The Centre of Roman Canterbury c. AD 300

(Coloured reconstruction and Fig. 1).

First look at Canterbury's modern street plan (Fig. 3) to orientate yourself with the area of the town which we are going to investigate.

Setting the Scene

It will be useful to have some image of the local area prior to the Roman Conquest. Our knowledge of this period comes from a combination of fairly brief references in historical works (for example, of Julius Caesar) and from archaeological excavation. The Late Iron Age people who had been living in the south-east of England for around 150 years before the conquest are known as the Belgae. They had migrated from the area of northern France and Belgium seeking new lands to settle. Theirs was a culture which was largely agricultural, although evidence has shown that the Belgae traded with merchants on continental Europe before the conquest and had considerable contact with, and knowledge of, the Roman world. There were many tribes and the people who inhabited the area we call Kent were known as the Cantiaci.

At Canterbury's Roman Museum there is a reconstruction image of how archaeologists think Canterbury may have looked just before the Roman Conquest. At this time the town was known as Durovernon. The Museum has allowed us to include a reproduction of the picture in these Notes (Fig. 5).

The early decades of Roman rule

A historical record from Roman times called the Antonine Itinerary tells us that the name of the town changed to Durovernum Cantiacorum under the Romans. The Itinerary was a kind of road guide for the Roman Empire and included names of stopping places along the way.

The process of Canterbury's Romanisation seems to have been rather piecemeal to begin with. Conversion to a Roman way of life certainly didn't happen overnight and in the early decades Roman style buildings stood alongside native dwellings. People continued to use hand-made pottery while also taking advantage of the new wheel turned pots made locally. Those who could afford it could also buy the more 'upmarket' lines imported from the continent. Romanisation is generally considered to have been 'A Good Thing'. With improved road systems linking markets and the new Romano-British towns, making many facilities more accessible, it is likely that many native people in the 1st century AD thought the same. Those tribes who had negotiated well with Roman authorities in a political sense before the conquest no doubt had a lot to gain from the new situation.

In Canterbury, it was not until the beginning of the 2nd century that serious town planning began. This also appears to have been the case in other Romano-British towns.

As a result of considerable work in the city, we have arrived at this interpretation of how the Roman town may have looked c. AD.300 (see reconstruction image). At this stage all the major public buildings had been established. The evidence from buildings and objects discovered suggests that there was a considerable population living in a busy urban centre, supported by a successful administration.

Main Features of the Roman Town: Public Buildings

The Theatre

There were actually two phases of theatre building on the same site. Canterbury's second theatre (c. AD 220) was one of the largest in Britain, seating an estimated 3,000 people. It was of similar size to the one at St Albans (Verulamium). An awning would have covered people in bad weather. The internal design of a Roman theatre was essentially taken from the Ancient Greeks. Like Greek theatres, some of the Romano-British ones were built into a natural slope in the landscape, as at Colchester (Camulodunum). The location chosen for Canterbury's theatre was however very flat as the heart of the town lies in a valley. So a free-standing structure was erected here.

A theatre should not be confused with an amphitheatre! The "D" shaped theatre was a venue for plays, religious festivals and the like. We associate the oval amphitheatre with perhaps less refined entertainment such as gladiator combat and wild animal fights.

What evidence have we found?

Theatre foundations

Parts of the huge flint and tile foundations and opus signinum floors (a mix of mortar and crushed brick giving a pink colour) have been discovered both through archaeological excavation and when cutting deep service trenches under Canterbury's streets. 'Robber' trenches of original Roman masonry have also been found.

A substantial part of the theatre's huge flint foundations have been preserved beneath Slatters Hotel in St Margaret's Street in what is now a cellar. You can see the remains through a thickened glass 'window' built into the floor of the dining room above. Unfortunately visibility is poor.

Theatre superstructure

Such massive foundations indicate a heavy stone superstructure. Although none of this remains in situ (that is, in its original position), large blocks of Kentish Ragstone

were found amongst the rubble in the area of the theatre. It is likely that these formed part of the original walls.

How long did the theatre survive?

Documentary evidence in the form of Cathedral Rentals shows us that the site of the Roman theatre had been built over by AD 1200. Although it tells us something, this evidence is of limited value because it means that the theatre could have been demolished anytime between the Roman period and 1200. Archaeological excavation suggests that it actually survived (in ruins) right up to the time of the Norman Conquest! This is the evidence:

Archaeologists found large quantities of masonry rubble at the site of the theatre. They found very little subsequent Anglo-Saxon occupation. This suggested that at the end of the Roman period the theatre was abandoned and fell into ruins. Doubtless the site soon became overgrown and it seems that the land laid relatively undisturbed for centuries. Above the ruins they found pits dug centuries later by local people to dispose of their domestic rubbish. Discarded sherds of pottery found in these pits showed that they were being used in the middle of the 11th century. This was the time in our history when Anglo-Saxon rule was giving way to Norman supremacy.

