

CAERLEON

EXCAVATIONS AT GOLLEDGE'S FIELD AND PRIORY FIELD, 2007: INTERIM REPORT

Andrew Gardner and Peter Guest



INTRODUCTION

Excavations on the site of the legionary fortress at Caerleon took place between 2 and 28 July 2007, under the direction of Drs Andrew Gardner (UCL) and Peter Guest (Cardiff University). The project team included staff and students from UCL and Cardiff, as well as the National Roman Legion Museum (National Museum Wales).

The excavations consisted of a single large trench in Golledge's Field and six smaller evaluation trenches in Priory Field (Fig. 1). All were located to follow up recent geophysical surveys conducted by GeoArch and commissioned by Cardiff University (in the Easter vacations of 2006 and 2007). Also, a further geophysical survey of the field outside the south corner of the fortress was undertaken during the excavation season.

Financial and other support for the project were provided by Cadw, Cardiff University, UCL, National Roman Legion Museum and the Caerleon Research Committee. Further assistance was provided by the Caerleon community and the authors are most grateful to the White Hart and Goldcroft public houses and, in particular, the Caerleon Rugby Club for providing the team with lunches and evening meals.

PROJECT AIMS

The aims of the project were to follow-up the geophysical surveys and evaluate the character of the surviving archaeology, including the depth and nature of the topsoils. Specifically, the objectives of the project were as follows:

- Excavate a series of evaluation trenches in Golledge's and Priory Fields down to the level of the intact archaeological deposits and to record the uppermost levels of the surviving archaeology;
- Evaluate the nature of any post-Roman occupation in the fields and to assess the impact of agricultural activity, particularly ploughing, on the archaeological remains;
- Ensure the total recovery of artefacts from the ploughsoil;
- Involve other organisations, such as National Museum Wales, the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust and Cadw, as project partners;
- Involve the local community in the project.

All of these objectives were achieved.

METHODOLOGY

Six 2 m. by 2 m. trenches were positioned in Priory Field with the aim of sampling the wide range of archaeology in this area, while a single 20 m. by 2 m. trench was placed across one of the buildings in Golledge's Field (see Fig. 2 for trench locations).

All trenches were de-turfed, excavated and backfilled by hand. Sieving was conducted for all deposits and recording was completed according of Cardiff University and UCL standards. Finds were processed and recorded at the National Roman Legion Museum under the supervision of Mark Lewis, Curatorial Officer.

RESULTS

Golledge's Field

Trench 1 in Golledge's Field was located across a so-called 'centurion's house' of the first cohort, which had been examined by V.E. Nash-Williams in 1931-3. The trench was oriented east-west across the width of the central building in Golledge's Field (Fig. 3).

The entire length of the trench was de-turfed, although continued excavation was limited to the eastern and western external wall-trenches excavated by Nash-Williams, and a central 5 m. by 2 m. sondage located to explore the building's courtyard. The quantity of overburden and backfill from the 1930s excavations necessitated such a strategy in order to ensure fulfilment of the project's objectives within the time available.

Excavation at the eastern and western ends of the trench revealed the remains of the building's exterior walls (Figs 4 and 5). These had been substantially robbed, leaving only the base course at the western end and the rubble foundations at the eastern end. In the latter area, a small area of *opus signinum* flooring and underlying deposits were observed in the interior of the building. These had been truncated by a combination of robbing activity and earlier archaeological investigations.

Excavation in the central area revealed the remains of a north-south wall, with the lowest masonry course preserved, and evidence of a pathway and associated midden-like deposits (Fig. 6). All of these features probably belonged to the latest Roman phase of the building's internal courtyard.

Finds from this trench included a wide range of Roman and medieval pottery. Preliminary analysis indicates that Nash-Williams did not retain a great deal of material and that, judging from the relative paucity of early Roman material, his workmen may not have reached the earliest levels of the building. The latest sherds of Roman pottery date to the late third or early fourth centuries, while medieval and later pottery was not common and probably derived from agricultural activity.

Overall, this trench confirmed the general accuracy of Nash-Williams' unpublished plans and of George Boon's successful transcription of these on to the overall fortress plan. We now have a fuller understanding of Nash-Williams' excavation methods (trenches locating and following walls) and of the extent of surviving stratigraphy in this building. The depth of stratified deposits in this field is considerable and a great deal of information on the earlier phases of the fortress (including environmental data) could be gathered from further work here.

