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Vespasian's camp-prefect, Publius Anicius Maximus, supervised the construction of a temporary fortlet above the quay. He or his successor, Poenius Postumus, oversaw the building of a full-scale military fortress, enclosing 38 acres, on the top of the spur. A road ran from this fortress due south parallel to the river, as far as the port of Topsham. Ancillary Roman forts have been found adjacent to this road, one in Topsham, one each side of Holloway Street and most recently (2010) on the site of the vacated St Loyes College in Countess Wear, cleared for the development of a retirement village. This latest discovery may have been used for storage or workshops or tented accommodation; it does not reveal traces of barrack blocks or metal working, but pottery shards date it to the time of the legionary occupation of the city-centre fortress. It was defended by deep ditches and ramparts. The outer ditch had a classic military Roman V-shaped profile, while the inner ditch has a 'Punic' profile – vertical on the outer side and sloping on the other, making it virtually impossible to scramble out of once one has leapt in to attack.

The Roman military presence lasted for 20 to 30 years, with all the shouting and clatter of barracks, workshops, hospital, kitchens and stabling for the horses and mules. There was a hill-top signal station to the north (near the British camp) where beacons could be seen from as far as Dorchester. Its ditch is still visible from the air, outlined by the trees round the practice yard of the present riding-school.

Pennsylvania Road lies on the route that Roman messengers took from the legionary fortress guarding the river-crossing to the signal-station and look-out 600ft above sea-level. In the 19th century a Roman signet-ring of iron was found under the road, and also the upper third of an amphora.

No clear evidence of military occupation was found in excavation in 1956-7, but the soldiers would have been living in tents inside the ditches and ramparts. It was possibly used again in the late 3rd to 4th centuries by a civic militia watching the estuary, as is suggested by the discovery of a coin of Carausius.

The fortress held tightly packed barrack blocks and possibly a hospital on the later site of the deanery. A bath house was erected in about A.D. 60. It was one of the first stone buildings put up in Britain, and was the finest bath house north of the Alps at that time. It consisted of the usual three rooms: hot, tepid and cold (caldarium, tepidarium and frigidarium). The entire suite of rooms was roofed with a series of concrete vaults. At each end of the baths there were apses holding round stone basins.

Rosemary Sutcliff's *Eagle of the Ninth* opens in the fortress at Isca in AD 128. Marcus is a young Roman who has been posted here as a centurion. The local British are rampaging on horseback on the river banks. They attack the fort and Marcus receives a serious wound to his thigh. His stoicism during painful treatment draws on the author's experience in hospital.

Another inspiration for Exeter children is *A Beacon for the Romans* by David Rees. A boy and a girl move to the higher slopes of St Thomas and discover Roman remains in the garden which bring Isca alive for them. David Rees also wrote *The Ferryman*, set in the time of Exeter's cholera epidemic, and he won a Carnegie medal for his book *The Exeter Blitz*.

Derek Gore's *Isca* is set in the last days of the Roman town and draws a vivid picture of the chaos and dilapidation as it collapses into disrepair.





