

# COWBRIDGE

**T**HE Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust seems to have a knack of discovering areas of Roman masonry in unexpected places. In 1980 they found a Roman naval base at Cold Knap, Barry, described in CA 75 and in 1981 they followed this up with the unexpected discovery of a fine Roman building at Cowbridge. Cowbridge is a small town that lies 12 miles west of Cardiff and half way between the Roman towns of Caerwent and Carmarthen. Roman finds have long been made there and so it has been a favourite site for the Roman town of Bomium (which the linguists say should really be Bovium, which certainly seems to be a suitably cow-like name). Bomium is mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary as lying 27 Roman miles

from Isca (i.e. Caerleon) and 15 Roman miles from Nidum, which is usually considered to be Neath. Although the R.C.H.A.M. recently favoured a site near Bridgend, Cowbridge has usually been the favourite location. It is also interesting as a medieval "new town" with a wall and so the Trust commissioned David Robinson of the Department of Geography at Swansea to write a report on the town (available from the Trust price £4.50).

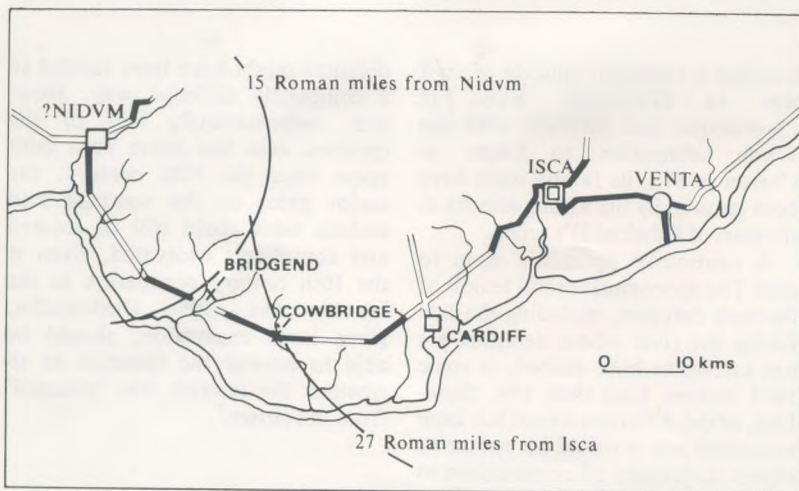
Excavations and watching briefs over the past few years have revealed Roman occupation at several sites in the town, mainly concentrating along the main road, the A48, that runs through the town, perpetuating the route of the Roman road. This

year, while digging in a car park just outside the northern limit of the medieval walls, a well-built Roman building was found at an angle of about 45° to the main road. It consisted of a main block of seven rooms with six further rooms projecting from the long sides and was heated by two hypocausts. The building was in use from the end of the first century to the middle or late second century, whilst to the north west were two drainage gullies and a corn drying kiln of the third/fourth centuries. (See front cover).

What was it? Two theories have been put forward, since the building is clearly not military. Firstly it might have been a *mansio* or inn, though it is not the usual form of a *mansio* in a hollow square. Alternatively it might have been an elaborate town house or perhaps even a suburban villa close to a town which may have had a special function.

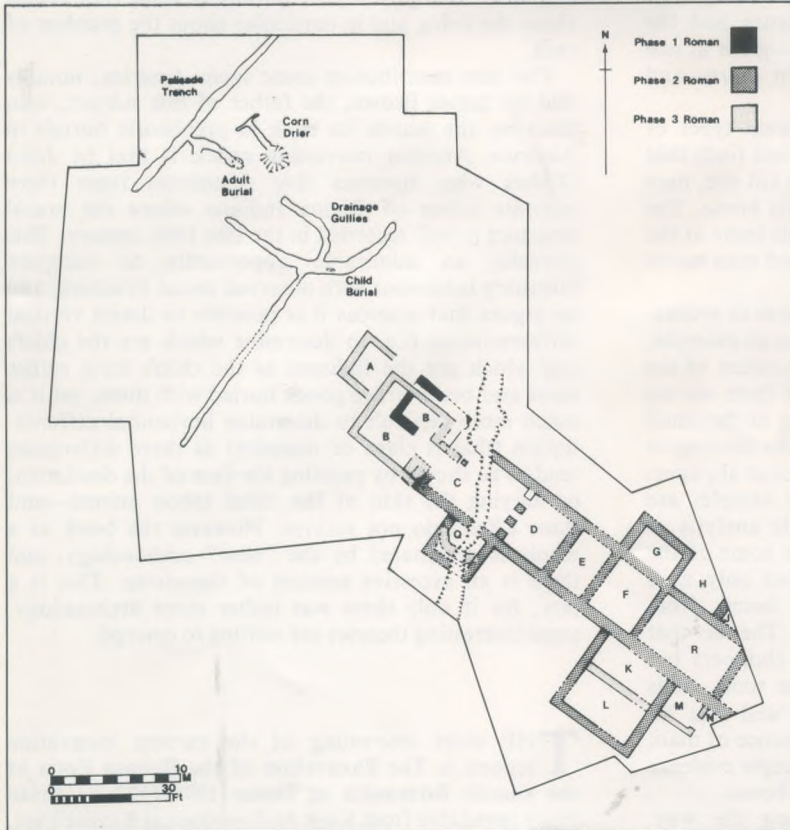
## Medieval

At the extreme western end of the town, the discovery of three cottages dating to the early fourteenth century demonstrated the rapid expansion of the town beyond the walled area, reflecting the evidence from the burgrave rents. The same site has also yielded Roman finds of third and fourth century date associated with a ditch of uncertain function. All these discoveries will encourage further excavation at Cowbridge this winter.



*Where is Bomium? This plan by David Allen demonstrates the information given in the Antonine Itinerary, with an arc of 15 Roman miles from Nidum and 27 Roman miles from Isca.*

The function of this Roman building remains uncertain. This view, taken from the SE corner looking NW, shows the central range on the right, and the two projecting wings on the left.



Perhaps the most significant finds came from the main excavation, where several roof tiles were found, stamped LEG II AUG, and a ballista bolt, which together with finds of military metalwork made during previous excavations suggest the presence of the Roman army. Archaeologists have long searched for a Roman fort at Cowbridge, and none has so far been forthcoming. Some have argued that if it is indeed the *Bomium* of the Antonine Itinerary this in itself must indicate a Roman fort; though this surely is doubtful, for in East Anglia, even a villa, the Villa Faustini, is included in the itinerary. Nevertheless, the presence of these military items suggests that there must be a fort at Cowbridge, if not underlying the modern town, then somewhere in the vicinity.

Jonathan Parkhouse,  
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Plan of the Roman building at Cowbridge.