The Normans liked to re-cycle stone from ruinous buildings. The Norman Castle keep at the south end of Castle Street (near the Wincheap roundabout, Fig. 3) gives us a clue about the destination of at least some of the stone from the dilapidated Roman theatre. The keep was built in 1086 and incorporated into its walls are large blocks of Kentish Ragstone...

The Temple Precinct

There were probably a number of small temples in Roman Canterbury. We believe we have found the main temple precinct just north-west of the theatre, across a street dividing the two. There are many examples from Gaul of theatres and temples built in close proximity and the same is true of the Romano-British towns of Colchester (Camulodunum) and St. Albans (Verulamium). It seems likely that there was a functional link and perhaps the theatre seated crowds of people at religious festivals. A lot of Canterbury-made pottery was found in the temple precinct which may have also served as a market place. We think that the precinct covered a vast area, bordered on at least three sides by a spacious covered walkway (portico). Within the precinct was a magnificent temple richly decorated with exotic marble. There is also evidence of what seems to be a fountain placed directly opposite to the theatre and there was at least one small shrine.

What evidence have we found?

The evidence for the Temple Precinct comes from a combination of ten excavations in one area. On each site, patches of gravel surfaces appeared. Put together, these indicate a courtyard of over 2 acres. Successive layers of courtyard show us that it was re-surfaced on six occasions during its lifetime. The portico

was visible as segments of an external masonry wall (80 centimetres thick) with evidence of an internal (stylobate) wall running parallel to this. This inner wall was made of large sandstone blocks on flint foundations. These probably supported brick columns, fragments of which were found on the site. Measurements made at the site show us that the walkway was an impressive 3 metres wide. We also found 'robber' trenches for parts of the walls.

Although we have found considerable evidence for the presence of a huge temple, we have not as yet discovered the structure itself. Hence, the exact location of the temple within its courtyard is by no means certain. The position shown in our reconstruction and the position shown in the one at Canterbury's Heritage Museum are equally valid with the current state of knowledge.

But we have found:

- Fragments of Corinthian column capitals and a fluted column shaft (70 centimetres wide) both made from Jurassic limestone.
- Over 1000 pieces of green and white marble-mouldings, wall and floor veneers imported from Italy.
- A fragment of a bronze monumental inscription with the letters 'SC'.

The architectural pieces suggest a temple built in the classical style which was richly decorated.

Fragments of a basin lined with opus signinum and wooden water piping running under the courtyard are evidence for the fountain sited opposite the theatre. Evidence for the small rectangular shrine was in the form of slots in the ground for wooden foundation beams, a wide robber trench with one Kentish Ragstone block still in situ, together with post holes and clay floors for the smaller central room (cella).

The *Basilica* (civic centre) and *Forum* (large public square)

This is an area that we know relatively little about as yet. Although we have not yet found the basilica we would expect it to be in the area indicated. The artist has drawn in this important public building to give a more complete impression of this area of public administration. Other excavations in Roman Britain (London, St Albans, Silchester for example) show us that the forum and basilica were always built as a 'unit'. Lincoln (Lindum) is the only Romano-British town having a surviving piece of basilica wall still standing above ground. Known as the 'Mint Wall' it stands an amazing 5.5 metres in height and 21 metres in length!

There is tantalizing evidence for Canterbury's forum where public meetings and markets were held. Looking at the reconstruction drawing, the forum is not visible but we think it was situated off right with the basilica lying along one edge.

What evidence have we found?

As yet, there has been no opportunity for large scale excavation in this area of the Roman town. However, random archaeological discoveries have been made on many occasions of service trenching, cellar alterations, property extensions and so on. Evidence of massive masonry foundations and courtyard surfaces together with stone paving slabs, moulded architectural fragments and marble wall veneers have all been found in the general area where Stour Street, White Horse Lane and Guildhall Street meet the High Street. By plotting these numerous 'findspots' we can suggest that this area is a likely location for the forum and basilica.

The Public Baths

The Baths were an important feature of Roman social life. Today's equivalent would be a Leisure Centre. People would swim, work out and indulge in various therapeutic treatments. Like today, they met up with friends and business acquaintances to keep up with the latest developments in business and social life (Fig. 6).

We have a good deal of evidence for a public baths complex at Canterbury. It straddled the northern (High Street) end of present day St Margaret's Street, lying beneath the general area of the Marlowe Shopping Arcade and Waterstones Bookshop on one side and St Margaret's Church (now converted into The Canterbury Tales experience) on the other.

