forum or market place) was probably situated.²

The *via praetoria* was identical with that portion of Northgate street³ extending from the Cross to St. Aldate street where was the important gate—*porta praetoria*—giving on to one of the great Roman ways, Ermin street, which connected Glevum with Corinium (Cirencester) and continued on its way to Londinium (London).⁴ The portion of the town between the praetorium and the gate was known as the praetentura, and that to the rear (the south) of the praetorium as the retentura, in which the majority of the garrison was usually located.

Such was the typical arrangement of a fortified camp, and no doubt, in part at least, obtained at Glevum

² During 1893-4 when the Wilts and Dorset Bank was being erected at the corner of Southgate and Westgate streets (the site of the ancient Tolsey), Roman foundations and base stones were found and carefully recorded by Mr M. H. Medland. The Roman buildings, 11 feet below the modern pavement, extended below the road and astride of Southgate street, and thus blocked a possible thoroughfare in that direction in Roman times. The buildings may well have formed part of the praetorium, and the Eastgate and Westgate streets the *via principalis*, but not so the Northgate and Southgate streets as suggested on Mr Medland's plan. (*Trans. B.G.A.S.* XIX, 142).

³ In the Northgate and Southgate streets, foot pavements, running parallel with the houses, have been found 8 feet underground supported by timber piles, and about 4 or 5 feet wide. (Fosbroke, *History of Gloucester*, p. 14).

⁴ The usual place for the burial of the dead was by the sides of the roads leading from the principal gates. Such was the case at Glevum where tombstones have been found on the London road without the Northgate. The Roman cemetery was at Kingsholm, in the same direction.

although it was a colonia from an early date if not from its inception. The area of 46 acres appears but a small town to us, but it was not so in the Roman period (Lincoln and Caerwent were smaller). The establishment of towns was a factor in the Romanization of the provinces encouraged by Agricola, because it was considered that city life had a civilizing influence.⁵

The style of architecture which the Roman introduced into the conquered provinces was based on the form and defined proportions of the classical buildings existing in Rome, the characteristic details of which remained practically unaltered during the Roman occupation. Unmistakable evidence that the Roman potentate settled in our county surrounded himself with buildings of the conventional type—but necessarily on a moderate scale and devoid of real refinement—may be observed by inspection of the recovered fragments of stone capitals, pillars and ornaments, and of mosaic pavements, to be seen at the museums at Gloucester, Cirencester and Chedworth, and just without the county on a magnificent scale at the Roman baths at Bath.

The historians Atkyns, Lysons and Fosbroke have not entirely overlooked examples of the period known to them in the county, but about the city relate little that is serviceable to us.

From time to time mosaic pavements have been laid bare: in 1796 one 19 feet by 11 feet, and in 1806 another, 30 feet by 20 feet, on the site of the Guildhall.⁶ Since those discoveries other examples have been reported on the site of the Greyfriars, and at the Crypt school and elsewhere.

⁵ Haverfield, *Romanization of Roman Britain*, 1923, 4th ed., pp. 14-15 and *Antiquity* 1929, III, 268.

⁶ 30 feet east to west and 20 feet north to south, below which were flue pipes for heating, the pavement seemed to extend further to the west, and in the wall of the house on the east was a window of Roman construction. (Fosbroke, *Gloucester*, p. 13). On the south side of Westgate street stone steps were found, with part of the shaft of a broken Doric column, unquestionably Roman. (*Ibid.* p. 14).

In 1854 whilst engaged on sewage works in Northgate street, for the space of about 300 yards, the old Roman road was discovered about 10 feet 6 inches below the surface. It was composed of stones of irregular shape bedded in cement or very fine mortar on a layer of concrete.⁷

In 1873 Mr John Bellows made some excavations on the site of Eastgate House when he discovered a wall, near to which was Roman pottery, etc. His discoveries were the subject of a paper contributed to the Cotteswold Field Club.⁸ He further observed that masonry, which he considered to be of the Roman period, was to be seen at several points south of Eastgate House, in Westgate street, the vicinity of the Shire Hall, and elsewhere. This information, it is understood, Mr Bellows supplied to the ordnance surveyors, who embodied it in their maps. Necessarily the sections referred to will need to be re-examined. The portion about Eastgate incorporating a postern is clearly to be associated with the medieval walling to which Fosbroke⁹ calls attention when referring to the South gate and the southeast corner of the city boundaries. Even so it is valuable information to be embodied in the history of that period when it comes to be dealt with. All is fish that comes to the antiquary's net.

In 1909, when additions were being made on the east side of the Shire Hall, Mr St. Clair Baddeley examined the site and found evidence of a vallum and fosse which led him to the conclusion that Glevum was enclosed by an earthen rampart and not as previously conjectured by a stone wall.¹⁰

Fortunately there are still vacant sites yet uncovered

⁷ John Clarke, architect, in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1854, pt. 1, pp. 486-7.

⁸ *Proc. Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club*, VI, 154.

⁹ Fosbroke, *Gloucester*, p. 64.

¹⁰ *Archaeological Journal*, LXXVIII, 264.

by buildings on the conjectured line of the enclosing walls or defences. If only careful excavations could be made thereon it might yet be possible to recover, among other things, the profile of the fosse and evidence as to whether earth rampart or stone wall crested its inner edge.

Other architectural fragments have been observed and variously interpreted, and tantalizing statements have been made regarding details in courts and basements which must be examined. All that is known, and there are many items the result of accidental discovery to be collected, should be described and illustrated in a precise manner, and laid down on a scientifically prepared plan. The further comprehensive investigation of Gloucester which I plead for must be an organized effort to compile an exhaustive and authoritative chapter on the period—acceptable to the future editor of the much needed and overdue history, which it is to be regretted was not included in the excellent series of the Victoria County Histories.

Notwithstanding the difficulties which the subject presents, and whatever the results of your labours, be they great or small, it is obvious that delay will not improve matters. The destructive agencies attending the alteration of buildings and the provision of new streets to cope with modern traffic are of daily occurrence. Furthermore the advantage of tackling the job speedily is that many of you—not the youngest—possess valuable knowledge of the subject and can best assist to reconcile opposing assertions and theories.

If my proposal commends itself to you, I would like your Council to consider the advisability of forming a special committee for the purpose of giving it effect. A committee which should include representatives of the City Corporation, because civic interest in archaeology is part of a public interest which has grown rapidly in recent years. I have instanced the initiative and support

of the civic authorities of St. Albans, Newcastle and Wallsend, but they are not alone. Rotherham contributed to the examination of Templeborough, and York for the study of the Roman military capital of England.

Even if the results be not the solution of outstanding problems the task will have been attempted and we shall have done something for the cause of archaeology, which our predecessors with vacant sites at their disposal neglected. Nor will it be accompanied by the dangers which beset Camden, who had to forego visiting the Roman Wall, because 'I could not with safety take the full survey of it, for the rank robbers thereabouts'.

Such a committee once established would be the recognized body who would be ready to act in exceptional circumstances during the alteration or expansion of buildings, and be prepared to take and accurately record the evidence of antiquities disclosed, of whatever age. Such work is obviously not a one-man job. It can only be accomplished by a number of workers interested and willing to give liberally of their time.



Fig. 1. TEDDINGTON CHURCH, WORCESTERSHIRE :
VIEW FROM SOUTHWEST

Ph. Sydney Pitcher