

Life in Roman and Medieval Leicester. Excavations in the Town's North-east Quarter, 1958–2006. By R. Buckley, N.J. Cooper and M. Morris. Leicester Archaeology monograph 26. University of Leicester, Bristol, 2021. Pp. xxx + 608, illus. Price £49.95. ISBN 9780957479265.

The authors and their multiple contributors take a thematic approach to the reporting of the excavations which took place in advance of the development of the Highcross Leicester and Shires shopping complex mostly between 2003 and 2006 (Sites 1–4) and at Sanvey Gate in 2004 (Site 7), but also including Wachter's 1958 excavation in Blue Boar Lane (Site 8) and the 1988–9 excavations in Little Lane and St Peter's Lane (Sites 5 and 6). Apart from two chapters which summarise the respective developments of the Roman (2) and the medieval and later town (3), all the others incorporate the evidence from all the sites and periods relevant to the theme in question as well as material from earlier investigations. The themes comprise: the evolution of the townscape (4), the built environment (5), the lives of the townsfolk (6), making a living (7), food and drink (8), the last three with multiple authors. Finally, religion and burial (9) is followed by 'Highcross Leicester: In Conclusion' by Patrick Ottaway. A major Appendix 1 of some 150 pages provides narratives of the eight sites, while Appendix 2 covers radiocarbon results and Appendix 3 an overview of the Roman coins found in Leicester.

This synthetic approach is an excellent way to bring together the evidence of multiple interventions and provide an accessible, up-to-date account of the Roman town. Only one of the excavations, Vine Street, was of a scale potentially to provide a coherent, single site narrative. But what about the detailed underpinning evidence to support the synthesis? Not mentioned in the volume, but for those who want to search more deeply, there are fuller and separate reports on the stratigraphic narratives, the associated specialist reports and, in the case of Vine Street and St Peter's, the skeletal reports, available on the Archaeology Data Service website (<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/1004404/index.cfm>).

The excavation of what became the town house in Vine Street (Site 1) in the south-west corner of Insula V, where a sequence of activity was traced from the mid- to late first century through to the medieval period and beyond, was on a scale potentially to provide an account of the development of one or more properties and characterise the changing life and occupations of their inhabitants. However, the excavators were unable to identify boundaries with any certainty and these are presented as conjecture, changing over time. It is unclear, but seems likely, that the sequence from early in the second century when the streets were laid down relates to the development of a single property: several buildings were constructed in the south-west corner of the block, which were subsequently replaced in the later second century and then incorporated into the construction of a courtyard house in the early third. How far, if at all, the property extended beyond the house itself is unknown and so it is all we have to work with as far as reconstructing daily life, occupations, etc. are concerned. Ironically, it is not until quite late, in the mid- to late fourth century, when the northern range was demolished and parts of the rest of the building were given over for use as workshops, that we can begin to gain some insight into the life of the inhabitants. Pits were dug to hide valuable items, including two probable hoards of coins, and thick deposits of charcoal and hammerscale provide the best evidence from the whole of Roman Leicester for the location of a smithy, in this case the final activity recorded in Room 6.

Drawing on important epigraphic material comprising curse tablets and military lead seals, the authors try to answer the question of 'Who lived in the large courtyard house in Insula V?' (pp. 180–3), but unequivocal evidence is elusive. The curse tablets from residual contexts are dated to between the mid-second and mid-third century, one mentioning the theft of silver coins from a *septizonium*, a temple to the seven planetary deities not otherwise known from *Britannia*, the other, also a first from the province, mentioning a *paedagogium*, slave quarters, and listing 19 suspects of stealing from it a cloak belonging to one Servandus, also a slave. Was, one wonders, a complement of 20 slaves typical of town houses in Roman Britain? The military lead seals from near the courtyard house naming the sixth and twentieth legions add to others from the town, including from auxiliary regiments, pointing to an important role of the town in military supply, distinguishing it from other *civitas* capitals.