We think the first public baths were constructed around the beginning of the 2nd century AD and then underwent several periods of alteration during their lifetime.

Layout of the Baths Centre

By looking at other Roman sites with bath suites, we can say that there was usually a range of hot and cold rooms and baths and a changing area. The layout tended to conform to a basic pattern, with the hottest rooms being closest to the furnaces.

At Canterbury, we have evidence of a furnace (praefurnium) serving a hot room (caldarium) and adjoining bath, both under Waterstones Bookshop; a separate hot bath; probably a warm room (tepidarium) in between these two; a hot dry room (laconicum); and a cold bath with a cold room (frigidarium) next door. There is also evidence for an indoor swimming pool (piscina) under St Margaret's Church. The reconstruction shows the bath rooms lying in parallel formation. A timber and masonry walkway (portico) ran around at least three sides. The open space outside the baths was an exercise area (palaestra).

Roman central heating

The Romans had an underfloor heating system (hypocaust) (Fig. 7). This is how it worked:

A wood-fuelled furnace supplied the heat for the system. This heat built up in the under floor chamber, warming the floor above. The floor was supported in the chamber by stacks of flat tiles (pilae). Heat also passed upwards through the walls by means of a series of flues. These had been built into the walls during their construction. Each flue was made of hollow box-shaped tiles stacked one upon the other for the entire height of the wall. The diagram shows a pitched roof building, but in the baths the roof would be curved. At the top, the box tiles would then stop and voussoir tiles (designed to make an arch when placed end-to-end) continued on, to form a rounded roof. Thus the entire internal surface area of the bath room was heated.

Experimental archaeology

At Xanten in Germany Roman-style baths have been built, based on archaeological evidence. Experiments have shown that stoking a furnace can take up to a week to reach a temperature of 40 degrees centigrade in a caldarium. With a temperature this high and 100% humidity, it is apparently just bearable if you lie motionless on a bench!

What evidence have we found?

The hot room (caldarium) and hot bath

The hypocaust under the caldarium was very well preserved. We found an underfloor cavity (approximately 70 centimetres deep) with red square tiles stacked in columns (pilae) to support the upper floor. This was made of pink waterproof ‘concrete’ (opus signinum). Evidence from other sites indicates that larger flat tiles were first placed across the stacks to bridge them and form the floor upon which a concrete mix could then be spread (Fig. 7). The pilae were surrounded by ash and remnants of the upper floor. There were also box flue tiles which had fallen from the walls and voussoir tiles from the barrel-vaulted roof.

One end of the caldarium was rounded, or apsidal, with a sunken floor. This may well have been a hot bath. The furnace supplied the heat for these rooms; it had flint and mortar walls and a ceramic tiled floor. The ash showed us that timber was the principal fuel. We also found evidence of a tile-lined drain taking waste water away from the hot bath.

Other rooms

To interpret the use of other rooms we have to look at the surviving remains and at how rooms are placed in relation to each other. Having found the hot room (extreme bottom right corner of reconstruction) we then move on:

Warm room (tepidarium)

The room found next door to the hot room is likely to be a tepidarium. The heat here is less intense.

Hot bath
Next to the tepidarium is a hot bath.

The following facilities are all housed inside the longest section that you can see of the baths:

Sweating room (laconicum)
A large room with an opus signinum floor above a hypocaust, thick brick walls and voussoir tiles, but no evidence of a bath or water tanks suggests a laconicum. This room had a very hot, dry atmosphere where you could sweat the grime out of your skin.

Cold room (frigidarium) and cold bath
Rooms without heating and found at some distance from a furnace may be interpreted as cold rooms. They may or may not have a plunge bath. We think we have a frigidarium with an adjoining sunken cold bath. The bath was floored with waterproof opus signinum and then covered in red brick tesserae.

Swimming pool (piscina)
The room identified as an indoor swimming pool was large, unheated and paved with Greensand stone blocks and Bethersden marble. This cold pool is interpreted as a swimming pool (rather than a plunge bath) because of its size.

Fragments of brightly painted plaster and marble wall veneers found during excavation show us that the bath suite was richly decorated.

One of the marble slabs from the piscina was a re-used piece decorated with a carved stylised shield (a pelta). We think that originally this formed part of a monumental plaque over the main entrance to the baths; an inscription flanked by a pair of shields.

Other Features of Roman Canterbury

Private Housing

It is worth noting that people did not immediately adopt ‘Roman’ ways following the conquest of AD 43. Evidence in Canterbury shows us that as late as the end of the 1st century AD, some local people were still living in native style ‘round houses’ made of wood, clay and thatch (Fig. 5).

