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Glevum

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Glevvm

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delivered at the Wheatstone Hall, Gloucester, on 11 March, 1967*

IN 1930 the late Mr Knowles, in his Presidential address to this Society, summarised what was then known of Roman Gloucester, urged a re-awakening of interest in the subject, and the organisation of active research. The formation of the Gloucester Roman Research Committee¹ resulted. Thirty-six years have passed and the time is now opportune to review what has been achieved as a result of Mr Knowles's initiative.

I think it can be asserted that, prior to the 1860's, interest in Roman Gloucester was antiquarian rather than archaeological. It was mainly restricted to such Roman objects as might be found, generally in the course of building operations: coins, weapons, mosaic paving, columns, *fibulae* and the like. Guesses were made as to the sites of a *forum* and *praetorium*, and the lines of some streets were held to indicate a Roman origin. In 1860 the Rev. Samuel Lysons plotted some Roman finds on a small scale plan of the city.

It may be claimed that John Bellows was the first Gloucester archaeologist. In 1890, on the occasion of the visit of the Archaeological Institute to the city, he excavated for and found the top of the Roman town wall close to the north transept of the Cathedral and, about the same time, he produced a plan of GLEVVM (FIG. 1). It was, however, as early as 1872 that he first became actively interested in Roman Gloucester. In that year, finding that his premises in Westgate Street had become too cramped, he acquired Eastgate House and erected new printing works in its garden. In the course of this work, he found the inner face of the Roman town wall, also masses of contemporary rubbish lying against it. He not only preserved the fine section which he had unearthed, so that it is still visible, but set about tracing the whole of its perimeter. This he vividly described in articles to the Transactions of this Society and in the Proceedings of the Cotteswold Naturalists Field Club.

Prior to his investigations, very little interest appears to have been taken in the town wall, and it seems to have been assumed that such

¹ The Gloucester Roman Research Committee ceased to exist as such in 1967, being reconstituted as the Gloucester and District Archaeological Research Group.

