

= Letocetum =

Letocetum is the ancient remains of a Roman settlement . It was an important military staging post and posting station near the junction of Watling Street , the Roman military road to North Wales , and Icknield ( or Ryknild ) Street ( now the A38 ) . The site is now within the parish of Wall , Staffordshire , England . It is owned and run by the National Trust , under the name Letocetum Roman Baths Site & Museum . The site is in the guardianship of English Heritage as Wall Roman Site .

The Romans came to Letocetum in 50 CE to establish a fortress during the early years of the invasion of Britain . The land could not support large amounts of soldiers and Letocetum , at an important cross @-@ roads , became a large scale posting station . The settlement developed with successive bath houses and mansiones built to serve the official travellers as well as the growing civilian population . It is known mainly from detailed excavations in 1912 ? 13 , which concentrated on the sites of the mansio and bath @-@ house , but there is evidence of a substantial settlement with possible basilica , temples , and amphitheatre .

The remains visible today are those of the stone bath house and mansio , built in approximately 130 CE after Letocetum ceased to have a military function and became a civilian settlement . The settlement reached its peak during the 2nd and 3rd centuries and at this time occupied 8 @.@ 1 ? 12 hectares ( 20 ? 30 acres ) . At the end of the 3rd century , the town relocated within high defensive walls astride Watling Street . After the Romans left early in the 5th century the settlement went into decline . The modern village of Wall emerged in the land once occupied by Letocetum .

= = Name = =

The site is mentioned as Etocetum in the Antonine Itinerary and presumably represented a Latinisation of a Brittonic place name reconstructed as \* L?tohaiton ( " Grey @-@ wood " ; cf . Old Welsh : Luitcoyt and modern Welsh Lwytgoed ) . The name possibly represented the species of tree prominent at the site such as ash and elm . Ford identifies the community as the Cair Luit Coyd ( " Fort Greywood " ) listed by Nennius among the 28 cities of Britain in his History of the Britains , previously identified with Lincoln or Lichfield .

= = History = =

= = = Native settlement = = =

It is likely that a small native settlement occupied the site before the advent of the Romans , possibly as the main trading station on the boundary between two British tribes , the Corieltauvi in the East Midlands whose later tribal centre was at Ratae Corieltauvorum , and the Cornovii to the west with their original capital Uriconon ( which would later give its name to the important Roman British city of Viroconium ) at the hill fort on The Wrekin . These tribes offered little resistance to Roman rule .

= = = Military staging post = = =

In about 50 CE , a Roman vexillatio built a large timber fortress on a hilltop ( near the site of the current church ) at Letocetum . This housed the Legio XIV Gemina during the campaigns of governor Aulus Didius Gallus against the Brigantes . It was a good defensive position , but the poor farmland surrounding the fortress could not support large numbers of soldiers . During the Neronian period this initial fortress was replaced with a smaller one and Letocetum then developed into a large @-@ scale posting station . Most of the troops moved to the fortress at Viroconium during the early administration of Gaius Suetonius Paulinus in about 58 CE .

== Posting station ==

A mansio was built to provide lodging for official couriers travelling on Watling Street . A bath house was also built for the travellers and the growing civilian population . When the first mansio and bath house were completed , workers were needed to provide wood for the bath house , look after animals , and repair vehicles to be used by the official travellers . The civilian population would have provided many of these services . The native settlement grew during the Flavian period onwards to occupy 8 @. @ 1 ? 12 hectares ( 20 ? 30 acres ) . Roman burials with 1st and 2nd century pottery were found along Watling Street in 1927 , and more in 1966 . In the field between the mansio site and Watling Street , a round depression in the ground may mark the site of a Roman amphitheatre . A large earthenware vessel in the likeness of Minerva was found near the modern church , which may therefore be the site of a temple of Minerva . A rectangular crop @-@ mark in the field to the north @-@ west of the bath @-@ house , only visible in dry weather , may be the site of another temple .

