

# THE CARLISLE MILLENNIUM PROJECT EXCAVATIONS IN CARLISLE, 1998-2001

## Volume 1: The Stratigraphy

John Zant

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Front cover: *Plan of Carlisle, produced c 1560 © British Library, Dupondius of Vespasian, minted in AD 72-3*

Rear Cover: *Carlisle Castle, with the excavation of MIL 5 in the foreground*

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## Abbreviations

BP	Before Present
BS	Body sherd
CAU/CAL	Carlisle Archaeological Unit/Carlisle Archaeology Ltd
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPR	Ground Penetrating Radar
GSB	Geophysical Surveys of Bradford
IT	Information Technology
NGR	National Grid Reference
NISP	Number of individual species
OA	Oxford Archaeology
OD	Ordnance Datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
SM	Scheduled Monument
SUERC	Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre
U/ID	Unidentified



## Preface

It is my pleasure to welcome this substantial contribution in recording Carlisle's rich history - more so because it represents some very significant advances in our knowledge of the early development of the city, and its pivotal role in the Hadrian's Wall frontier system.

The Tullie House/ Castle Green excavations were a key aspect of the Millennium Gateway Project, which was very much a Carlisle City Council-led venture. The successful outcome is abundantly shown in this publication, which is a great credit to the expertise of our partners at Oxford Archaeology North, English Heritage, Cumbria County Council, and the University of Bradford, building on earlier work carried out by the former City Archaeological Unit.

This is a major resource for the future: both this publication and the associated finds will ensure that the City Council and Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery are better able to promote Carlisle's exciting heritage to the world, stimulating the interest and pride of our citizens, and bringing ever more people to discover our story for themselves.

As Leader of the City Council, I am intrigued that the presence of the Roman army here - and especially a reference to a 'Centurion in charge of the region' - may with some justification be claimed as the starting point of organised local government in this area. We do indeed go back a long way.



Councillor Mike Mitchelson  
*Leader of Carlisle City Council*

## Foreword

Carlisle has been described as one of England's least known cities and this description applies also to the national public perception of the archaeology of the city. Given its history, situation on Hadrian's Wall, and the possession for many years of its own urban archaeological unit, it is remarkable that its rich archaeological remains are not celebrated more widely. Perhaps there has been a lack of the publication of the type of discoveries that have raised the profile of the archaeological remains of some other cities. It is for this reason that the publication of the Carlisle Millennium Project is so welcome. In three volumes, it covers the excavations undertaken in front of Carlisle Castle between 1998 and 2001. These shine a spotlight on the wealth of Carlisle's archaeological heritage and reveal something of the extent and quality of the research that has been undertaken.

The Millennium Project excavations were a milestone in the investigation of Carlisle's archaeological resource: they were the last large excavation programme undertaken in the city by its own urban archaeological unit before its demise; they were occasioned by an attempt partially to reconnect Carlisle Castle with its medieval city, which remains severed by the road known as Castle Way. Above all, they provided a wealth of previously unknown detail on life in Roman and medieval Carlisle. Some of the finds were extraordinary and richly deserving of wide recognition.

The publication of the Millennium Project excavations does justice to such a significant site and programme of investigation. The team involved assimilated, processed, analysed, and described a huge quantity of data in a relatively short period. There is no doubt that *'The Carlisle Millennium Project'* will remain a publication of substance and importance for many years to come. It will be a cornerstone to any study of the archaeology of Roman and medieval Carlisle, and of significance to any serious study of Hadrian's Wall or Roman forts in Britain. In addition, it will be essential reading for anyone reviewing the archaeological background to the Roman and medieval development of towns in north-west England. This publication should be a springboard to future research into Roman and medieval Carlisle. The city's rich archaeological heritage deserves to be better known and the publication of the Millennium Project excavations will help to attract the attention Carlisle's archaeological remains deserve.