Priory Field

The trenches in Priory Field were located to explore structures revealed for the first time in the 2006 GeoArch survey. These included part of the rampart (Trench 6), elements of two barracks (Trenches 5 and 7), one of the *horrea* (Trench 4), and the open 'yard' area between these and a large courtyard building (Trenches 2 and 3).

Yard/courtyard building (Trenches 2 and 3): Trench 2 revealed the interior surface of an ephemeral structure probably built against the western wall of the large courtyard building. This area was covered in building debris, beneath which was a cobbled floor and associated hearth (Fig. 7). The dating of these latter features is uncertain, but finds of late Roman date (including a later-fourth century coin) came from this trench. A densely-packed layer of deliberately laid rubble was excavated in Trench 3, confirming the existence of an open area or yard between the *horrea* and courtyard building (Fig. 8). This rubble appeared to overlie at least two similar deposits, suggesting that a sequence of substantial yard surfaces is preserved in this area.

Horreum (Trench 4): The trench situated in the central granary revealed a stone pier of the building's raised floor and an extensive deposit of roof-tiles at approximately 1 m. depth (Fig. 9). It is likely, therefore, that the full stratigraphic history of this *horreum* remains preserved beneath the roof collapse. A later stony layer could relate to agricultural activity in the medieval period in this part of the field.

Barracks (Trenches 5 and 7): These trenches were located over individual rooms in separate barrack blocks and in both cases they revealed clay floor surfaces that were the uppermost Roman deposits. These were below rubble deposits at relatively shallow depths (c.0.5m). Few other features were encountered in Trench 7 (Fig. 12), but a later posthole was recorded in Trench 5 (Fig. 10).

Rampart (Trench 6): Trench 6 was intended to examine a possible rampart building (suggested by a faint linear anomaly on the magnetometer survey), though no indication of such a building was discovered during the excavations. Instead, the slope of the rampart back and a curb-line, or possible stone drain, at its base were recorded (Fig. 11).

The pottery from the Priory Field evaluation trenches was mainly from the later Roman period, generally terminating with material from the early fourth century, though some later material was also present. Medieval and later pottery was indicative of agricultural activity.

Taken together, the results of the Priory Field evaluations confirm that Roman buildings and their interiors are well preserved in this part of the fortress. While post-Roman agricultural activity certainly took place in the field, limited damage appears to have been done to the Roman archaeological deposits and robbing also seems to have had relatively little impact. There is enormous potential for further research in Priory Field.

Geophysical survey

A magnetometer survey of the field outside the southern corner of the fortress was undertaken by Dr Tim Young (of GeoArch) and students during the excavation season. The survey revealed the line of a road apparently heading towards the extramural bath-house that lay beyond the *porta principalis dextra* and which was demolished to make way for the construction of the amphitheatre (Figs 13 and 14). The road is also certainly of Roman date and appears to have been fronted by a series of buildings, or possibly one large building with numerous internal divisions, though its destination and how it was affected by the building of amphitheatre is unclear. The survey also detected a stone-lined drain leading to the river Usk from the amphitheatre (recorded during the Wheelers' excavations in 1926-7).

WIDENING ACCESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The archaeological work at Caerleon was fully supported by the local community and parties of schoolchildren and other visitors were given site tours throughout the season. Altogether, 28 school groups were shown around the excavations, including every class in the Caerleon Endowed Infant and Junior Schools, while other visitors included the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association and members of the Caerleon Research Committee.

A particularly important and successful event for engaging the general public with archaeological research was the Military Spectacular held on the weekend of 7/8 July. Approximately 5000 people visited Caerleon over the two days, most of whom walked past the excavations in Golledge's Field. A gazebo housed a display of information panels and finds from Roman Caerleon, while a leaflet explaining the 2007 excavations was handed out to all visitors (Fig. 15). The project team worked both days of the Military Spectacular and tours of the Golledge's Field trench proved to be very popular with the public.

PUBLICATION AND ARCHIVE

The site records were taken to Cardiff University where they are currently being archived. Plans and sections are being drawn up for publication, while the context and finds record sheets have been entered onto the project database. Dr Peter Webster has completed an assessment of the pottery from the excavations, while the animal bone assemblage has been examined by Dr Adrienne Powell. Conservation of the small finds is underway in the laboratories of the Cardiff School of History and Archaeology and should be completed in early 2008.

