

## **Halton Chesters – (*Onnum*)**

Located 8.5km east of Chesters, the fort at Halton Chesters occupied an area of high ground immediately east of the Fence Burn so as to command the ridge lying to the north. The ground is reasonably level to the east and slopes down gently to the south. The fort platform is visible along with the denuded southern rampart and its accompanying ditch. The fort was 1.75 ha (4.37 acres) in size originally and was later extended to 1.95 ha (4.87 acres). It projected north of the Wall with the latter meeting the fort wall immediately south of the double-portalled gates as at Rudchester and, also like the latter, with minor gates south of the Wall. The garrison in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries was the quingenary *Ala I Pannoniorum Sabiniana* (RIB 1433; *Notitia Dignitatum* XL 37). The Wall and ditch, dug to its full depth, crossed the site and were obliterated when the fort was erected.

### *History of exploration*

A 4<sup>th</sup>-century bath-house in the north-western quarter of the interior was excavated in 1823-7 (Hodgson 1840, 179-80, 316-20). Three excavation campaigns have been undertaken; by Simpson and Richmond in 1935-6 (1937, 151-70), and by Jarrett in 1956-8 and 1960-1 (1959, 177-90, 1960, 153-60; *JRS* 51 164, 52, 164). Further information about the fort and its *vicus* has been produced by geophysical survey in 1995 and 1999 (Berry & Taylor 1997; 1999).

### *Layout and history*

The *principia* has been partly examined. It had a forehall attached to it – enclosing the *via principalis* - in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Geophysical survey has revealed the commandant's house to its east. To the west, excavation disclosed a granary and, beyond it, a hospital. Geophysical survey has revealed two double barrack blocks. In the north-east quarter a double-barrack, a stable and a store have been found. Two phases of buildings were found, the later with superstructures of wattle and daub. In the opposite half of the *praetentura* geophysical survey has revealed the bath-building seen in 1823 and another double barrack.

An extension was added to the fort on its western side south of the Wall in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century giving it an unusual L-shaped plan. The original fort wall was demolished. The extension contained another bath-house and other buildings of uncertain function. For much of the 4<sup>th</sup> century the garrison was reduced considerably but occupation intensified towards the end of the century. Buildings of this period are characterised by timber superstructures resting on stone sill-blocks.

### ***Vicus***

#### *Official buildings & structure.*

A large building outside the south gate revealed by geophysical survey may be the Hadrianic bath-house.

#### *Civilian buildings.*

Antiquarian descriptions of buildings south of the fort (e.g. Horsley 1732, 142) have recently been confirmed by geophysical survey and a minor excavation. Civilian buildings can be seen lining both the Military Way, which enters the fort via the

minor gates, and the road leading south beyond the Vallum. Some are typical strip-buildings while others appear set within their own enclosures.

*Religious structures.*

A relief of Mercury (*CSIR* I.1 206) and two reliefs and an altar associated with the Mother Goddesses (*CSIR* I.1 240 & 241; *RIB* 1424) hint at shrines outside the fort.

*Cemeteries.*

South of the fort and immediately north of the hamlet of Halton at least one barrow can be seen.

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***Bibliography***

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