Dr Richard Newman

*President Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*



## Summary

Between 1998 and 2001, major excavations were undertaken immediately to the south of Carlisle Castle, in advance of construction works associated with Carlisle City Council's Gateway City (Millennium) Project (NY 397 561). The investigation comprised five main trenches, the positions of which were determined by the development footprint. Several geophysical surveys associated with, but completed prior to, the main phase of excavation, were also carried out, together with a limited excavation in which no significant archaeological remains were encountered. Previous excavations had demonstrated the archaeological significance of the area; it was known that the site lay within the multi-phase Roman fort and the medieval castle's outer ward, and it was anticipated that the ditch separating the castle from the medieval city would be encountered beneath Castle Way.

Evidence for pre-Roman activity was restricted to cultivation marks, the remains of a field system of possible Iron Age date. The arrival of the Roman army saw the construction of a turf-and-timber fort during the autumn/winter of AD 72–3, a date known from the dendrochronological dating of timbers recovered from the south rampart in the 1980s. The Millennium excavations fixed the position of the west rampart and located the junction of two major roads, and in the southern part of the fort, the remains of barracks, workshops/stores, and external areas were investigated. A small part of the central range, including fragments of what may have been the *principia* and the *praetorium*, was also exposed.

An extensive internal reconstruction undertaken in the autumn/winter of AD 83–4 saw the replacement of almost all the original buildings with new structures. The barracks were rebuilt to a slightly larger specification, but otherwise the layout remained essentially unchanged; the fort defences do not appear to have been modified at this time. Following a minor episode of refurbishment c AD 93–4, the fort was demolished around AD 103–5. The break in occupation appears to have been a short one, however, and rebuilding, again in timber, occurred c AD 105. The excavations uncovered barrack blocks in the southern part of the second fort and fragments of two central range buildings: the *principia* and an adjacent structure that might possibly have been a *fabrica*. A shift in the character of occupation during the Hadrianic period suggests that the fort may have evolved from a conventional base into something like a works depot, a change precipitated, perhaps, by the construction of Hadrian's Wall and the fort at Stanwix less than 1 km to the north. In the possible *fabrica* in the central range, an important cache of articulated armour fragments was deposited towards the end of this period.

The fort was again demolished in the mid-second century, perhaps as a consequence of the Antonine re-occupation of southern Scotland in the early AD 140s. The status of the site during the second half of the century remains obscure. Intermittent occupation occurred, but the site does not seem to have been used as a conventional fort. The early third century saw extensive rebuilding in stone, but it is not clear whether the new installation was a conventional fort or something else, although for the most part the new layout followed that of the earlier forts. What was probably the west curtain wall lay inside the Flavian rampart, the *principia* was constructed on the site of the earlier headquarters buildings, the position of the major roads was maintained, and barracks were erected to the south. A building stone in the east wall of the *principia* suggests that the reconstruction was the work of *Legio VI Victrix*, although epigraphic evidence from elsewhere suggests that the fort was garrisoned by detachments from the other two British legions.

Thereafter the site was occupied to the end of the Roman period, with occupation certainly extending into the fifth century. Heavy coin loss outside the *principia*, associated with large quantities of animal bone and an increase in items of personal ornament, suggest that the fort may have taken on a market function in the late fourth century. Eventually, the excavated buildings were levelled and their remains covered by 'dark earth', although parts of the *principia* probably remained upstanding for centuries. Any activity in these centuries cannot, however, be characterised. Intensive activity recommenced in the mid-twelfth century, when most of the site was incorporated into the castle's outer ward. On the west, the city wall was constructed, whilst further east a road or track running north towards the castle's main gate was flanked to the west by a probable timber building, from which a palisade trench extended westwards. Following the construction of another timber building of particularly substantial construction, a layer of soil accumulated across this part of the site. Subsequently, activity within the outer ward was limited principally to the digging of a few pits, although at some stage an earthwork was constructed across the southern part of the ward in an east to west direction. The latest surviving levels, which need date no later than the thirteenth century, comprised a further accumulation of soils suggestive of gardening activity. The earliest cartographic information relating to this area, from the sixteenth century, clearly shows the main area of excavation as gardens and orchards.

To the south, a near-complete section was obtained across the large defensive ditch beneath Castle Way. This feature probably originated in the second half of the twelfth century but was recut, perhaps during the early fourteenth century, after becoming choked with earth and debris, seemingly largely as a result of rubbish disposal from the direction of the castle. From the late fourteenth century, the ditch was no longer maintained and encroachment occurred from tenements on the north side of Annetwell Street. All later medieval and most post-medieval deposits in this area had been removed when Castle Way was constructed.

