

WALL (*Letocetum*) ROMAN SITE: Notes for Study Group for Roman Pottery, 6 July 2019

Overview (details in tables 1 and 2)

The earliest Roman activity at Wall comprises two probable marching camps, which were succeeded by a large Neronian fort, in turn followed by smaller Flavian forts. The latest fort was abandoned in the early 2nd century. The first phases of the baths and mansio were constructed in the late 1st century and they were both extended and rebuilt during the 2nd century. A presumed vicus outside the forts developed into a small town along Watling Street, and there were several farmsteads nearby, including a possible villa. Following early 3rd century additions the baths and mansio were abandoned before the end of that century, and possibly robbed to construct the wall of a late 3rd or early 4th century burgus straddling Watling Street. A cemetery to the south-east remained in use into the 4th century but there is otherwise scant evidence of 4th century occupation. A raid on Wall is described in a 7th century poem, at which time nearby Lichfield had become an ecclesiastical centre.

Wall has long been identified as the *Etoceto* of the *Antonine Itinerary*. Visible Roman remains were recorded in the 17th and 18th centuries, including the substantial wall that gave the village its name. Many small excavations have taken place since at least the middle of the 19th century, on the forts, baths, mansio, cemetery, burgus and other sites in the village, and along the line of the A5 to its south. Excavations undertaken on the route of the M6 Toll to the south and east included a further cemetery, a farmstead and a pottery kiln.

Most of the present village and its immediate surroundings are scheduled (NHLE 1006108). The excavated remains of the baths and mansio are owned by the National Trust and managed by English Heritage; the site museum is curated by English Heritage and manned by National Trust volunteers, the *Friends of Letocetum*.

Publication, archives, and future research potential (table 2)

All the excavations at Wall from the middle of the 20th century onwards have been published, with the exception of excavations to the west of the mansio and the most recent excavations on the forts. The locations of the excavation archives are known, therefore there is potential for further analysis and re-assessment and collation of data. Earlier work is published in much less detail, there is no surviving paper archive, and although finds survive they are not generally identified to context.

Roman pottery from excavations at Wall

The large quantity of pottery found in excavations at Wall ranges in date from Neronian (and possibly Claudian) to the 4th century (although relatively little has been assigned a 4th century date). The pottery is from a range of sources in the Midlands and beyond. Some Flavian/Trajanic wares from Wall have been identified as local products, a 2nd or 3rd century pottery kiln was found at Shenstone to the south-east (on the M6 Toll), and kilns are reported near the the mansio (unpublished, but mentioned in an interim note). Reports on the 1960s and 1970s excavations (other than a later backlog report) do not quantify the pottery, describe fabrics in detail or compare them to type series. They contain specialist reports on samian and mortaria but coarse wares and non-samian fine wares are described by the excavator and tend to draw comparisons with large published assemblages available at the time. There is therefore a need to quantify the excavated assemblages from Wall and reassess them in the light of current knowledge.

Some outstanding research questions at Wall:

Origins: Did the site have a pre-Roman significance, as a meeting place and/or religious centre lying on or close to a tribal border (Cornovii to the west, Corieltavi to the east)?

Military activity: What was the extent of the earliest fort, did the forts have annexes, and what was the extent of the vicus?

The civilian settlement: Its extent, character and function- a roadside settlement/small town or a market /religious centre/administrative centre serving scattered farmsteads? (further fieldwork could include extensive geophysical survey around the existing village)

The 4th century and later: What was the function of the burgus? What was the character of the late Roman settlement, and when did the focus shift to Lichfield?

The landscape: With the exception of analysis of pollen in buried soils under Watling Street and Ryknield Street, palaeoenvironmental data has hitherto not been considered at Wall.

WALL: Bibliography in addition to individual site reports (except for Blake et al 2018, all of these works predate the M6 Toll excavations)

P Ellis, *Wall Roman Site* (English Heritage Guidebook, 1999)

J Gould, *Letocetum: The rise and decline of a Roman posting station* (privately printed, 1998)

R Meeson, *Archaeology of Roman Letocetum* (Wall, Staffordshire) (Staffordshire County Council)

Various *RIB* volumes [for the inscribed stones from the mansio and other sites]

H Welfare and V Swan, *Roman camps in England: the field archaeology* (RCHME 1995) [for the marching camps]

E W Black, *Cursus publicus: the infrastructure of governance in Roman Britain* (BAR Brit 241, 1995) [for re-interpretation and re-phasing of the baths and mansio]

Papers by J Gould and others in various volumes of *Transactions of the [South] Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society* [placename, carved stones, dating of mansio, early fort]

S Blake, S Dean and C Wardle, C, 'Staffordshire in the Roman period', in White, R. and Hodder, M. (eds) *Clash of Cultures? The Romano-British period in the West Midlands* (The Making of the West Midlands, vol 3) (Oxbow Books, 2018), 136–57

Journal abbreviations in table 2 (list of excavations) below:

JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*

TBWAS *Trans Birmingham [and Midland Institute] [and Warwickshire] Archaeological Society* (currently hard copy only, but now digitized, to go on ADS soon- see <https://bwat-online.co.uk/>)

TSAHS *Trans [Lichfield and] [South] Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society* (online access to whole run via one-off subscription- <https://www.sahs.uk.net/transactions>)

WMA *West Midlands Archaeology* (Council for British Archaeology, West Midlands)- for online access see <http://cbawm.archaeologyuk.org/WMA.php>

