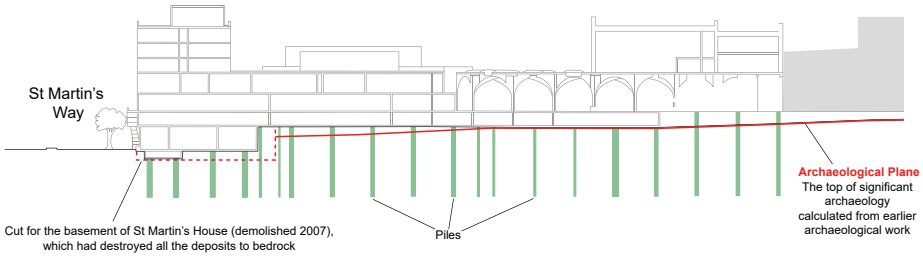
Innovative Development

The Northgate development scheme is in the heart of Chester's historic city, within the area defined legally as being of archaeological importance. Indeed, the scheme was not allowed to disturb more than 3% of the areas of greatest archaeological sensitivity. This was achieved by the establishment of an 'archaeological plane', which defined the level of post-medieval deposits of lesser significance across the site. The new buildings were then innovatively designed to sit above this level, with much of the ground being built up to accommodate them. In the end, the disturbance of significant archaeology was limited to only 2.4%!



Chester Northgate

The Archaeology of Chester Northgate

Where archaeological deposits could not be left *in situ*, they were recorded in a way that would discover the maximum information during the construction works. In most cases, this involved professional archaeologists monitoring the groundwork, excavating and recording the evidence found. To the south of Hunter Street, two larger excavations were undertaken, for a trench to divert an existing surface-water drain (left), and within the footprint of the new market's basement.

Most of the archaeology identified was retained *in situ* as the new buildings were constructed using CFA (continuous flight auger) piles, which only made a small hole where they went into the ground, leaving all the adjacent deposits unaffected. Where it could not be avoided for engineering reasons (below left), a few pile caps cut into the uppermost archaeological levels, and these were also fully excavated.

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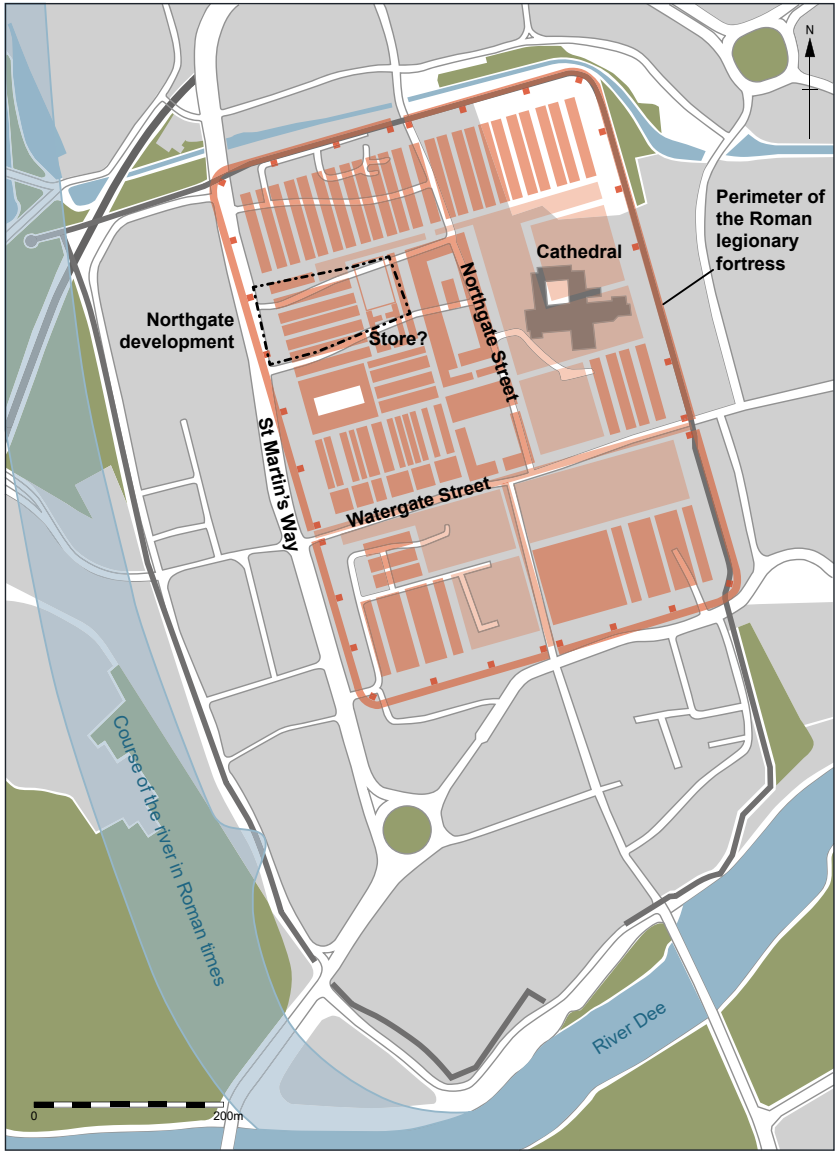
The **Roman** Legionary Fortress