Exceptional preservation of waterlogged organic materials, including the remains of timber buildings, and outstanding artefactual and environmental assemblages, were a feature of the late first-century to mid-second-century levels over the greater part of the site, and of the medieval deposits within the ditch. As a consequence, the Millennium excavations yielded evidence rarely found on archaeological sites in Britain, the study of which has greatly enhanced our understanding of daily life in Roman and medieval Carlisle.

# Phasing Summary

## Pre-Roman (Period 1)

- 1 Agricultural activity represented by plough-marks overlain by a buried soil horizon (Iron Age?)

## Roman (Periods 2–6)

- 2 Earliest Roman activity; pre-fort or (more probably) associated with first fort construction (c AD 72–3 or shortly before?)
- 3A Construction and primary occupation of the first fort (AD 72–3 to AD 83–4)
- 3B Extensive internal refurbishment, perhaps associated with the arrival of a new garrison (AD 83–4 to c AD 93–4)
- 3C Less extensive refurbishment, including construction of some new buildings (c AD 93–4 to c AD 103–5)
- 3D Demolition of the first fort (c AD 103–5)
- 3E Activity immediately post-dating the demolition of the first fort (c AD 103–5)
- 4A Construction and primary occupation of the second fort (c AD 105 to c AD 125)
- 4B Internal reorganisation of the second fort, possibly associated with a (partial?) change of use to a more industrial function (c AD 125 to c AD 140s)
- 4C Demolition of the second fort (c AD 140s)
- 4D Activity immediately post-dating the demolition of the second fort (c AD 140s)
- 5A Abandonment or near-abandonment of the fort site, characterised by the accumulation of dark soils, but also slight evidence for continued activity (c AD 140s to c AD 160+?)
- 5B Occupation of indeterminate nature characterised by the construction of a few small timber structures and associated external surfaces. Site probably not occupied by a conventional fort at this time (second half of the second century)
- 5C Similar activity to Period 5B (second half of the second century)
- 5D Continued evidence for low-level activity on some parts of the site, but probable abandonment of other areas characterised by accumulations of dark soils (late second to early third century)
- 6A Rebuilding in stone and primary occupation within a conventional fort or some other type of military installation (early third century to late third / early fourth century)
- 6B Second phase of occupation within the stone fort, characterised by alterations to some buildings and changes in external areas (late third / early fourth century to mid- late fourth century)
- 6C Third and final phase of occupation within the stone fort, characterised by changes to some external areas, particularly those adjacent to the *principia*. Internal alterations to some buildings also apparent (mid- late fourth century to early fifth century or later)
- 6D Demolition and robbing of most of the excavated stone fort buildings (early fifth century or later)
- 6E Slight evidence for occupation post-dating the demolition of some fort buildings (early fifth century or later)

## Post-Roman (Periods 7–9)

- 7 Accumulation of early medieval dark soils sealing almost all late Roman levels. Excavated areas probably largely unoccupied, though the taphonomy of the dark soils and the presence of a small artefactual assemblage suggest pre-Norman activity in the vicinity of the site (later fifth century? to late eleventh / early twelfth century)
- 8A Early Norman occupation within the outer ward of the medieval castle, characterised by the construction of a timber structure and a road or track leading to the gatehouse, and by the construction of the city wall on the western edge of the site (approximately second half of twelfth century)
- 8B Construction of a large timber building within the outer ward (approximately late twelfth century)
- 8C Accumulation of dark soils over the excavated areas in the outer ward, indicative of a major change in the character of occupation (gardens?; approximately late twelfth–early thirteenth century)
- 8D Localised activity in the outer ward, characterised by pits and small clay-lined hearths (approximately thirteenth century).
- 8E Construction of a possible east to west-aligned earthwork on the southern edge of the outer ward (approximately thirteenth century)
- 8F Accumulation of possibly cultivated soils over much of the outer ward (thirteenth / early fourteenth century)
- 8i Construction and subsequent infilling of the large ditch on the southern edge of the castle's outer ward (mid-twelfth century to thirteenth century)
- 8ii Recutting of the ditch, followed by further silting (approximately late thirteenth / early fourteenth century to late fourteenth century)
- 8iii Encroachment of medieval tenements into the partially filled ditch, characterised by the construction of timber buildings and fences (approximately late fourteenth century to fifteenth century)
- 8iv Similar activity to Period 8iii (approximately end of fourteenth century to fifteenth century)
- 9 Activity from the sixteenth century to the present day