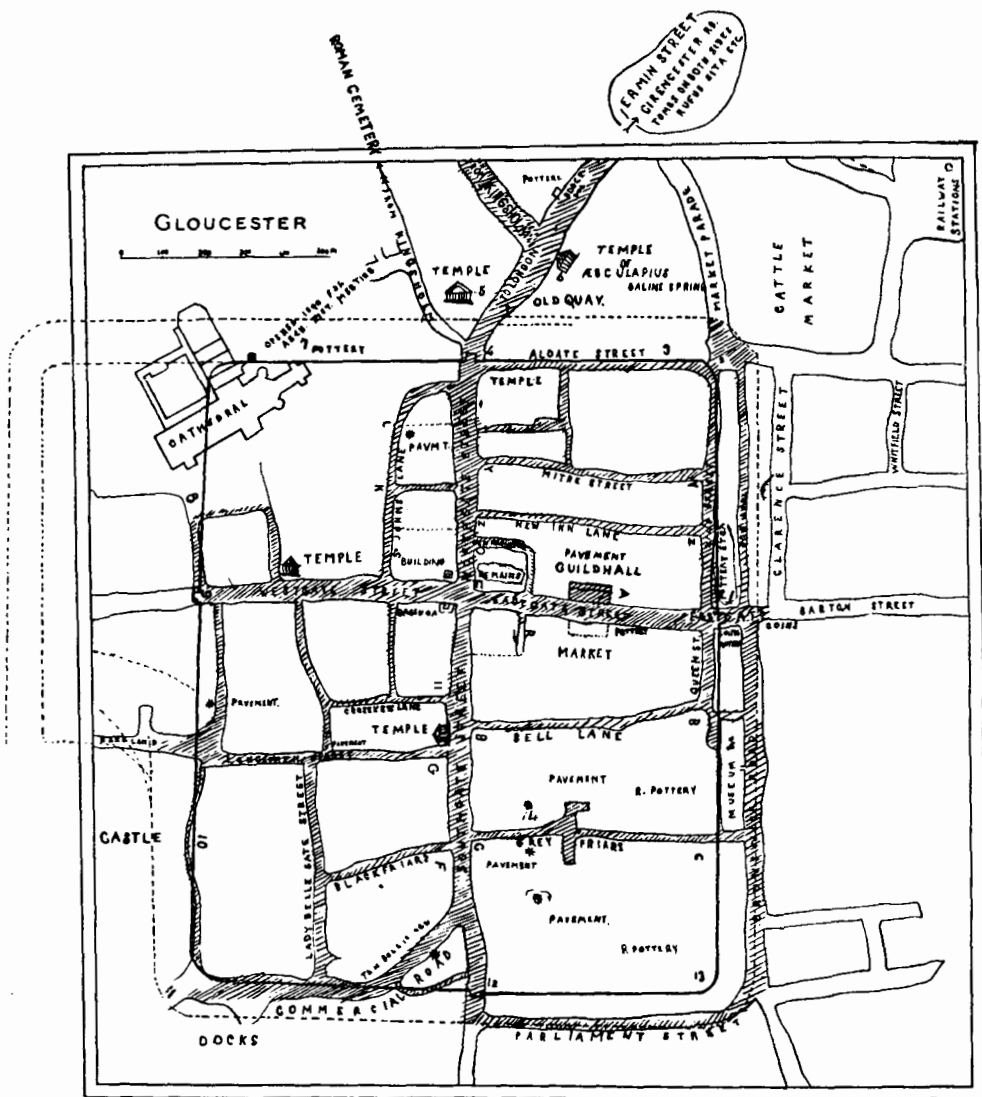


Fig. 1. Plan of GLEVVM by John Bellows

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Conjectured key to John Bellows' plan of 1890

- | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Eastgate House | 8. No. 4 College Green | 14. Pavement, 1889 |
| 2. Almsham Postern | 9. West Gate | A Guildhall |
| 3. Billingham's Warehouse | 10. Barbican | BB, F, G, K, L, NN, YY streets |
| 4. North Gate | 11. ? | assumed to be of Roman |
| 5. Column base | 12. South Gate | origin |
| 6. Shakespeare Inn | 13. South-east angle of town | O New Inn |
| 7. Pottery | wall | R Portico |

of it as was then still above ground was medieval. Charles II had ordered the razing of the walls as a punishment for the city's opposition to his father, but this could never have been completed because, at the time when John Bellows made his discoveries, a section more than 300 yards long still stood above ground, though reduced to a height of 8-9 feet. It extended from the City Museum, which had already been erected partly on it and partly in its outer ditch, almost to the site of the South Gate. It stood on a strip of land about 6 feet wide which was sold in 1888 for £120 by the City Corporation to the Governors of the Crypt School who in the same year transferred it to the Gloucester United Schools. A condition of the sale was that it was never to be destroyed, removed, built on, covered up or interfered with; further it was to be available for inspection by members of the public on application to the Mayor. This the "ancient Roman wall" (as it was described in the deed) was to be hereafter protected and preserved at all times as an object of local and historic interest. The Gloucester United Schools were subsequently transferred to the Corporation to which, as trustees, the wall thereby reverted. On it have been erected the Price Memorial Hall, the School of Art and the Public Library. Furthermore, the whole of the Friars' Orchard part of it and the Orchard itself are now embodied in the Technical College which was opened in 1941.

Such has been the fate of a long stretch of the Roman town wall on which the medieval was subsequently superimposed. It is possible to get an impression of its appearance in 1850 from a line drawing in Clarke's *Architectural History of Gloucester* (FIG. 2). This shows a stretch of four courses of massive stone blocks at the back of the houses in what is now Parliament street, formerly Green Dragon lane. G. A. Howitt, writing in 1890, stated:

"The impressions made upon my mind in early days, by our massive walls and wide moat, are too powerful and lasting to be forgotten. Often at its rounded angle at the Friar's Orchard I have stood looking up at it, and long in silence have I leant over it where the breach was made, looking down into the moat." (The breach was made during the siege of 1643.)

