

ROMAN ALCHESTER

Beyond hedgerows to the south, lie two Scheduled Monuments. They are buried remains of a Roman fortress and walled town now known as Alchester and a separate parade ground and marching camp. The town lies at a junction of two major Roman roads, and it may have been the main Roman settlement in Oxfordshire. Although it has been known about since at least the 17th century, and there have been small-scale investigations, much of our evidence comes from aerial photographs.

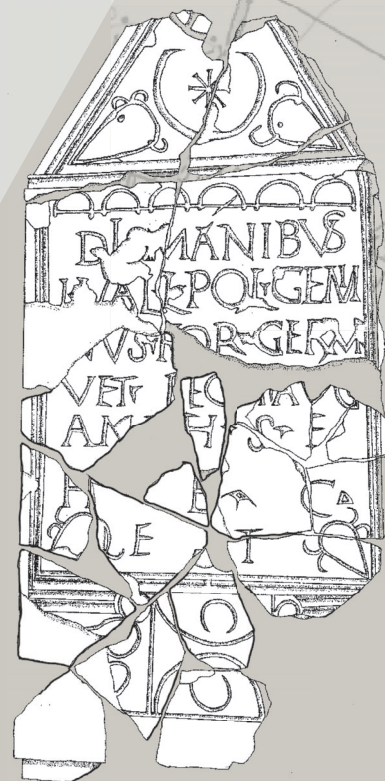


Aerial view of Alchester Roman fort and walled town

The surrounding local area is known to have been home to Iron Age people, but a new site seems to have been chosen in the very early Roman period for a legionary fortress which is buried beneath and to the W of the Roman town. Tree-ring dates of AD 44–45 from an annexe to the fort show that it was built immediately after the Claudian invasion of Britain. It would have been important, and maybe sited at the boundary of the territories of the *Catuvellauni* and *Dobunni* tribes.

The discovery of an inscribed tombstone of Lucius Valerius Geminus, a veteran of the Second Augustan Legion, is important as it suggests that it must have been the Legion's main base. The Second Legion's commander at the time was Vespasian, who later went on to become emperor (AD 69–79).

Defensive town ramparts were built enclosing about 45 hectares probably no earlier than the late 2nd century AD. Regular streets were laid out and buildings of 2nd to 4th century AD date have been investigated. There were probably shops and houses lining the streets and one or two larger buildings are also known.

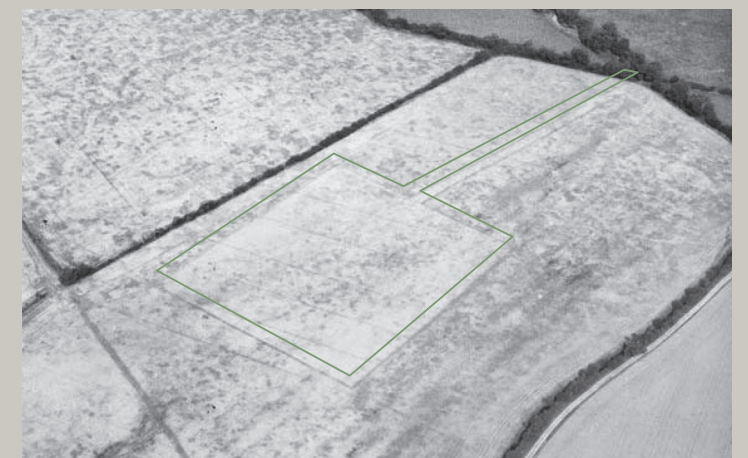


Tombstone for Lucius Valerius Geminus, who served in the Second Augustan Legion

There were also houses and burials outside the town walls. There doesn't seem to have been much occupation after the early 5th century AD.

The separate rectangular military parade ground enclosed by ditches that lies to the east of the town with its access road and an earlier marching camp is type of site that can rarely be identified.

The sites are protected as Scheduled Monuments. You can find out more about the monuments by checking out the Historic England website.



Aerial view of Alchester Roman parade ground and marching camp