## Acknowledgements

As with any large archaeological project undertaken over a protracted period, the success of the Carlisle Millennium excavations and of the subsequent post-excavation programme has been due to the expertise, enthusiasm, and hard work of a large number of people, far too numerous to list individually. Sincere thanks are offered to all who, in one way or another, have contributed to the project in the period of over a decade that has elapsed from the earliest stages of planning to the publication of this volume.

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Responsibility for the initial cleaning, cataloguing, recording, and stabilising of the enormous artefactual assemblage was shouldered by Gill Scarlett, assisted by Celia Harding, Stephen Wadeson, and Fiona Wooler. In addition to helping out with the excavation, Neil Wigfield was also responsible for supervising the collection, recording, and storage of all environmental and timber samples, and was heavily involved in the selection and sub-sampling of the timber for dendrochronological dating and other analyses. There is little doubt that the day-to-day running of the excavations would have been considerably more onerous without the administrative expertise and cheerful efficiency of Angela Farren and Judy Page. Regular pottery viewings undertaken by Cathy Brooks and Louise Hird, together with provisional coin identifications provided throughout the project by David Shotter, assisted with the establishment of a broadly dated occupational sequence from the earliest stages of the excavation. David also participated in a number of in-house seminars conducted by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to discuss various aspects of the stratigraphic sequence. The final report has unquestionably benefited from his unrivalled knowledge of the Roman period in north-west England.

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It is impossible to see how the post-excavation phase of the project would have progressed as smoothly as it did without the hard work, assistance, and co-operation provided by John Egan, Carlisle City Solicitor and Secretary, and the goodwill and professionalism shown both by John and by other Officers of Carlisle City Council at what was a crucial time in the project's history. For OA North, the post-excavation assessment and the early stages of analysis were managed by Carol Allen, whose efficiency and professionalism in dealing with a variety of thorny issues and an almost overwhelming quantity of archaeological material was key to the successful completion of this stage of the project. Latterly, the reins of management and administration were

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The post-excavation programme was monitored on behalf of Carlisle City Council by Richard Newman and Jeremy Parsons of Cumbria County Council's Historic Environment Service. A post-excavation Advisory Panel, comprising members of the OA North project team and representatives from Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council's Historic Environment Service, Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, and English Heritage, met at regular intervals in order to monitor progress, exchange ideas and information, and to provide advice. Panel members, who are thanked for providing continuing support throughout the post-excavation programme, included John Egan, Peter Messenger, and Mark Beveridge (Carlisle City Council), Richard Newman, Mark Brennand, and Jeremy Parsons (Cumbria City Council), Tim Padley, David Clarke, and Hilary Wade (Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery), Andrew Davison (English Heritage), and Rachel Newman, Christine Howard-Davis, and Adam Parsons (OA North).

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Carlisle City Council is thanked for permission to reproduce the many photographs from a number of CAU/CAL excavations. Thanks are also due to the following organisations for permission to reproduce photographs and other images from their collections: the estate of the late Barri Jones (Pl 1); the British Library (Pl 144), Cumbria Record Office (Pls 21, 145, 146, 147, 148); the Ordnance Survey (Fig 260; Pls 22, 149, 150); and Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery (Pl 18). Plates 5, 27, and 139 are reproduced from photographs taken by the late Dorothy Charlesworth, which were lodged by Ms Charlesworth in the CAU archive.

The Millennium excavations formed part of Carlisle City Council's Gateway City (Millennium) Project, which was jointly funded by the Millennium Commission and a partnership between Carlisle City Council and local businesses. In addition, Carlisle City Council provided substantial funding for the post-excavation and publication programme, which included the provision of a popular booklet and a teachers' resource pack, in addition to the academic report. Considerable assistance in kind was also provided by English Heritage, which undertook the expensive and time-consuming task of conserving the large and important assemblage of Roman and medieval leather generated by the excavations. English Heritage also set up and funded a highly successful exhibition at Carlisle Castle, which presented the results of the excavations to the general public during the course of what was inevitably quite a long period of post-excavation analysis.