The inner face of the wall has always been covered by the rampart built against it. This was still visible on the south side of the Friars' Orchard at the time of the 1931-32 excavations. When it was exposed in 1961, several military ovens were found in it, affording strong evidence of GLEVVM having been a legionary fortress site. At the same time a Roman street was found running parallel with the rampart. The excavations in 1931 and 1932 had revealed not only the town wall but an angle-tower at its south-east corner, also indications of an outer ditch.

To the north of what used to be the Friars' Orchard, the outer face of the wall is visible in the basement of the City Museum, and, just beyond this, a fine stretch, 45 feet long, was exposed during building operations in part of the premises of the local Co-operative Society in 1932. On the north side of Eastgate street is the section found by John Bellows under his printing works, and a small section was ex-



SECTION OF THE CITY WALL EXPOSED FROM BRUTON LANE

Fig. 2

cavated in 1932 in the garden of property belonging to Messrs. Bruton & Knowles. It showed characteristics similar to those of sections already mentioned.

After the work of the early 1930s, there were no further opportunities for examination of the town wall till 1958-59, when the site to be occupied by the Midlands Electricity Board became available in King's Square. Not only was a stretch of the wall excavated 43 feet

long, but also part of the outer ditch. Work on the latter was much impeded by a strong stream flowing through the lower courses of the wall. It necessitated very frequent pumping. Very little could be done on the inner face of the wall here owing to lack of space available for excavation, but walling was found which was subsequently confirmed to be the remains of a Roman interval tower. Excavations of the Bon Marché site, at about the same time, resulted in the finding of the rampart of the town wall and a Roman street running parallel with it along St. Aldate street, on the line of the north side of the fortress and *colonia*. The actual wall was uncovered during street works in 1933 and 1961, and between 1870 and 1880 it had been found under Lea's premises at the north-west end of the street.

As a result of the investigations which I have just summarised and of reports made by 19th century observers, there is now a considerable body of information concerning the wall round the eastern half of the Roman town, though next to nothing is as yet known about any gates and only one interval and one angle tower have as yet been established.

The picture is very different when the western half of GLEVVV—the area west of North and Southgate streets—is considered. The wall has only been confirmed between Northgate street and the north transept of the Cathedral, where it was located by John Bellows in 1890. In 1964 however, a full investigation was made of its inner face in the King's School House garden which lies to the south-east of the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral. Evidence of both rampart and wall was found though the latter had been entirely robbed, and it was confirmed that here, on the north side of the *colonia*, the size, date and construction of the rampart were similar to those found in 1961 in the grounds of the Technical College on the south side of the town.

As regards the remainder of the perimeter, we have, as yet, only John Bellows' report of his findings. He said that he had seen it in the cellar of No. 4 College Green. When College street was widened, about 1890, the west end of this house was demolished, so that the wall here will now be under the pavement or the roadway. He also reported it at the junction of Westgate and Berkeley streets, where an extension of the Shire Hall now stands, and in Bearland, at its junction with the Barbican. Beyond this point we know nothing, except that cottages in Barbican alley look as if they were built in a ditch. An excavation, made in 1934, on the site of the present Employment Exchange at the junction of the alley with Commercial road, in the hope of finding the south-west angle tower of the fortress, proved negative in result.

Examination of Roman remains found within the walled area shows that, considering its size, some 43 acres, comparatively few have

been recorded, and such excavations as have been made up to the present have proved in many respects, too indeterminate to permit of any definite indications of the lay-out of the Roman town. It has always been considered that the North, South, East and Westgate streets follow the lines of the principal Roman streets, but actual remains have only been recorded in Northgate street, just outside the town wall, during sewerage operations in 1854 and under the front wall of No. 8-10 Southgate street when these premises were re-built over fifty years ago. It has been considered that the 180 feet long colonnade in Westgate street and the siting of mosaic pavements in Eastgate street indicate the lines of Roman streets. Whatever may have been the actual courses of these, there is evidence that they were narrower than the modern streets. The northern front of the Roman building on the site of No. 2 Southgate street was 15 feet north of the present Westgate street frontage and its Southgate street frontage projected 6 feet beyond its present line (but 15 feet in the time of the medieval church which was superimposed on the remains of the Roman building). On the east side of Southgate street, at Nos. 21 and 33, remains of Roman buildings have been found extending, at least, under the present pavement.