When the Legion XIV first settled at Letocetum they would have used existing trackways . A stone @-@ surfaced road was needed to allow reliable movement . Watling Street was given a stone surface past Letocetum in about 70 CE . This date is approximated from two coins found in the centre of Letocetum beneath the first road surfacing . There is no evidence to indicate when Ryknild Street was constructed , but from the layout it is thought that Watling Street was built first . Watling Street stretched from Letocetum to London in one direction and to Wroxeter and Chester in the other . Ryknild Street , 7 @. @ 3 metres ( 24 ft ) wide where it crossed with Watling Street , connected Letocetum with Cirencester to the south west and Yorkshire to the north east .

=== Early mansiones and bath houses ===

The foundations of the last mansio built at the site , and its associated bath @-@ house , were uncovered by archaeologists in 1912 ? 13 . The rooms of both the mansio and bath @-@ house were emptied and the stone foundations were exposed . This work left , in some lower stratified levels , traces of the two earlier wooden mansiones .

The hillside had been terraced and the first mansio , whose construction is dated to 54 ? 60 CE , fully occupied one terrace . It was of a sleeper beam construction , the walls were wattle and daub , some were plastered and some were painted with simple linear decoration . It has been assumed the roof was thatch and was consumed when the building was destroyed by fire . The rooms were arranged around a square courtyard approximately 19 by 19 metres ( 62 ft x 62 ft ) . Due to the construction of later buildings the known layout of the first mansio is very fragmentary . The date at which the first mansio was destroyed is uncertain , it was probably near the beginning of the 2nd century , as the destruction layers contained Flavian @-@ Trajanic samian @-@ ware , part of a mortarium dating from 70 ? 100 CE and part of a glass bowl which has been dated to the 2nd century .

The evidence for the layout of the second mansio is also very fragmentary . It was a courtyard building constructed with posts set vertically in foundation trenches .

The walls were plaster and daub and some rooms were painted in vivid colours . In the courtyard was a large well 2 @. @ 29 by 2 @. @ 44 metres ( 7 @. @ 5 ft x 8 @. @ 0 ft ) and 6 @. @ 1 metres ( 20 ft ) deep , cut into the underlying sandstone . The second mansio was deliberately dismantled in about 140 ? 150 CE during construction of the third mansio . The well was filled in at this time and contained a samian sherd dated 125 ? 145 CE . About the same time the second hilltop fort was abandoned and the town ceased to be a military site . One of the last military features at Letocetum was the " punic ditch " associated with this last small fort . The ditch was filled before any secondary silt formed and the filling contained a Trajanic coin dated 98 ? 117 CE and pottery suggesting a Hadrianic or early Antonine date .

The earliest bath @-@ house was discovered during an excavation in 1956 . In a construction trench of the very first building was a worn coin of Vespasian dated 71 CE , due to the condition of the coin it is believed that this building was erected around 100 CE . It is thought that this building

was built during the military period as the surviving masonry is of high quality with finely dressed stone and a wall some 1 @. @ 2 metres ( 3 @. @ 9 ft ) thick . It is thought that the second mansio , the last fort , and the first bath house all ended approximately at the end of the military period on the site .

= = = Civilian development ; the third mansio and second bath @-@ house = = =

Letocetum ceased to be used by the military after about 130 CE , probably leaving the town under the authority of the civitas of the Cornovii with its capital at Viroconium Cornoviorum . About this time that a new mansio and bath house were built .

The third and best @-@ understood mansio was built on a stone base about 130 CE . It was at least two storeys high and fronted by a colonnade with a tiled roof , probably supported on wooden columns . In the centre of the colonnade , a large door formed the main entrance to the interior of the building . Through the entrance hall was a colonnaded atrium or courtyard with a plastered floor , the central area probably being open to the sky and perhaps containing a herbaceous garden . Timber posts resting on these foundations around the edges of the colonnade supported a balcony above .