Many remains of Roman domestic dwellings have been excavated. Because of the nature of urban archaeology, it is usually only partial excavation of the original building. The spread of domestic buildings in the reconstruction is therefore based both on substantial excavated remains in some parts of the town and on more scanty evidence in others.

We can assume from the available evidence in Canterbury, that the centre of the Roman town accomodated many domestic premises. They surrounded the core of public buildings and flanked the main streets and ranged from small homes adjoining workshops to grand town houses with baths.

Construction techniques

Many of the first houses to be built were constructed in timber with wattle and daub or clay walls and thatched roofs. Timber and thatch were the building materials of the Late Iron Age peoples in the construction of their 'round houses'. As Romanisation took hold the house shape changed from round (most commonly, although a few rectangular ones have been found) to a typical Roman rectangular structure. Traditional materials endured for some time. Building in timber and thatch must have been cheaper but there would have been considerable fire risk.

Later houses were built in masonry (largely flint and mortar) or with masonry foundations and timber superstructure. Tile roofs became more common and workshops were established to make the necessary building materials. A typical tile roof was constructed by laying rows of overlapping imbrices (curved tiles) and tegulae (flat and flanged) onto a timber framework (Fig. 7).

Tile kilns

Many of the tiles used on Canterbury houses must have come from the tile kilns discovered by archaeologists outside the town at St. Stephens Road (to the north) and at Whitehall Road (to the north-west). There is some evidence to suggest that this general area may have been an industrial 'suburb' in Roman times (Fig. 4).

Looking closely at the reconstruction, you will see that there are no chimneys on the tile roofs. This is because we have no conclusive evidence for them being used. Certainly the use of charcoal in the home for heating and cooking would reduce the need for them. Where they may have existed, it is likely that standard building materials were used to construct them. Four flat tiles or stone slabs could be built into a roof, or a hole may be left in an outside wall with a curved imbrex 'hood' projecting out from it.

Amongst the rubble that we tend to find as evidence for a building's structure it would be almost impossible to distinguish any such materials and say they were specifically used as chimneys. There are rare examples of purpose built Roman tile chimneys from Italian sites. These are cylindrical with a small double-pitched 'roof' of pyramid shape. This style of chimney is still in use in Italy today.

Different types of floors have been found. Some were made of simple clay or pink opus signinum. Others were paved with tesserae set in mortar creating plain red brick or (probably most expensive) mosaic panels of different coloured clays and stones. Floors could also be made by placing small rectangular shaped tiles on edge in a herringbone pattern. This work was known as opus spicatum. A large house may have had rooms with different types of floors, depending on their functions.

Often houses went through phases of structural alteration and refurbishment during their lifetime, as houses do today. Some rooms were clearly redecorated

several times with successive layers of painted wall plaster, as we might put up new wallpaper over old, when styles change.

Towards the end of the Roman period there was a return to the use of thatch and timber to build houses in some parts of Canterbury. It is likely that this was due to general economic decline at this time when other building materials were in short supply.

The 'Roman Painted House' at Dover

It is worth mentioning the 'Painted House' here. It is a remarkable case of survival of Roman remains, now preserved under cover for public viewing. A visit is a 'must' as you can see much of the building's structure still standing, including decorated walls standing up to 1.8 metres in places. These examples of painted plaster are considered to be the best in Britain. A hypocaust system under one of the rooms is also clearly visible. The 'Painted House' gives you a good idea of how the better quality houses in Canterbury would have looked.

What evidence have we found?

The reconstruction drawing shows houses built both in timber and in masonry.

Timber framed houses

Any one or more of these features may appear:

- Impressions in the ground of long 'sleeper' beams, the foundations for the main structure
- Post holes dug directly into the ground to take upright timbers
- Lines of smaller holes indicating presence of wattle and daub walls.

Wood will decay in most soil conditions. Evidence for these features usually shows up as dark staining in the ground.

Masonry and half-masonry houses

A masonry building of flint and mortar needs deep masonry foundations. Either we find these or the robber trenches where they once stood. Foundations of around 60 centimetres (2 Roman feet) or more indicate a substantial building, possibly more than one storey in height. Another indication of a masonry building is a mass of building rubble found nearby, from its demolition or dilapidation. 'Dwarf' masonry walls with an even finished top surface indicate a timber superstructure. Sometimes an impression of the first horizontal timber beam can be seen along the top of these small walls.