Five Roman side streets have been definitely identified. One ran eastward from Southgate street behind and parallel with the rampart of the town wall. This became the medieval Sheep lane. The second ran in a similar manner from Northgate street parallel with the wall approximately on the line of the present St Aldate street. Towards its eastern end, a third street has been found leading off from it in a southward direction. It has been possible in each case to note their re-makings over an extensive period; in the case of the first, down to the 16th century. This one was originally 10-15 feet wide. Recently evidence of a street running east and west has been found during an enlargement of the premises of the "Citizen" newspaper in St John's lane, also another running parallel with Bell lane.

During the past one hundred and seventy years, accounts have been written of the findings of the remains of Roman buildings, but they are not, for the most part, very informative and, with the exception of one at the Cross, found in 1895, no proper plans were made. It was not until the 1930s that scientific examination really began. In the past objects found proved to be of more interest than the settings in which they were located. Thus discoveries of mosaic paving, coins, carved stone and metal objects were recorded. In some cases, epithets, such as temple, *forum*, *praetorium* and *basilica* were ascribed to buildings without any adequate supporting evidence.

The record of an extensive *portico* in Westgate street, between St John's lane and College Court, has already been mentioned. Another building, at least 80 feet long was found in Longsmith street in 1854. In many respects, however, the most interesting site in the city is at the south-west corner of the Cross, now occupied by a tailor's shop. It is unique inasmuch as it bears evidence of continuous occupation, at least since Roman times. When the present building was being erected in 1893-4, a flint arrowhead was found at the lowest level excavated. There were considerable remains of a Roman building, considered to have been the *forum*. Superimposed on these, were a Saxon and more than one medieval church. The last was removed in the 17th century to make way for the Tolsey, the precursor of the present Guildhall in Eastgate street. It was replaced in 1893-4 by a bank which was subsequently converted into a shop. The finding of a number of mosaic pavements on the north side of Eastgate street, on the site of the Guildhall and its adjoining premises, indicates a Roman building or buildings.

The largest single area in Gloucester to be thoroughly examined is part of the extensive site of the Bon Marché emporium between Northgate street and King's Square, St Aldate street and the Oxebode. Here between 1825 and 1964 a number of remains of buildings have been found. Those uncovered during the last thirty years have been carefully plotted on plans.

It may be significant, in estimating the degree of the *colonia's* prosperity, that in the comparatively small area within the town walls of which we have records, more than thirty mosaic pavements have been found; some were of indifferent workmanship, but others were definitely of very superior quality, though none may have compared with the elaborate examples at CORINIVM, Chedworth or Woodchester. To quote from the contemporary description of one pavement, found in Eastgate street in 1806, about 6 feet below the surface:

"It was 30 feet long and 20 wide, divided into compartments, enriched with a great variety of scrolls, frets, and other architectural ornaments, and having a wreathed or braided border. The colours are white, red, bluish grey, and pale and dark brown."

Several porticos and wells have been found. The latter raise the question of water supply in Roman times. It has to be borne in mind, in this connection, that as the river Severn is affected by tidal influences at Gloucester, its water is brackish and so unsuitable for drinking purposes. The *colonia*, in consequence, must have been dependent on wells. The question arises: Did the Romans lead water in from outside as they did at Wroxeter, at the Dorset Dorchester, and elsewhere?

