

EASTGATE CHAMBER

The East Gate

(based on Carolyn Heighway)

The first Roman gate was built around **AD 70**, as the SE entrance to the Roman fortress which was the key point in the Roman campaign against Wales. It was in heavy timber with 2 towers astride a central passageway. To each side of it were earth bank walls with a deep V-shaped ditch on the outside.

When the fortress became Colonia Nervae Glevensis in **96-8AD**, the gate and wall were rebuilt in stone as befitted the status of this more permanent settlement. This was strengthened with internal earth banks in 170 and interval towers added. Some 100 years later it was again rebuilt, and finally a long stretch of the wall to either side of the gate was rebuilt in the 4th century. This was excavated in 1974, and found to consist of a mat of tapered oak piles some 4-5m long, driven into the Charmouth Mudstone and left some 4-6" proud of the ground, then infilled flush with hardcore and covered with willow fascines, before laying the large base slabs of limestone. The wall was then built on top of this. The timber piles were dated to **c310AD**.

Surviving fragments of this wall can be seen in the King's Walk chamber (when not flooded), in the basement of the City Museum in Brunswick Road, and in 71-3 Southgate, but sadly none of the piles was preserved.

After the withdrawal of Roman forces in **410AD** the economy, discipline and order began to disintegrate as the Roman-style urban economy reverted to the more primitive Celtic rural economy, and Britain descended into the "Dark Ages". By **600 AD** Gloucester was under Saxon rule in Mercia, partly deserted and with a nucleus of wooden buildings. The East Gate still stood, together with the wall.

In the early 900s Queen Aethelflaed of Mercia, daughter of Alfred the Great, restored Gloucester to vitality, and the present street pattern was laid out. She established the Royal Palace at Kingsholm, and St Oswald's Priory.

In the **11th century** the Roman Gate was demolished and replaced by a simpler structure, probably Norman. This had a single incurved entrance passage with room above.

In **about 1250** the walls were repaired, with a line of external rounded towers the foundations of one of which is seen in the Eastgate viewing chamber, and one in the King's Walk Bastion Chamber. The East Gate was rebuilt with two round towers and rooms above. It had a drawbridge outside. The gate served as the city boundary.

In **1471**, during the **Wars of the Roses** (1455 – 87), the gates were locked and the walls defended to repel the Lancastrian forces, who were forced to continue to Tewkesbury where they met defeat.

About **1540** the Horse Pool was constructed outside the gate for washing horses for entry into the city from the muddy country lanes. It was supplied by a culvert visible at its north end, which carried water from the Twyver at the

east corner of the city wall. Carts were also taken in to keep the wooden wheels moist and tight, as well as washing them. It originally extended some 20m to the south, where it terminated in an access ramp

By **1588** the gate was used as a prison for women, later as a meeting place for the city council. It also served as a male prison, two prisoners escaped through the sewer, emerging rather dirty and smelly. They were soon caught, without the help of sniffer dogs.

In **1643** during the Civil War Gloucester was held for Parliament against the King. The Royalists attacked from the east, and the gate was filled with earth to withstand cannon fire. A 15lb cannon ball was found here during the 1974 excavation.

In **1778** the East Gate was demolished and the road widened to cover the north tower of the old gate, and a dwelling built over the south.

In **1867** The Co-op built a store, extended in 1882 and 1931. In **1974** the Society acquired the whole site, which they sold for redevelopment to the Scottish Amicable Building Society, who cleared the site and made space for the major 1974 archaeological investigation. This quickly revealed the Roman and medieval gate and walls and in response to enormous demand the site was scheduled as an ancient monument. In **1978** it was sold to the Boots Co who built the present Boots store. Boots allowed a further deeper dig, and also agreed to finance preservation of the gate and adjacent wall, which were dedicated to the City Council for public viewing. It was opened in **1980**.

Boots' reliefs

Roman invasion, Civil War