Where internal walls can be detected, these may be of flint and mortar, wattle and daub construction or simply of clay. At the Longmarket site in the High Street we found a chunk of internal clay wall in situ. The wall's clay core had been keyed

by running a roller (probably wooden) over its surface. The diamond pattern cut into the roller produced a repeated pattern over the clay. A thin layer of sandy clay was then applied to this and finally a layer of white plaster. The type of roller used for this job would also have been used to key the surface of flue tiles used in hypocausts (Fig. 7). Some of the designs were very elaborate and presumably were a way of advertising the products of a tile 'factory'. It is a shame that they were destined to be covered up by mortar!

Where roofs were built in tile we tend to find quantities of imbrices and tegulae. A noticeable absence of roof tiles is important negative evidence and would suggest that the roof was thatched. Apart from these structural remains, we find fragments of painted wall plaster (Fig. 8), hearths made in tile, remains of clay ovens, clay and opus signinum floors, tesselated floors and where heated rooms occur, hypocaust materials. Although fragmentary, this kind of archaeological evidence gives us probably our best picture of how houses were decorated internally and some idea of the function of different rooms.

'Town houses'

Although we have found random evidence of coloured mosaic panels suggesting high class residences, there are as yet few structural remains which we can confidently say belong to the type known as a 'town house'. Just three are mentioned here. Two of these can be seen in the reconstruction drawing. They both appear to be of 'wing corridor' style with a central courtyard, a fairly typical architectural design. Their remains lie beneath the general area of the present Marlowe Shopping Arcade.

Centre of reconstruction

Evidence shows us that this house was built with a timber frame around a central courtyard. The floors were of simple clay and fragments of internal walls showed that they were decorated with painted plaster.

Centre bottom of reconstruction

The owners of this property must have had considerable wealth and were perhaps of some standing in the community. The house was built in masonry and parts of it were possibly two storey in height. Even though there were public baths literally across the road a substantial private bath suite was incorporated into this spacious residence.

Along with the structural foundations of the bath rooms, archaeologists found:

- Pilae stacks from hypocaust chambers (some heat crazed and surrounded with ash)
- Stacks of box flue and voussoir tiles used in the same way as pilae tiles (very unusual)
- Limescale on the internal wall of a hot bath and inside the tile water pipe draining away waste water.

- Floors of red, white and orange tesserae
- Floors of opus signinum
- A drain made of curved imbrex tiles (normally used on roofs)
- Fragments of wall plaster with well preserved surfaces painted in orange, red, white, black and yellow. Although no overall design could be identified, there were bands of colour (which may have enclosed a central panel) and a grey marbled effect on some pieces. Painted 'marbling' was a cheap alternative to the real thing!

A cautionary note about interpretation...

In the hypocaust of the hot room (which was well preserved) we found evidence that we would not normally expect to see. We found stacks of box flue tiles and voussoir tiles in the hypocaust chamber where we would expect to find stacks of flat tiles. Within the walls (where the flue tiles would normally be) there were instead flat tiles placed together in box shapes as if imitating flue tiles... In other words, everything was the reverse of what we would expect to find. There seems to have been no real advantage to this. Was there a foul-up at the supplies depot - or maybe an apprentice was to blame! We found this evidence in situ, so the way the different tiles had been used in this building was clear. Had we found the tiles as building rubble we would have made a more conventional interpretation for how they had been used (see Fig. 7 for the usual arrangement). Disturbed evidence can lead archaeologists to a wrong conclusion...

'The Longmarket Roman House' (not visible in reconstruction)

The best known local example of a town house lies preserved beneath the Longmarket shopping development fronting the High Street. Canterbury's Roman Museum has been built around the remains (entrance in Butchery Lane, Fig. 3). The site was partially excavated after the Second World War and then in 1990 by Canterbury Archaeological Trust. The original Roman masonry building was altered and extended over a long period. At the museum visitors can watch a computer generated video reconstruction* of the various building phases. In its later stages the house had a range of several rooms and corridors lined with colourful mosaics. These can still be seen in situ. A hypocaust system has also been found showing that part of the house was heated.

* Produced by Canterbury Archaeological Trust and Kent University.

A Roman hotel?

In the reconstruction, notice the big building sitting at the far end of Roman Watling Street (extreme top right corner). When we excavated in this area we found part of a structure in flint and mortar with evidence for painted walls. Our trench was

located at some distance back from the line of Watling Street. We had discovered an outside wall to the Roman building, a length of about 15 metres. We wanted to find out how far this extended and infact whether it ran right up to the edge of Watling Street. By using geo-physical equipment to try and detect any structures below ground, we could explore this area which was not available for excavation. We found that the wall did indeed extend right up to the street (about another 40 metres). If this wall is the boundary to a single property then we are dealing with a substantial building, possibly a mansio, or hotel. This is a reasonable interpretation given that the building is situated just inside the London Gate, next to the busy London-Dover stretch of Watling Street (Fig. 4). This is one interpretation. However, the wall may equally well enclose more than property.