Chester Northgate

The Northgate development is towards the north-west corner of the large Roman legionary fortress known as *Deva*, which was occupied for over 300 years from its construction in the AD 70s. For most of that time, the fortress served as the base for *Legio XX Valeria Victrix*, one of the four legions that had spearheaded the invasion of southern Britain in AD 43. The new development covers most of a single block of land inside the fort, that the Romans called an *insula*, which contained the six barrack blocks of a legionary cohort. Each provided accommodation for a century of 80 men and their officers.

The barracks were constructed of timber at first but were later rebuilt in stone. The western end of one barrack block was investigated in some detail, where the centurion (the commanding officer of the century) would have lived.



The **Archaeology** of Chester Northgate

The centurion's quarters had some luxurious features such as painted wall plaster (above) and some of the rooms had concrete flooring (below), indicating the high status of the officer.

Part of another *insula* to the east was also investigated. In the early Roman period (late first-second century AD), this seems to have been used for industry, followed by the dumping of rubbish, but later a stone building (or buildings), possibly a store or workshop, was built there.

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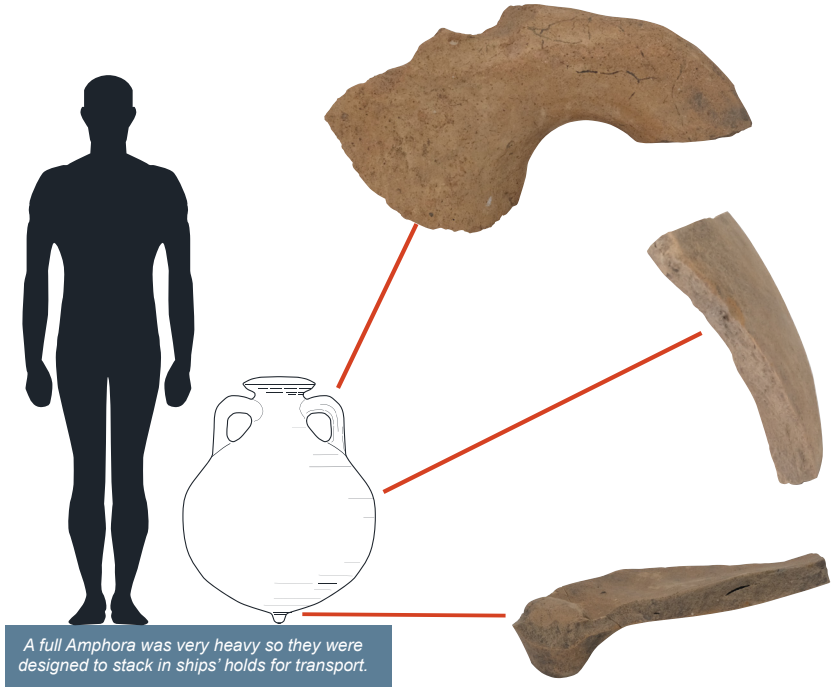
Trading Empire: Roman Pottery

Chester Northgate

During the archaeological work, over 2700 fragments of Roman pottery were found! These included pots that had reached the fortress from far-flung provinces of the Roman Empire, transported along complex supply routes, as well as others made locally or elsewhere in Britain. The imported pottery included samian ware (right), a high-quality tableware from Gaul (modern-day France), characterised by its moulded decorations and shiny surface, made by dipping the vessel into a solution of water and very fine clay (called a slip) before being fired. Some of these vessels bore the stamp of the potter or workshop owner where they were made (far right).

Fragments of large storage vessels (amphorae) from southern Spain, used to transport olive oil or fish sauce, were also found (below), together with Gallic wine amphorae and some smaller vessels that probably held dates or other dried fruit from the Middle East and North Africa.

Decorated samian ware bowl: body sherd (left) and base (right).