The entrance hall was flanked on either side by similarly sized rooms probably accessible from the central courtyard . The one on the west contained washing facilities and a gutter leading to a soak @-@ away in the central part of the building , the room to the east may possibly have been a guardroom . On the western side of the courtyard were three small rooms which opened out onto the central colonnade at ground level . The function of these rooms is uncertain , but they were probably used as private accommodation for users of the mansio . The largest room in the mansio lay in the north @-@ east corner , the chamber was heated by a channelled hypocaust system added some time after the building was first completed .

To the west of the mansio lay the public bath @-@ house , separated from it by a cobbled road between 2 @. @ 4 and 3 metres ( 7 @. @ 9 and 9 @. @ 8 ft ) wide . From the street , a paved area led into a colonnade fronting the building on the east and continuing round the north side . Large doors in the centre of the eastern colonnade opened into a large , covered courtyard . This courtyard may have been a basilica ; a settlement of this size would be expected to have one , and this is the only candidate on the site . At the far north end of the bath complex was the stoke @-@ room or praefurnium , which contained the wood @-@ fired furnaces of the hypocaust system . This underfloor heating system was present in the tepidarium , the caldarium and the laconicum where the floors were supported on pillars of tiles or pilae . The hot combustion gases from the stoke @-@ room furnaces circulated under the floor between these pillars and were drawn up around the sides of the building through box tiles embedded in the walls , to escape finally through vents in the barrel @-@ vaulted roof .

= = = Late Roman defences ; abandoned mansio and bath @-@ house = = =

Letocetum lost its public buildings near the end of the 3rd century ; the bath @-@ house and mansio were destroyed by fire . Around this time , very solid defences were built which did not include the bath @-@ house or mansio sites . The reason the bath @-@ house and mansio were abandoned can not be determined but the reason was probably economic . Other mansio sites around Britain appear to have been abandoned at this time . This did not imply an end to the posting service at Letocetum , it may have been a less costly reorganisation . The late defences were built in about 300 CE astride Watling Street , approximately 150 metres ( 490 ft ) east of the mansio site . The defences consisted of a stone wall about 2 @. @ 7 metres ( 8 @. @ 9 ft ) thick , fronted by three ditches and with a contemporary turf rampart to the rear , the area within the walls was 2 @. @ 1 hectares ( 5 @. @ 2 acres ) . The northern and western sides were identified and sectioned in 1964 and the foundations of a wall at the south west corner were uncovered . On the western side a section of wall was found still standing 1 @. @ 5 metres ( 4 @. @ 9 ft ) high above shallow foundations but below the ploughed soil . The wall is believed to have been built within the period

275 ? 325 CE .

It is thought that the construction of these defences was related to a general uprising of the Welsh tribes , the Ordovices and Silures , that occurred at this time . The revolt was soon quelled , but , to guard against further disruptions , a series of strongholds including Letocetum , Pennocrucium , and Uxacona were established along the length of Watling Street . All 4th century archaeological remains have come from within the defences and none from outside , suggesting that the whole population were within the defences by the 4th century . The latest coin to be found at Letocetum was minted in the time of the Emperor Gratian and dated to 381 CE . Roman administration collapsed at the beginning of the 5th century and nothing has been found at the site that is datable after this time .

= = = Post @-@ Roman abandonment and later re @-@ occupation = = =

The settlement must have been significant for some time ; it is listed in the 9th century *Historia Brittonum* , and Reno writes " Wall , appearing as Cair Luitcoyt , and undoubtedly correctly ascribed , appears rather incongruously among such major towns and military depots as York , London , Chester , Wroxeter and Caerleon but nevertheless must have been a place of important consequence because of its inclusion as a strategic city . " The late defences led to its description as a *Caer* and a British , possibly Powysian , outpost was established there . We have no knowledge of the period immediately after the Roman departure as no historical or archaeological evidence is present .

Letocetum lost all importance with the development of nearby Lichfield in the 7th century as the seat of a Bishop . When the place again emerged historically it was under a new name , Wall . This name referred to the remains of the late Roman defences , parts of which were still standing in the early 19th century .