Current plans for publication of the 2007 excavations include notices in *Britannia* and *Archaeology in Wales*, while a full report will be submitted to *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for publication in 2008/9.

The site archive will be stored in the National Roman Legion Museum, Caerleon.

FIGURES

Fig. 1. Location map

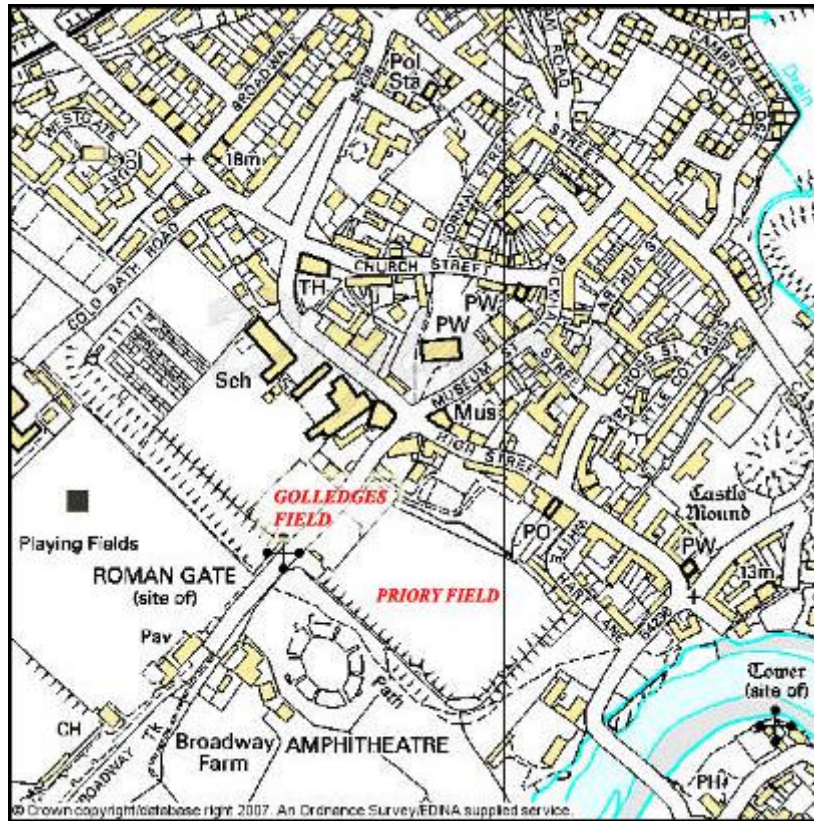


Fig. 2. Trench location plan



Fig. 3. Golledges Field, trench location.



Fig. 4. Golledges Field (trench 1), west wall and robber/excavation trench from south.



Fig. 5. Golledges Field (trench 1), east wall and robbing/excavation trench from south