There is a tradition that they diverted the river Twyver which results from the confluence of a number of Cotswold streams. There is clear evidence of diversion of the river from its natural course and of canalization some $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Gloucester. Another tradition attributes this to the Benedictine monks for the purpose of bringing stone from the Cotswold quarries for the building of their abbey. The Romans may have made the diversion for a similar purpose, namely the building and walling of GLEVVM. There is no evidence, at present, as to when it was done, but it must have been at an early date. It is possible, however, that the Romans may have piped water from springs on Robinswood Hill, only $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the Cross, and that the subsequent use of this source of supply by the abbey, by the priory of the Grey Friars and the Corporation, may have been an adaptation of Roman usage.

It is considered nowadays that Roman troops had reached Gloucester by A.D. 49, that a legionary fortress was occupied between then and about A.D. 75, that the *colonia* came into being about A.D. 98, and that the earthen rampart of the legionary wall was first stone-faced at some date before about A.D. 200.

It was only natural for GLEVVM to extend towards the river Severn, but this extension does not appear to have been walled, as happened at Lincoln under somewhat similar circumstances. Remains of a substantial residence with several mosaic floors were found in 1825 under the church of St Mary de Lode and, in 1938, vestiges of a Roman building were unearthed at the junction of Quay and Upper Quay streets. West of a line between these two finds alluvial and other deposits have been very heavy. When the Roman quay was found, about 1830, it was some 20 feet below the surface, and about 150 feet east of the present channel of the river. Recent deep tunnelling for sewers along the line of Quay street has provided evidence of Roman buildings. The paucity of indications of Roman occupation in the Westgate area is probably due to the considerable depth of alluvial deposits to which reference has just been made. Striking evidence of these was provided when St Bartholomew's Hospital was rebuilt *c.* 1789. In the time of Henry VIII, it had been necessary to raise the hospital floor and, when the old building was being removed to make room for its successor, the shafts of the pillars were found to be nearly 8 feet underground.

It seems probable that the Romans, advancing from the east about A.D. 49 (if a reconnaissance force had not arrived earlier) established a camp on the easternmost channel of the Severn at Kingsholm which was occupied till the completion of GLEVVM.

It also seems that the earliest Roman road ran from CORINIVM (Cirencester) direct to Kingsholm. Traces of a road from the latter to GLEVVM have been found recently and they align on the present Hare Lane (the old Saxon Herelone, 'military road') which led to the North Gate. No conclusive evidence of a Kingsholm camp exists at present.

Kingsholm came to be extensively used by the Romans as a burial area and great numbers of interments have been recorded, namely incinerations, coffin and simple burials. A great variety of objects, associated with them, has been found. These burials took place not only on both sides of the present Kingsholm road, but in Denmark road, and further north, on the line of the present Estcourt ring road. There was another burial area on both sides of London road, extending from the Almshouses to Wotton Pitch. Here the burials were, for the most part, urns or cists, and it was here that the only two local epigraphic monuments were unearthed, the well-known RVFVS SITA stone and a fragment of one commemorating a soldier of the XXth. Legion.

There is evidence of a small Roman cemetery outside the South Gate, and there are records of several coffin burials scattered further afield—St Paul's road, near the Park, close to the Horton road railway crossing, and Hucclecote. A solitary urn burial was found in Barton street, near the East Gate, in 1959. Quite recently human inhumations have been found in Brunswick road.

The late Sir Ian Richmond, in his report on the excavation in the King's School House garden, states: 'the *colonia* for veterans was planted within the fortifications of an abandoned legionary fortress . . . these were in due course embodied in the bank of the town wall.' It would seem that, in this context, the word 'abandoned' should not be treated too literally. On the assumption that the *colonia* had been established by A.D. 98 and that the walls were first stone-faced about A.D. 200, there is evidence that, though GLEVVM was no longer occupied by a legion, its function as a fortress was maintained.

As one of the four *coloniae* in Britain, GLEVVM held a special status. It was a settlement for legionary veterans who constituted a reserve in the event of emergency and it served as a base for the dissemination of Roman culture. Its inhabitants enjoyed Roman citizenship and a form of local government based on that of Rome. Furthermore, a certain amount of territory (*territorium*) was attached to it. The extent of this is not known, but, from the fact that tiles stamped *R(ei) P(ublicae) G(levensium)* have been found at Barnwood, Hucclecote, Dryhill and Ifold near Painswick, it may be inferred that

it probably extended eastward as far as the western flank of the Cotswolds.