Streets within the town (Fig. 4)

Limited evidence from small scale excavation during the post-war years once suggested to archaeologists that the Roman town had a regular chequer-board street pattern. However, more recent large scale digging has shown that this was not entirely so. There is some regularity, for example the street running straight from London Gate to Riding Gate (Roman Watling Street in reconstruction); and another running from West Gate to Burgate, with a third located equidistant between them (neither of these last two visible in reconstruction, but see Fig. 4). There is further evidence of two other streets at right angles to these. One of them is visible in the reconstruction, running diagonally across the picture from approximately the mid-top-left edge down to the 'private bath' of the town house bottom centre. You can see that this street runs at right angles to Roman Watling Street. Elsewhere, the street 'plan' seems to be rather random, developing through time from around the end of the 1st century onwards.

What evidence have we found?

Typically, evidence for Roman streets in Canterbury appears as extensive areas of rammed river gravel. Some streets were re-surfaced several times, the one at the Longmarket (High Street area) on 14 occasions! Most of the streets do not appear to have had any kind of substantial foundations. The stretch of Watling Street passing through London Gate did show an area of large rounded flints (cobbles) but this seems to be exceptional.

Town wall and Gates (Figs. 1, 3 and 4)

Only a small section of the Roman wall and a single gate (Worth Gate) are visible in the coloured reconstruction (extreme top left corner). The stretch of wall between Worth Gate and London Gate can be seen in the black and white version. Because the boundary of a Roman town is a significant feature a summary of the evidence is given here.

Town wall

The sections of wall that we see today are almost entirely of Medieval date but they follow the same line as a Roman predecessor (Figs. 3 and 4).

Archaeological excavation has shown us that Canterbury's first masonry town wall was built at the end of the 3rd century. This date broadly coincides with the building of 'Saxon Shore' forts along the eastern and southern coasts of Britain at (going clockwise) Brancaster (Branodunum), Burgh Castle (Gariannonum), Bradwell (Othona), Reculver (Regulbium), Richborough (Rutupiae), Dover (Dubris), Lympne (Lemanis), Pevensey (Anderida) and Portchester (Portus Adurni). This was a time when the Roman Empire was under considerable threat and such defences were no doubt erected for a number of reasons. Among these would be the need for protection against continental invaders (Anglo-Saxons) and Picts from northern Britain sailing down the coast to attack southern shores.

What evidence have we found?

A considerable section of Roman city wall can still be seen where it was incorporated into the north wall of the old St Mary's church in Northgate (Figs. 3 and 9). The piece has survived the centuries by being 'recycled' in a medieval structure.

To find it, you must turn into St Radigund's Street off Northgate and stop at the small grassed garden area to your left. The section of Roman wall is then straight across the grass infront of you. It shows clearly how the wall was faced with large rounded (unlike Medieval knapped) flints and sandstone boulders. Above this, regular rows of smaller rounded flints were added and topped with crenellations.

A second section of Roman masonry survives on the southern side of the town in the part of the wall which encloses Canterbury's Norman Castle keep. You will need to go into the Castle grounds. The section faces the southern (Wincheap) side of the keep and again is identified by its rounded flints (Fig. 3).

Archaeologists have suggested that the face of the wall may have originally been plastered over to make it smooth, thus hindering any intruders trying to scale the protruding flint work. However we have no evidence of this.

There have been numerous excavations around the present walls which show us that the Roman wall was about 2.3 metres thick and that the original Roman core was made of whole flints.

Gates

The names of the town gates used in these notes are the ones in use today and have no known Latin origins.

In the reconstruction you can just see the Roman gate at Worth Gate, leading to Lympne. It was blocked up in the 16th century and finally removed in the late 18th century when a wider gateway was opened nearby. Excavation revealed the foundations of the Roman gate, establishing where it was located; there is a marker in stone at the south end of present day Castle Street. We have evidence of how it

looked above ground from an 18th century drawing made by the antiquarian William Stukely, which has survived in the historical record (Fig. 10).

Going clockwise, we arrive at the Roman gate at London Gate; a stone marker is laid in the grass at Westgate Gardens, near to where Rheims Way (the southern part of Canterbury's ring road) crosses the River Stour.

Further round the circuit, evidence for a Roman road at medieval West Gate suggests that there was a gate here in the Roman period. This would have led to Rochester (Durobrivae) and London. Similarly, remains of a Roman road at Northgate suggest a Roman gate here which led to Reculver and Thanet (Tanatis).