Table 1: Broad chronological sequence at Wall, by location

	Forts etc	Baths/mansio	Burgus area	Cemeteries	Other
Neolithic to Bronze Age	Worked flint	Worked flint			M6 Toll: Pits, charred grain and pottery
Iron Age			Stone-filled trench	Buried soil under Ryknield Street	M6 Toll: farmstead
Mid 1 st century	Marching camps. Large (19 acre?) fort on hilltop	Neronian cultivation layer. Timber buildings	Timber buildings	West and south-east cemeteries begin?	
Later 1 st century	Sequence of three smaller forts. Punic ditch.	First bath house. Timber buildings on mansio site	Watling Street surface c AD70. More structures	Cemeteries in use	Farmsteads along Watling Street
Early 2 nd century	Forts abandoned	Baths rebuilt. New timber building on mansio site. Shrine?	More structures	Cemeteries in use	Farmsteads along Watling Street. Possible villa at Shenstone
Later 2 nd century <i>Etoceto</i> in Antonine Itinerary	Ditches on fort site. Occupation on hilltop?	Extended bath house. Stone mansio	More structures	Cemeteries in use	Farmsteads along Watling Street. Shenstone pottery kiln
Early 3 rd century	Occupation on hilltop?	Additions to bath house and mansio		Western cemetery out of use?	Ashcroft Lane building with window grille
Later 3 rd century/ early 4 th century	Occupation on hilltop?	Bath house contracts, then both buildings out of use and robbed.	Burgus constructed: stone wall and 3 ditches	South-east cemetery continues	
4 th century	Occupation on hilltop?	Occupation on baths site?	Debris of heated building	Burials east of burgus? Chi-rho bowl	Shenstone possible villa abandoned?
5 th - 7 th centuries	7 th century Welsh poem describes raid on <i>Caer Lwytgoed</i> by Morfael, took cattle and horses. Mentions monks and a bishop in his 'four-cornered house- ' church/monastery in burgus				5 th /6 th century structures in Lichfield; St Chad 7 th cent
8 th -9 th centuries	<i>Historia Britonnum</i> ("Nennius"): <i>Cair Luit Coyt</i> was one of the 28 cities of [Roman] Britain				Bede: Lichfield (<i>Liccidfeld</i>)
13 th -14 th centuries	Large sherds of pottery-occupation	Small sherds of pottery-manuring scatters		Manor of Wall mentioned in 12 th century	
16 th - 18 th centuries	Antiquarian accounts (including Camden, Horsley, Plot, Stukeley: identification as <i>Etocetum</i> ; visible burgus wall and baths/mansio walls and floors; robbing				

Table 2: Principal known excavations at Wall (see above for journal abbreviations)

Date	Director	Location	Publication (journal abbreviations in bibliography)	Paper Archive and finds
1859	?	Burgus	Letter in <i>Staffs Advertiser</i> 18/6/1859, p3	?
1872	Bagnall	Baths/mansio and burgus	TBAS for 1873 (1874)	?
1912-14	Mott	Baths/mansio	<i>Trans N Staffs Field Club</i> 47 (1913); 48 (1914); 49 (1915)	EH
1920s	Jackson and Henderson	Western cemetery; burgus; chi rho bowl	JRS 11(1921); 14(1924); <i>Trans N Staffs Field Club</i> 59 (1925); TBAS 50 (1924); TSAHS 24 (1995)	?
1920s	Walsall Historical Society	Western cemetery	W Blay, <i>Letocetum</i>	site museum/ BMT
1927	Hodgkinson	Western cemetery	TBAS 52 (1927)	?/site museum and BMT
1926-27	Hodgkinson	Watling Street and Rykniel Street	JRS 19 (1929)	?
1956	Webster	Baths	TBAS 74 (1956)	BMT
1957	Webster	Burgus	TBAS 75 (1957)	BMT
1959	Lyon and Gould	Forts	TBAS 79 (1964); TSAHS 2 (1960-61)	BMT
1961-63	Gould	Burgus	TSAHS 5 (1964)	Keele Univ/ BMT/ Lichfield DC
1962-64	Greenfield	East of burgus	TSAHS 37 (1998)	Historic England Archive/EH
1963-64	Gould	South-east of Wall	TSAHS 6 (1966)	Keele Univ/ BMT
1964-66	Gould	Forts	TSAHS 8 (1968)	Keele Univ/BMT
1966-67	Round	Forts	TSAHS 11 (1971)	BMT
1968-72	Round	Forts	TSAHS 23 (1983)	BMT
1971	Round	Baths	TSAHS 12 (1972)	BMT
1972-78	Round	Mansio	TSAHS 21 (1980); TSAHS 32 (1992)	EH/ BMT
1978-89	Ball and Ball	Mansio	Unpublished: interims in WMA 21 (1978); 22 (1979); 26 (1983); 27 (1984); 28 (1985); 29 (1986); 38 (1995)	EH
1989	Sterenbergh	Burgus	https://doi.org/10.5284/1032058	?
1980-81	Ball and Ball	"Triangle" bungalows	TSAHS 25 (1985)	BMT
1997	Campbell-Kelly	Forts	Unpublished	With excavator
2001	Oxford- Wessex Archaeology	South-east cemetery and other sites	A Powell et al, <i>The Archaeology of the M6 Toll 2000-2003</i> (2008)	

Archive abbreviations: EH= English Heritage, Wreast Park; BMT= Birmingham Museums Trust