The discovery of individual deposits with large finds assemblages offers challenges of a different kind. Two examples are described at some length: a cellar from Little Street and a latrine pit from Castle Street, the latter previously interpreted and published as a 'delicatessen' (pp. 311–15). In neither case is there very much associated structural evidence to provide context and assist interpretation. A large pottery assemblage with quantities of samian, including many decorated vessels and drinking cups with traces of wear, flagons of both pottery and glass, a collection of amphorae, other drinking vessels of pottery and glass and at least 747 oysters, led the excavators to interpret the Little Street assemblage as indicative of

'an establishment of some class', perhaps refuse from 'a tavern selling snacks alongside alcohol to be consumed on the premises'. Castle Street, on the other hand, produced only a small group of 469 sherds but with 'a higher proportion of amphorae, flagons and samian dishes and bowls than would be found in *normal* (my italics) domestic rubbish'. This poses the question what a 'normal' domestic latrine-pit pottery assemblage of the mid-second century might look like. The same might be asked of what constitutes 'normal' food waste. Mineralisation in the pit, evidence that food had passed through the gut, ensured the preservation of seed and plant remains, including exotic imports like figs and grapes, which, along with the remains of 16 cattle scapulae pierced so that the shoulder of beef could be hung for drying and smoking, contributed to the interpretation of the contents as that of a 'delicatessen' shop, even though the interpretation as a latrine pit, indicative of the food consumed on the premises, is well founded. Fascinating though these deposits are, do we yet have enough comparative data to make the kind of interpretations, particularly ones which catch the imagination and are likely to be widely repeated, put forward here?

The above reflections offer some insights into an important publication, not just for Roman Leicester, but for Roman Britain more widely. The authors and their contributors are to be warmly congratulated on their achievement.

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Bridge over Troubled Water: The Roman Finds from the River Tees at Piercebridge in Context. By H. Eckardt and P.J. Walton. Britannia Monograph 34. Roman Society, London, 2021. Pp. xii + 316, illus. Price £30. ISBN 9780907764489 (print); <https://doi.org/10.5284/1085344> (ebook).

Roman Piercebridge lies either side of the River Tees where three Roman bridges are recorded. The second one was associated with the original course of Dere Street and traces of an earlier one have been found upstream. The third was constructed downstream when the road was re-routed further east. The second and third ones were discussed by Fitzpatrick in this journal in 1999, and the volume under review publishes the evidence for the earliest one for the first time. It was to investigate these bridges that Bob Middlemass and Rolfe Mitchinson started diving in the river in the mid-1980s. Over the next 30 years they amassed a remarkable assemblage of Roman material from the riverbed including nearly 1,300 coins, over 1,600 small finds, 60 kg pottery and small assemblages of vessel glass and animal bone. This book publishes all this material and explores whether it should be regarded as the result of rubbish disposal or votive offerings.

Part I places the material in context. It starts with an overview of riverine assemblages across the empire and how they have been regarded. There are useful considerations here of how boundaries in scholarship have impeded our understanding of them. These boundaries are not just those between prehistorians and Romanists, but also between different national preferences for rubbish or ritual explanations and between specialisms with some categories of material attracting much more attention than others. This chapter will undoubtedly become the starting point of any future consideration of river deposition across the empire.

The Piercebridge context is then explored. Extensive excavation between 1969 and 1981 (published by Cool and Mason in 2008) revealed occupation starting in the first and continuing into the sixth century, with widespread evidence of intense military involvement starting in the later second century and continuing into the third. The material recovered during those excavations becomes a baseline against which the river assemblage can be compared. A section by Christopher Green considers the river and the mechanisms by which the assemblage could have remained in position, given it is prone to flash flooding. Detailed recording of the finds on the riverbed was not undertaken by the divers, but the records are sufficient to show that deposition was concentrated in the area of the earlier bridges.

Part II discusses all the material by functional category. Catalogue entries are available online in the Portable Antiquities Database. The discussions in the book are succinct, well informed and well illustrated. They will deservedly provide a happy hunting ground for finds specialists. Throughout this part