Fig. 6. Golledges Field (trench1), central sondage from west



Fig. 7. Priory Field, trench 2 from west



Fig. 8. Priory Field, trench 3 from north



Fig. 9. Priory Field, trench 4 from west



Fig. 10. Priory Field, trench 5 from north



Fig. 11. Priory Field, trench 6 from east



Fig. 12. Priory Field, trench 7 from west



Fig. 13. Magnetometer survey results

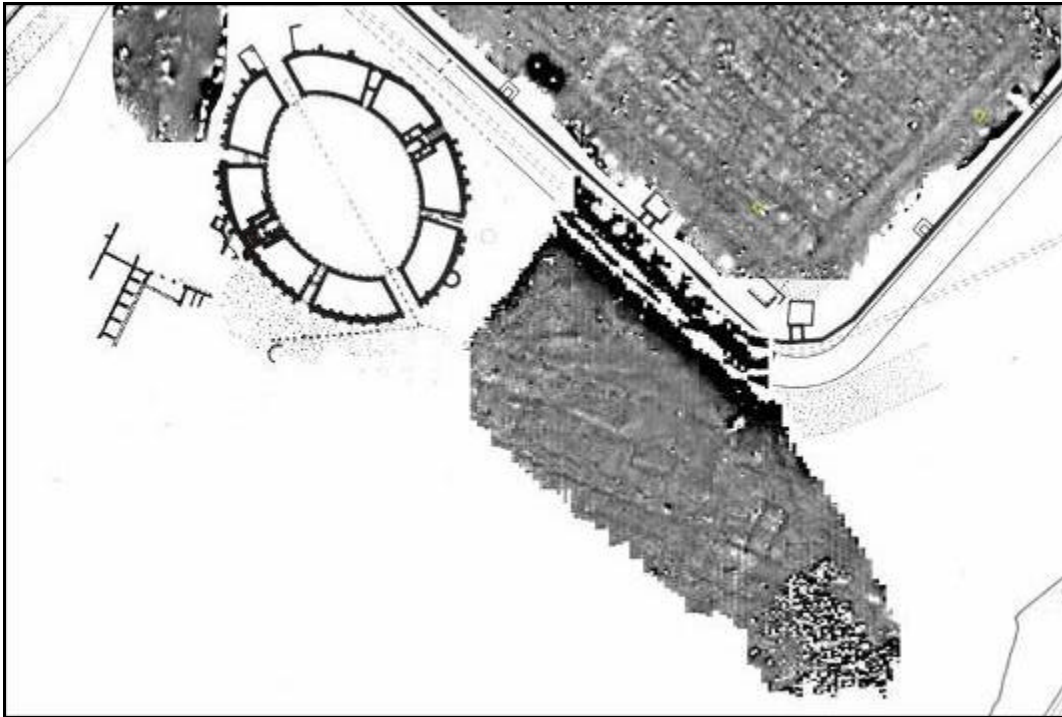


Fig. 14. Magnetometer interpretation

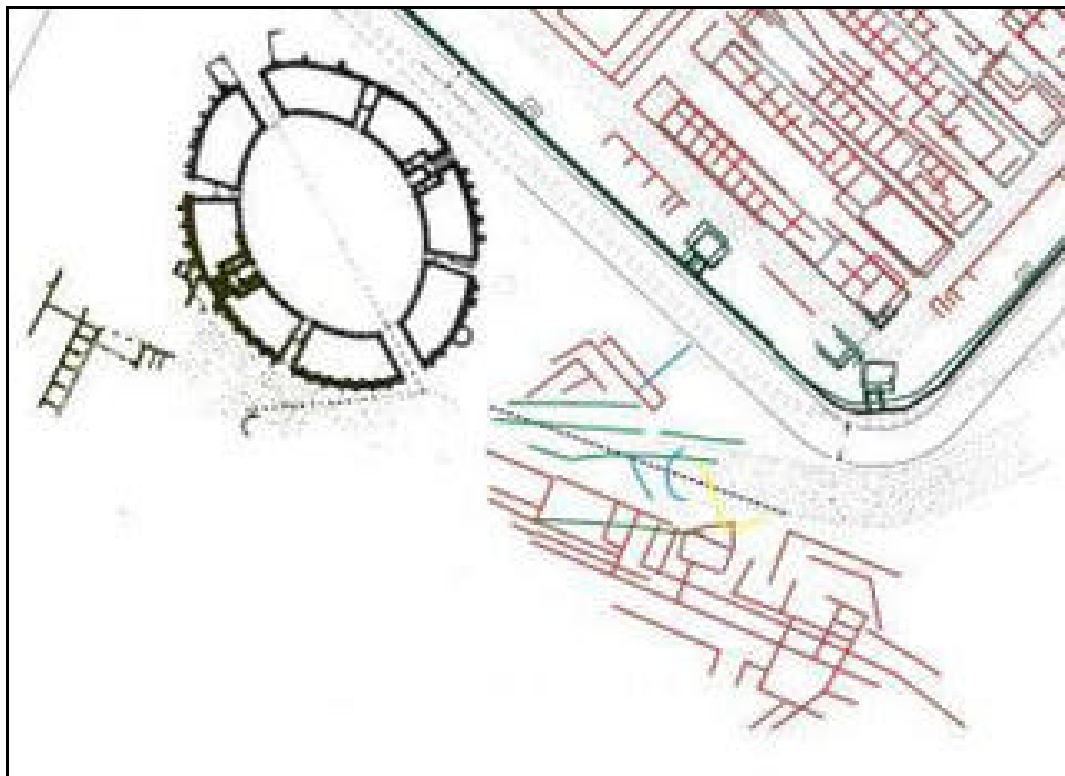


Fig. 15. Visitors to the excavations during the Military Spectacular Weekend in July

