

A TOUR OF ROMAN GLOUCESTER BY IAN HOLT

Start at the Eastgate Chamber.

This is, perhaps, the best place to start because it is dry. This is especially so if it is wet.

- Begin by talking about the Claudian Invasion of Britain in 43 AD. The pretext was provided by a king called Verica who was deprived of his kingdom by the sons of Cunobelin. Claudius decided on invasion because Britain had rich farm land and such minerals as lead and tin. He also wanted to consolidate his regime after the death of his mad nephew, Caligula and conquering Britain would give him great prestige.
- He brought four legions with him: II Augusta, IX Hispana, XIV Gemina and XX Valeria Victrix. They were under the command of Aulus Plautius. There were a lot of auxiliaries. There were some 40,000 men in all.
- The conquest of south-east Britain was quite straightforward. The Romans reached Gloucester in about 49/50 and set up their *castra*, that is fortified camp at Kingsholm. It was abandoned in the sixties and they moved to the present site in about 66.
- The new city was a largely wooden affair at first. It was surrounded by an earthen embankment topped by a wooden palisade. It is quite possible that the legion, XX Valeria Victrix or II Augusta, left the city in the mid 70s, leaving a small 'caretaker' garrison.
- The city was laid out on a gridiron pattern with two main streets, the *Via Principalis* and the *Via Praetoria*. The Praetoria, the barracks, would have been one of the first buildings to be built.
- In the late 90s Gloucester became a *colonia*. This was the highest status a provincial city could attain. They were populated by retired army veterans who married local women. They were given a parcel of land outside the city to support themselves. The official name of the colonia was Colonia Nerviana Glevensis or simply Glevum. They had a town council and a number of industries including ceramics and tiles. The city eventually fell on hard times.
- The surviving remains of the Roman East Gate are part of the second century gate tower. Immediately to the south of this is a section of the fourth century Roman city wall, the upper courses of which were rebuilt in the middle ages. To the east is the circular tower of the thirteenth century gate, built just in time for the Barons' War of the 1260s in which the city was taken three times. There is also the 16th century horse pool.

After leaving the East Gate. We will go into the King's Walk, following the line of the Roman wall. We will stop at the entrance to the King's Walk Bastion and I will tell them that the Bastion is also 13th century, but that there is also the finest stretch of the Roman wall in the city. The stretch here dates from the third and fourth century.

After the King's Walk Bastion we will continue along King's Walk and into King's Square. We will continue along St. Aldate Street and cross over Northgate Street to Longfield, the charity shop on the corner of Northgate and St. John's Lane. Inside the shop are three of the stones of the Roman North Gate which was excavated in the seventies along with the East Gate.

We then go to the cross. In Roman times as now this was the centre of the city. Turning into Westgate Street we will go to HSBC where we will see the plinth of a huge Roman pillar that is now in the city museum.

Nerva Statue. We will go to Southgate Street to the statue of our founding father. In 96 the tyrannical emperor Domitian was assassinated and was immediately succeeded by the elderly senator **Marcus**

Cocceius Nerva. He was born in Narnia. No, not CS Lewis's fictional world, but the city now called Narni in northern Italy. He came of good patrician stock and had held the consulship under Vespasian, who had also been involved in the Invasion of 43. He was in his sixties and had not been appointed by the army. He died in the early part of 98 after only 14 months on the throne. He introduced important economic reforms. During his brief reign he granted the city its first charter. The city became known as Colonia Nerviana Glevensis and the statue is based on the remains of a statue of him found nearby in what was once the forum.

From here we go to Gloucester City Museum.

- Coincidentally or not Gloucester Museum is built onto the line of the Roman city wall.
- In the foyer is a huge Roman pillar that was once attached to the plinth in the bank in Westgate street. It was probably part of a temple.
- Inside the museum proper is the best mosaic in the city. It was found in the fifties in Northgate Street.
- The tombstone of Rufus Sita found at Wotton. He was with the sixth cohort of Thracian cavalrymen and died when he was forty.
- There are a number of votive tablets found in the city to Mercury and Rosmerta. Mercury was the winged messenger of the gods and Rosmerta was a local goddess who had become associated with him.
- Another stretch of the Roman city wall can also be seen.

That is the end of this tour of Roman Gloucester. Thank you for participating.