

DISCOVERY OF ONE OF THE MAIN SEWERS OF
ROMAN LEICESTER.

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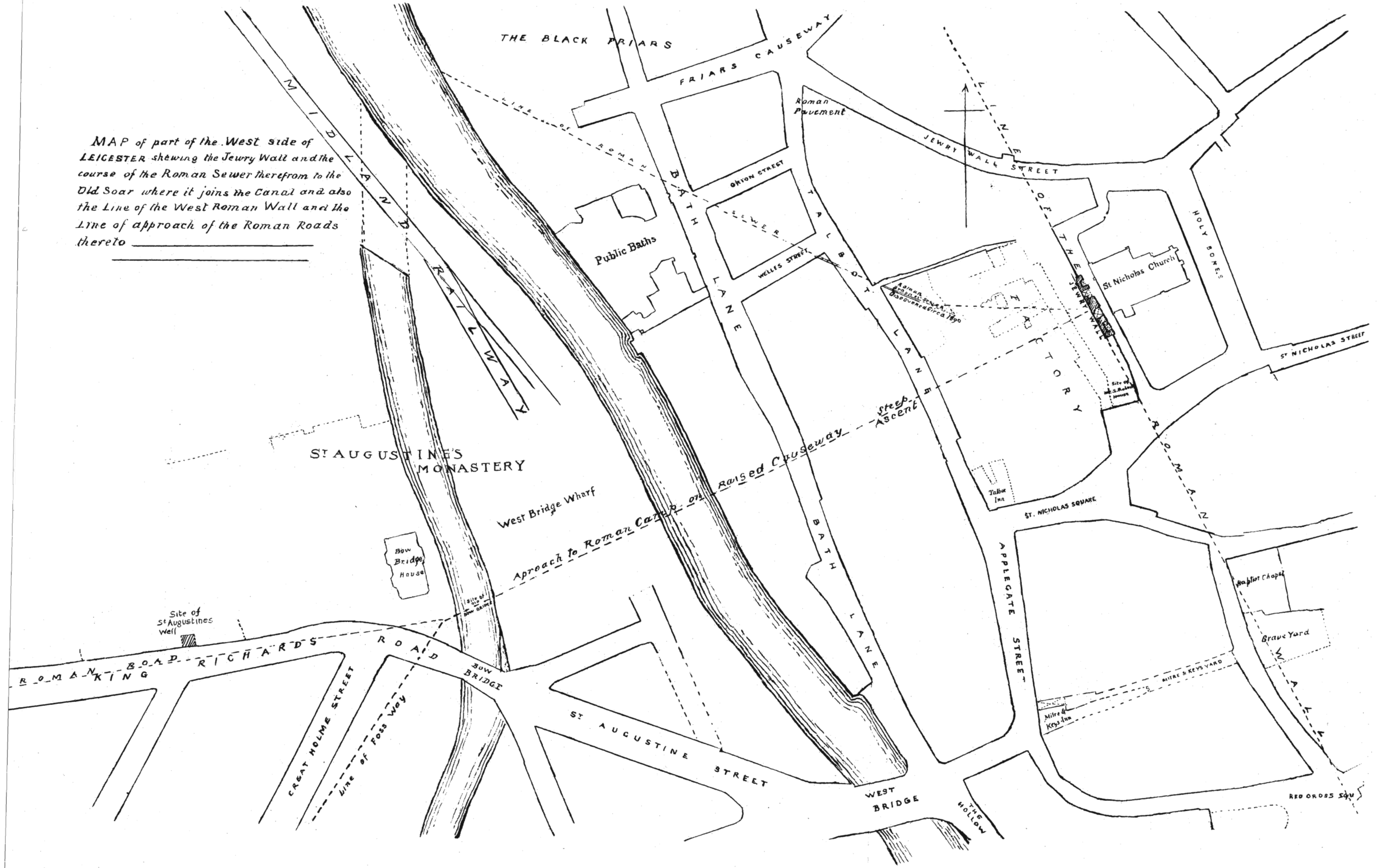
A VERY interesting discovery was made a few years ago in Talbot Lane in this town, on the East side, where some old cottages stood which were destroyed for the purpose of making additions to Messrs. Rust & Co.'s Factory, when during the excavations for that purpose many fragments of Roman pottery, bricks, tiles, &c., were found, and part of the continuation of the Roman Sewer mentioned by *Throsby* in his *History of Leicester* was re-opened or rather re-discovered.

Throsby's description of this Sewer so exactly describes what has lately been brought to light, that as many of our Members have no access to his work, and it is otherwise interesting, I give a copy of his description of the Sewer, and also of other antiquities found at the same time, and to some remarks of his about the Jewry Wall, with all mistakes.