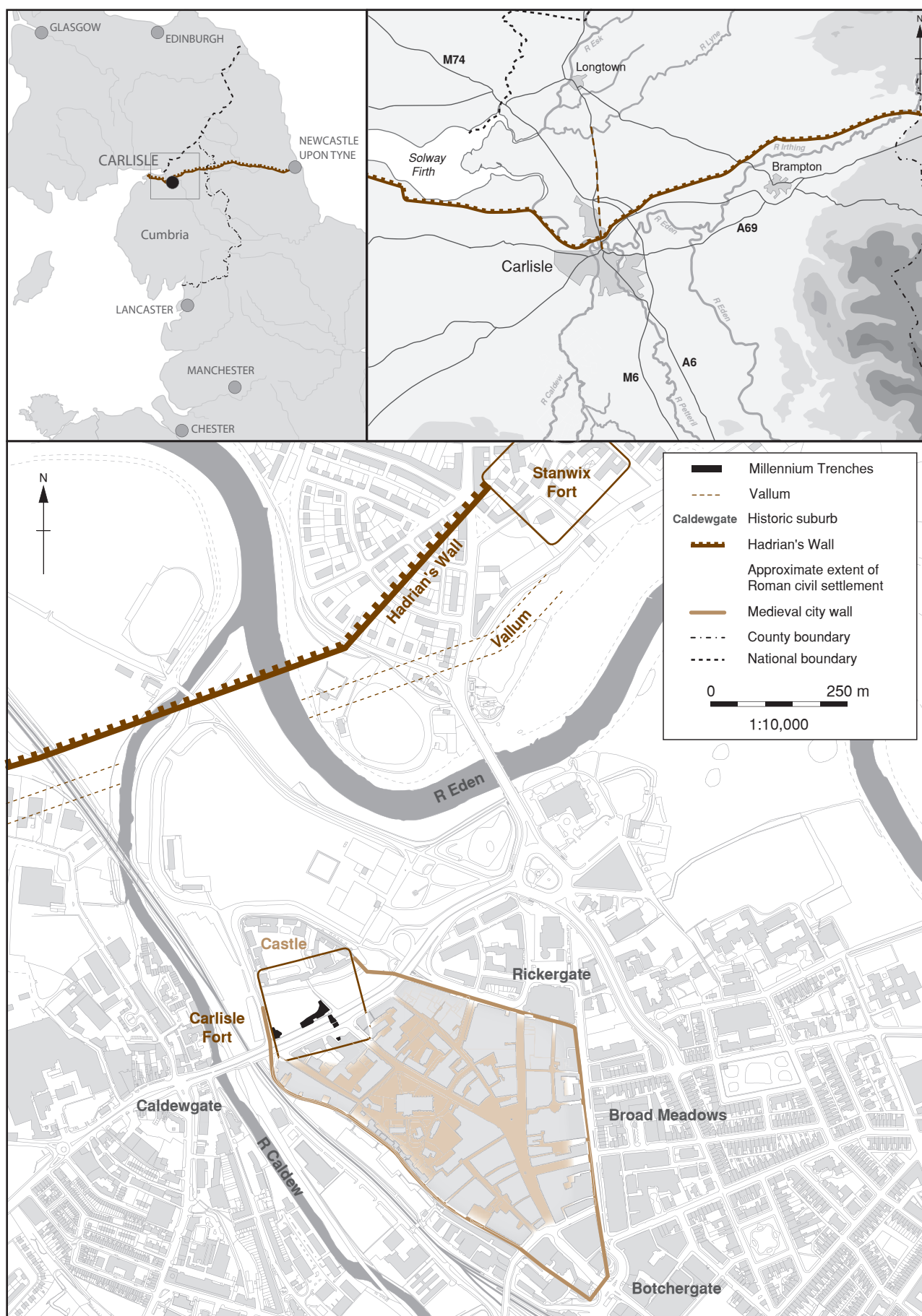


Figure 1: Site location