In all probability, GLEVVM contained at least two temples, one dedicated to the living and deceased members of the Imperial House, and the other to the State deities of Rome. Where these may have been is not known. Two sites have been suggested. One of these is the Shakespeare Inn in Lower Northgate street, but this is outside the walled area. Here were a Roman building with a columned portico opening on to the street, a doorway and a stone-flagged floor, also a votive tablet, now attributed to Mercury and Rosmerta (or Maia). Originally, it was considered to depict Aesculapius, presumably because a strongly saline spring was found adjoining the building. The other site was just off Commercial road where a large pit, 9 feet wide and 8 feet deep and solidly built of substantial oak timbers, was found in 1900. It was full of animal bones and there was part of a stone column at one corner. Twenty-four years later a bust of Attis (or Mithras) was found nearby. A third possible temple site might be the extensive portico in Westgate street already mentioned.

It has been suggested that, once the Roman occupation had become firmly established and military requirements had become of secondary importance, GLEVVM developed characteristics that have marked it ever since, and that these were determined by its geographical position—a busy road junction at an important river crossing. These inevitably made it a centre of industry and trade, much of the latter entrepôt.

It seems certain that iron mined in the Forest of Dean was brought to GLEVVM from ARICONIVM (Weston-under-Penyard) or by water from Lydney and elsewhere in the form of blooms. Three of these, weighing 484, 256 and 356 lbs., were found at the Roman villa at Chedworth. Roman forges have been reported in the vicinity of Longsmith street and iron slag of Roman origin has been identified here and on the Bon Marché site.

It is probable that, as in medieval times, there was a considerable metal industry in GLEVVM for the making of horseshoes, weapons, domestic requirements, agricultural implements, and the like, iron coming from the Forest of Dean and lead from the Mendips or Shropshire.

The carriage of stone from the Cotswold quarries must have continued during a long period, not only for the *colonia* defences, but for the erection of buildings. We do not know whether it came by the Portway or was borne on a canalised River Twyver. The use of

Cotswold oolitic limestone was supplemented by stone from the Forest of Dean.

Tileries there must have been, as is evidenced by the great quantities of roofing and other tiles found, and there must have been kilns for the making of pottery, including the local product, known as Glevum ware, but the sites of these are, as yet, unknown, except that a small kiln was found last summer opposite the Public Library in Brunswick road, just outside the Roman town wall. Close to it sherds of Glevum ware have been unearthed.

I have mentioned in the foregoing remarks the finding of a street in Bell Lane. This took place during extensive excavations last year. A full report on these has not yet been issued, but I think this street is the only new contribution to our present knowledge of the topographical plan of Roman Gloucester. Structural remains were unearthed, but, perhaps, the important feature of the excavations was that at their lowest level soil marks suggested that they may indicate the lines of timber sleeper-beams of wooden structures of the earliest period of the Roman occupation of the site.

At the beginning of this address, I referred to the long stretch of town wall that used to be visible in Brunswick road and Parliament street. There have been a number of schemes for the development of Gloucester during recent years. One of these envisaged the widening of Parliament street. This would, presumably, be achieved by the removal of houses on the north side of the street. These houses are built in the ditch of the Roman and medieval town wall, and the yards or gardens in their rear are separated from the grounds of the Technical College, which are situated at a higher level, by a brick wall. This level is that of the old rampart. It may well be that, behind this brickwork facing, the original stone wall still stands. If a stretch of this could be permanently exposed, the city would have, above ground, a section of its ancient defences to show. At the time of the erection of the Technical College, a section of the Roman wall found in the Crypt School grounds was taken down, all the stones being numbered for purposes of re-erection. I have always understood that they were taken for storage to the Corporation's depot in Stroud road. If they still exist, a home for them might, at last, be found.