

The Barracks at Caerleon Roman Fortress



Originally known as Isca, the site originally housed the 5,500 men that made up the Second Augustan Legion. They were originally part of the invasion force which fought for the conquest of England in 43 AD. Caerleon, or Isca, is one of the three great legionnaire fortresses in the United Kingdom, and “Its location had been selected by the then governor of Britain, *Sextus Julius Frontinus*, who had been given the task of settling the remaining unconquered areas of Britain” (Historic UK).



Built in 75 AD, the fortress at Caerleon and the barracks in particular are among the most well preserved in the UK. Almost the entire foundation walls survive for the barracks, and also the accompanying toilets. As such, it is clear to see not only the social divides between the soldiers and their senior officers, but also many of their ways of life.

One particularly interesting aspect of the barracks is that in the shape of the floor plan, there is a clear divide between the centurions and the legionaries. The higher officers were given a larger living space, and were in single rooms, rather than being forced to share. It is thought that one room the smaller rooms would be shared between eight men, whilst the larger rooms were for the centurions. It is said that a “centurion’s quarters took up 30-40 per cent of the length of a barrack and might be detached and separated from the main block by a hallway.” (Copeland, 2014). One block of barracks would have housed a century of men.



To the corner of the field in which the barracks were built is the communal toilets built for the soldiers. It's likely that the latrines took the same form as others from the era, in which there would be a room lined with a wooden bench, that is thereby placed over a sewer. It is then thought that the 'cleaning' method would be a sponge on the end of a stick, which the user would insert through the circular shape in the wood.



To some extent, the latrines at Caerleon are odd because of their sewer systems. The drainage route that encircles the toilet structure appears to travel down past the barracks block, therefore running past the legionnaires quarters. This would presumably create quite a smell, since it would deal with all the excrement passed by all the soldiers and officers situated in Isca. Also, since there doesn't appear to be any real form of drainage system, it is likely that it would have been a form of punishment for soldiers to clear it.



“The main drain carrying effluent from the toilets is running alongside the barrack block...” (Copeland, 2014)

Bibliography

Johnson. B, *The Roman Fortress of Isca*, Historic UK, viewed 17 February 2020 <<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofWales/The-Roman-Fortress-of-Isca/>>

Copeland, T. (2014). *Life in a Roman Legionary Fortress*. Amberley Publishing Limited