A full Amphora was very heavy so they were designed to stack in ships' holds for transport.

A rusticated ware jar used for cooking an storage

Although tablewares and mixing bowls (mortaria) were imported from the Rhineland, in Germany, most of the 'everyday' pots were made in Britain. These included vessels from production centres as far away as Dorset (above), Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex/Kent, and places like Peterborough (left) although the bulk of the pottery used in the fortress was produced much more locally, either in Chester itself (and elsewhere on the Cheshire Plain), at Holt, near Wrexham, or at Wilderspool, near Warrington.

The **Archaeology** of Chester Northgate

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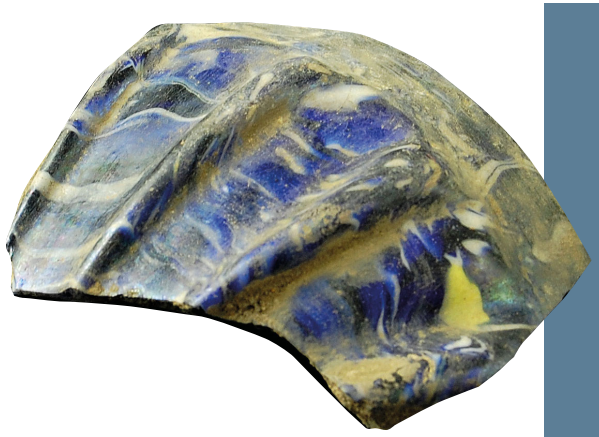
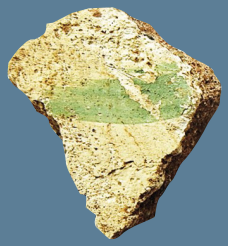
High and Low: The Artefacts

There are some interesting Roman finds from the excavations, which give us an insight into the people who occupied the fortress and their way of life. A triangular tile, called an antefix, was found (left) which bore the name of the Twentieth Legion (Leg XX) and its emblem; a running boar below. The boar has been used in the logo of the new market in recognition of the site's Roman history. This would once have adorned the roof of one of the buildings in the fortress. There was also a copper-alloy key (right), from a strong box or chest, which showed the inhabitants had money or precious items which they wanted to keep safely locked away.



Several fragments of highly ornate, coloured glass bowls (left), dating to the early years of the fortress, were also found. These were made by fusing pieces of patterned glass together to form a disc, and pinching raised ribs into the hot glass, radiating out from the centre. The disc was then heated and draped over a domed former to produce the bowl. These valuable items were probably imported from elsewhere in the empire, and indicate the wealth and status of some of the officers. Fragments of painted plaster (right) also indicate the status of some of the buildings themselves. These came from the centurion's quarters in one of the third-century barrack blocks. The plaster had fallen off the walls after the building was abandoned at the end of the Roman period.



Chester Northgate

The lower-ranking occupants of the fort and their activities and pastimes are represented by items left behind by the soldiers. These include tweezers (left), an iron spearhead and an unusual bone object only a few centimetres long that may have been a gaming piece or a token.

The **Archaeology** of Chester Northgate

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Tunnelling under Chester

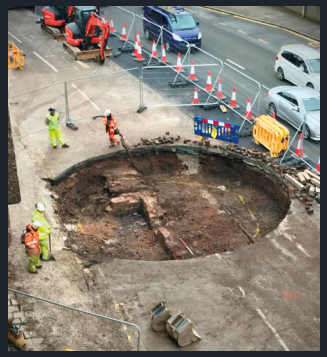
Chester Northgate

One intriguing part of the project was the creation of a new 1km long surface-water drain extending from the Northgate site down St Martin's Way and Nicholas Street to the River Dee. Over 85% of the drain was tunnelled underground with specialist equipment up to 7m below the surface (far right), but a few sections of the drain (right), and 8 access shafts (below right), were open cut, this work being overseen by archaeologists. The route was carefully planned to avoid the shafts and open-cut sections disturbing areas where archaeological remains, such as cemeteries, were anticipated.

The tunnel shaft on the Grosvenor roundabout

At intervals, large drive and reception shafts (for the tunnelling machine) were constructed, again overseen by archaeologists. The drain was also tunnelled several metres beneath the medieval city wall so that this was not disturbed.

The Archaeology of Chester Northgate



Most of the archaeological evidence that may have been present had been heavily disturbed by the modern roads and the existing services within them, but some small fragments of nineteenth-century buildings that had been demolished in advance of the creation of St Martin's Way were discovered (below).

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