Remnants of Roman Quenin Gate can still be seen in the city wall at the Queningate car park in Broad Street. To find it, first go to the foot of the present day steps leading into the Cathedral precincts. Walk about 16 metres north (right) keeping the line of the wall on your left. The blocked Roman gate is found in the wall just before the first tower (Fig. 3 and 10). The Kentish Ragstone blocks supporting a red brick arch were first recognised as being Roman in 1640 by the historian William Somner. It is likely that this was a simple postern gate. By the end of the 15th century it had been blocked and incorporated into the now Medieval town wall. A new gate was built approximately 16m. to the south of the Roman one.

Although no evidence has been found as yet, it seems likely that a Roman gate would have stood in the area of the later Burgate (top of present Burgate Lane). A road leading out of the town from here would take you directly to Richborough.

Completing the circuit, remains of two Roman arches at Riding Gate (where present day Watling Street leaves the city walls in the direction of Dover) were visible until the late 18th century, again recorded by William Stukely (Fig. 11, bottom). Roman Watling Street ran from Dover, meeting Canterbury at Riding Gate, then on through the town leaving the walls at London Gate. No doubt this major route between the coast and London demanded a suitably impressive entrance. Riding Gate was built with two arches, flanked by guard chambers. All of the other identified Roman gateways were single arch structures.

What evidence have we found?

At Roman London Gate only the foundations were discovered of the single arch gateway. 'Courses' or bands of flints were found resting on blocks of Kentish Ragstone.

Stukely's illustration of the Roman gateway at Worth Gate is our best piece of evidence for how this once looked. He shows again a simple archway, with stone jambs either side supporting a brick arch. We can compare the appearance with the surviving remains of Roman Quenin Gate. It is likely that most of the gateways into Roman Canterbury were built in this simple style, using local building materials.

To date, Riding Gate has undergone the most extensive excavation by far with investigations in the mid 1950's, 1970 and most recently in 1986. It is a good example of the hazards of interpretation.

A case study: Interpreting the evidence for Riding Gate

The investigation of Roman Riding Gate is an example of the combined use of different historical sources, in this case archaeological, documentary and pictorial. It also illustrates well the hazards of interpretation when evidence is limited.

Archaeological remains

The earlier excavations were restricted to small trenches. The discoveries made then together with observations made from Stukely's drawing led archaeologists to conclude that the Roman gateway had one high and wide archway (a carriageway) and beside this a low, narrower one for pedestrians, like Newport Arch at Lincoln (Lindum) which still stands today.

However, in 1986 further archaeological exploration revealed a more complete plan of the original foundations for Roman Riding Gate and the interpretation had to change. We now had measurements for the width of each gateway and the evidence suggested that the whole structure was more symmetrical, with 'twin' gates of virtually equal size (Fig. 11, top).

Archaeologists discovered foundations of flint and mortar beneath a plinth of massive greensand blocks. These blocks were tied together with iron clamps. The plinth supported the main walls which were built in flint and mortar. The walls had evidence of regular string courses made of red tiles, to ensure even construction.

The jambs of the twin gateways were edged with greensand blocks. No part of the arches themselves survive. They may have been in red brick (as Roman Quenin Gate).

Traces of the lower part of one of the timber doors were found and at the base of the other doorway, large iron nails and fittings were still in situ. These held together the heavy planking of the door. We also found a massive iron hinge set into the stone block work of the central wall between the two doors and another iron fitting which may well have been a bolt.

A problem of interpretation...

In an article about Stukely's work, the archaeologist Stuart Piggott writes: '...those (archaeologists) who have had occasion to check his field observations know him as an accurate and careful observer.' (Antiquity, Volume 9; 1935).

Stukely has drawn one high and one low arch in his illustration of the Roman remains at Riding Gate.

So how do we justify our re-interpretation?

There are two things to consider:

1) Architectural evidence from the Roman Empire shows us that the architects of the day had a strong tendency towards regularity in style. It is unlikely that they would design Riding Gate with arches of equal width (as seen in excavation) but differing in height (as shown by Stukely).

2) In Stukely's drawing, the curve of the two arches is very similar suggesting they were symmetrical and not differing in size.

That one arch is so much lower than the other is probably due to restoration work on the town walls in Medieval times.

Documentary sources tell us that orders were given for major repairs in the 14th century. Our evidence comes from letters sent by the king's secretary to the town's central administration, giving instructions for specific building works to be carried out.

Perhaps a whole chunk of decaying Roman masonry containing an arch fragment was re-located lower down the wall. Maybe the area of wall which surrounded the arch subsided as a result of the major alterations taking place.

