

Nothing later than A.D. 55 was found in the ditch, while BB I 31 contained nothing later than A.D. 60. The silt (BB I 29) overlying the upper surface, contained coarse pottery dating as late as A.D. 80.

Other early, extra-mural features were also recorded from the Mycalex site in Ashcroft Road (Reece, 1977, 92) and from Site AX beside the Health Centre in Watermoor Road. A large and deep pit (AX II 58) at the latter site produced pottery of the Claudio-Neronian period, but there is nothing to show that the pit was not originally dug by the army. At least three other levels, however, (AX II 45, 47 and AX V 33) produced pottery of the same general date range in addition to some native, Iron Age fabrics.

## CIRENCESTER IN THE EARLY MILITARY PERIOD (JSW)

The fort established at Cirencester was one of a number designed to hold the earliest frontier of Roman Britain. It lay in the territory of the Dobunni at the meeting of three major roads, Akeman Street, the Fosse Way and Ermin Street, where the two former joined and crossed the river Churn. It lay only 4.8 km. (3 miles) from Bagendon (*Corinion*) (Wacher, 1975, 293), the contemporary native capital of the Dobunni, whose attitude towards the Roman advance has frequently been discussed (Hawkes, 1961, 43-67, and Wacher, 1975, 289-93).

Unfortunately, on present evidence, it is not possible to be certain precisely when the Roman army arrived at Cirencester. Undated structural features, from the period before the principal fort was founded *c.* A.D. 49, were uncovered in the course of the excavations, and suggest that an establishment existed before that date. Among them were two small, parallel ditches, earlier than, and behind, the rampart of the Leaholme fort.

If these belong to a fort founded within a year or two of the invasion, it was but one of a number in the area. Others may be envisaged at Bath (*RIB* 159) and Wanborough (Anderson, 1977, 155); while a third has been suggested on Rodborough Common, near Stroud (Rennie, 1959, 24-43). To the east and north-east further forts are known, or may be expected, e.g. at Alcester, Alchester and Dorchester (Oxon.), and perhaps at Dorn or Chesterton. Uncertainty still surrounds the date of the placing of a fort at Kingsholm, near Gloucester, (Garrod and Hurst, 1975). It has often been assumed that a fort for a part-mounted cohort (*Coh. VI Thracum RIB* 121) preceded the legionary base, thought to have been built *c.* A.D. 49. It is also usually assumed that *Legio XX* was transferred in its entirety from Colchester to Gloucester in that year, but it is still possible that a vexillation fortress may have been the first establishment at Gloucester, garrisoned jointly by a legionary detachment and *Coh. VI Thracum*. If so, an earlier fort at Cirencester would have been in an important pivotal position, commanding the main approach from the south-east to the Severn crossing and south Wales, where Caractacus was still entrenched.

At one stage during the investigations at Cirencester, it was, indeed, suggested (Wacher, 1975, 30 and 294) that a vexillation fortress might have existed there before A.D. 49 and before the establishment of the fort (see also p. 55). However, this interpretation has not stood up to a rigorous examination of the evidence, and the theory must be discarded.

As things stand at present, we can recognise a probable military presence at Cirencester soon after the invasion, followed by the foundation of a cavalry fort (referred to hereafter as the Leaholme fort) *c.* A.D. 49. The fort lay on a terrace of oolitic gravels masked by a thin cover of brown clay, on the south-western bank of the river Churn, (see p. 72). The north-west and north-east defences have been positively identified, but the other two are less certainly located. Evidence cited on p. 59 suggests a perimeter measuring approximately 165 m. by 110 m. (540 ft. by 360 ft.), giving an area of some 1.8 ha. (4½ acres).

Tombstones attest the presumably successive presence at Cirencester of two quingenary *alae* (*RIB* 108 and 109 and page 67 below), but three phases of military buildings have been shown to exist within the fort. Consequently it is not impossible that an unidentified unit also served there. Nothing is known of later possible expansions or reductions in the fort's size. But it must