

Newcastle upon Tyne

The exact location of the fort at Newcastle was only determined beyond doubt in the late 1970s (*NCH* xiii; Snape and Bidwell 2002; Bidwell and Snape 2002). It was situated on a bluff overlooking the Lort Burn to the east, and to the south the bridge over the River Tyne (from which the fort derived its name, *Pons Aelius* or possibly *Pons Aeli(i)*). The fort was detached from Hadrian's Wall which seems to have run down a small valley to its north, on the line of The Side. It was built in the late second or early third century and had an estimated area of about 0.5ha (1.2 acres). Parts of the *principia* and two granaries have been excavated, as well as fragments of probable barracks. The *principia* has no forecourt and is of exceptionally small size, as are the granaries. Few new forts of this period are known anywhere in the empire, and the plan of Newcastle might reflect the reductions in unit size suggested by the plans of the third-century barracks at South Shields, Vindolanda and elsewhere. The plan of the fort, with the granaries placed in the *praetentura* opposite the *principia*, is also unusual and is perhaps an early occurrence of the cruciform plan typically of late-Roman date (cf. South Shields; Bidwell 1996). Newcastle is thus potentially of exceptional importance to our understanding of Roman castrametation in an age of transition. It is unfortunate that so many elements of its plan are uncertain.

The pattern and quantity of coin losses suggest that in the fourth century a market was established on the *via praetoria* (cf. subsequent discoveries at Carlisle). During its period of use (from the 330s to the 350s, or possibly through to the 360s or 370s), the fort can hardly have had a full garrison, although the *principia* might have been restored to use in the late fourth century. A cemetery (publication forthcoming) was established on the fort site in the late seventh or eighth century, following some poorly-understood building activity. The partial survival of post-Roman deposits and well-defined chronological horizons represented by later activities mean that Newcastle is one of the four key sites in the Wall-zone for understanding the transition of power between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods (the other three sites being Carlisle, Corbridge and South Shields).

Although the area of the *vicus* and cemeteries is poorly known, discoveries include a stone sarcophagus and waterlogged features. A third-century cremation is known at the Gunner Tower, on the probable line of the Military Way almost a kilometre west of the fort.

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