So while Stukely's observations may be correct, they are misleading.

What about the evidence of the Newport Arch at Lincoln? There is indeed a main gateway standing beside a much lower one. There is however an important difference between this and Canterbury's Riding Gate; the lower archway at Lincoln is much narrower than its neighbour.

Cemeteries (Fig. 4)

Cemeteries are a significant feature of any Roman town and give us a lot of information about the lives of the Romano-British people. It was Roman practice to bury the dead outside the town, bordering the main roads. So most of the evidence for Canterbury's cemeteries lies outside the reconstruction image. You will need to look at the plan for their location. A few cremation burials have been found within the masonry walls (as at Rosemary Lane at the south end of Castle Street). We think that in the early years of its development, the Roman town may have occupied a smaller area than you see in the reconstruction, possibly with an earthern boundary. In this case these burials would have been outside the boundary.

From 19th and early 20th century observations during building works and small scale excavation, we can see that the cemeteries flanked most, if not all, of the principal roads leading into the town. While we can plot the general location of Canterbury's cemeteries, we only have a rough idea of how far they extended beyond the town. Given the intensive occupation in Roman times, it would be a fair assumption that the cemeteries needed would be quite extensive.

To date, the greatest number of cremation burials found has come from the 'St. Dunstan's/London Road' cemetery to the west of the town. Fifty-three cremations were found in 1982 at a site in London Road On another occasion, a few inhumations were discovered in New Street and Kirby's Lane (same cemetery but nearer to the town walls). Depending on how long they were in use, Roman cemeteries may have both cremation and inhumation burials.

Elsewhere in Kent (mainly along Watling Street and in the central Medway valley) archaeologists have found evidence for cemeteries enclosed by walls. At Keston (about 3 miles west of Orpington) they excavated a Romano-British villa-

estate with a walled cemetery containing a circular structure. This contained a number of burials and has been identified as a mausoleum. It was about 9 metres in diameter, built in Kentish Ragstone, with the outside plastered and painted dark red.

We have found no evidence for walled cemeteries at Canterbury but it is possible that such boundaries did exist.

What evidence have we found?

Broadly speaking, for the first two centuries of Roman Britain it was normal practice to cremate the dead. Towards the end of the Roman occupation, burial custom changed to inhumation.

Cremations

Most of the burials found so far have been cremations. A typical cremation burial would contain whole pottery vessels. These may include locally made dishes and flagons, imported wine or olive oil amphorae (very large jars or flagons) and fine tableware, like glossy red samian from Gaul. The pieces of burnt bone are usually placed in one of the vessels but are so fragmentary that it is often impossible to determine the age or sex of the individuals. Sometimes we find other personal possessions such as jewellry buried inside a pot, or the remains of a pair of boots which had been placed in the burial pit.

Inhumations

We have found relatively few burials where the complete skeleton has been interred (inhumation). One found recently near Lady Wootton's Green in Broad Street, was identified as an adult female. There were six bracelets (one shale and five copper alloy) and an intaglio ring in the grave with her.

At North Lane, just beyond the West Gate and presumably part of the St Dunstan's/London Road cemetery we have found a number of inhumations. Most recently (1996) archaeologists discovered an isolated group of 5 graves here. This may well have been a family plot. The skeletons were in perfect alignment and one adult had a young child of around 8 to 10 years old lying beside it. The archaeologist who specialises in human skeletal remains (osteo-archaeologist) was able to tell the age of the child quite easily by looking at the development of milk and second teeth.

An Extraordinary Discovery

In 1976, a double burial of two adult males with their swords was found on an excavation at the south end of Castle Street (Figs. 3 and 4), not far from the site of the Norman keep. The skeletons lay head to toe, apparently thrown in hastily. Their swords suggest they were Roman cavalrymen, but soldiers dying of natural causes would not be buried with their weapons. The whole sinister business suggests

murder or maybe the unfortunate outcome of a drunken brawl. There is a display about this discovery in Canterbury's Roman Museum in Butchery Lane (Fig. 3).

Another intriguing burial, made in the troubled times at the very end of the Roman period is described on p. 30. Both of these unique discoveries are dealt with in more detail in Roman Canterbury, a journey into the past (see bibliography).

Burial mounds

A number of mounds survived until recent times and have been located by using documentary and pictorial sources. None of them has been excavated but artefactual evidence in the vicinity of two suggests that they have Roman origins. The mounds cluster on the south-east side of the town with two of them lying just inside the walls. One of these, now known as the Dane John mound in the public gardens near Canterbury East Railway Station, is the only one visible today (Fig. 3). We think that the Dane John mound was later re-used as the site for Canterbury's first Norman castle, built in timber.