"The Cloaca a Sewer of the Romans is of great importance to the history and age of this place (Leicester,)—it was discovered on February, 1793. As some workmen were employed in removing the earth from a piece of ground nearly an equal distance between the Jewry Wall and the river, they found at the depth of about 5 feet, some very large blocks of freestone half a ton weight; and on their being removed it was discovered they had been placed over a kind of tunnel 2 feet over and 4 deep made of the same kind of materials and built on the same principles as the Jewry Wall. The bottom of this tunnel is of freestone like the blocks which cover it. The commencement of it (so far as is known) is in a cellar of Mr. S. Robert's house, near the South end of Jewry Wall and continues with a considerable descent, in a right line, north westwardly to the River. In emptying this tunnel of its contents (for it was completely gutted up) I found that it contained light earthy particles on the surface somewhat heavier lower, at the bottom gravelly, the whole blended with broken pottery, in general of a singular construction; besides which a few bones of animals were found therein in a petrifying state, and a fragment or two of glass vessels; a bottom of one was layered with silver. Hence it seems apparent that this subterraneous passage was originally the CLOACA or common sewer of the Roman Town.

"Among the fragments of pottery which I selected from this store house of antiquarian treasure I was agreeably surprised to find some Roman characters impressed in relieve very legible.

MAP of part of the West side of LEICESTER shewing the Jewry Wall and the course of the Roman Sewer therefrom to the Old Soar where it joins the Canal and also the Line of the West Roman Wall and the Line of approach of the Roman Roads thereto



In one or two instances, however, the contrary is the case, to me at least: these I will just notice. On the rim of a portion of a vessel made of white clay are characters doubly impressed with an apparent rude instrument. The vessel originally was made shallow, its circumference near the rim about 27 inches; the breadth of the rim which forms a half circle 2 inches; it is layered within with a kind of grit or small pebble and bears the marks of fire. Might not this vessel be a censer used in sacrifice called by the Romans *Thuribulum*? The other illegible characters are on the bottom of a vessel made of beautiful red clay.

“The legible characters are impressed chiefly on the bottoms of vessels of red clay, fashioned like a wine glass which is narrow at the bottom and broad at the top. These were probably cups used in libations, with Emperors or Consuls names impressed thereon. One has *MACRINI*, probably the Emperor *Opilius Macrinus* who reigned 218 years after Christ. Another has *ALBINUS*; the third *ALBUSA*. Part of a bottom has only the ending of a name *TOR* or *IOR*. If *TOR*, it might stand for, or rather be the ending of *CLAUD. FUSCUS. SALINATOR*, who flourished after Christ’s nativity 118 years. The *o* and *r* are very plain. If *IOR* there can be no ascertaining for whom it stood as it doubtless in that case stands part of the word *IUNIOR* of which there were Emperors and Consuls many between the year 319 and 541.

“A part of two other impressions found near, but without the shore, at the same time bear these characters respectively *CICVR* and *MARINH* on a sort of composition stone.

“Adjoining it and nearly of a level with the covering stones was discovered a floor of extraordinary formation: it consisted of mortar, small pebbles, and pounded brick or tile, of each about an equal proportion. One of the best preserved coins in copper was shovelled from the top of one of the covering stones of the shore it appears of the Augustine age. Round the head *VRBS ROMA* on the reverse *Romulus and Remus suckled by a wolf*. Another coin of inferior metal, nearly the size of the former, was found at the same time with the stones, which have the inscriptions *CICVR* and *MARTNH*; but this, time has defaced.

“It is remarkable that none of the pieces of pottery are glazed except one, but those made of red clay—the exception is a small piece of thin black pottery delicately veined. When I compare this little beauty to many others which seem artless in their formation, their original use mysterious, and bear about them no characteristic but clumsy strength. I am sometimes apt to conceive they respectively were in use at very distant periods. One piece of red clay has a rude representation of hunting; two figures appear in Roman military dresses, one pretty perfect. The glazed pottery has suffered nothing from time, many of the others it has much injured.

“ Within the space of a yard of this ancient sewer lay the base of two columns: and two shafts each above a yard long, girth nearly a yard and three-fourths, none of these lay below the blocks of stone which covered the shore. About the same time, but at the distance of thirty yards from these, was discovered on a bed of fine red clay at the depth of 12 feet, a capital of a column made of the same sort of stone as the base and columns and corresponding in every particular with them. I now put all the members of one column together in my garden. This, now it is erected, shews that it was originally hewn behind to fit some rugged building, probably of forest stone. This column does not correspond exactly with any order: it is of purple hue. I observed in the centre of the shaft where there had been originally a piece of square iron to hold the joints together, that that which remained of the iron was reduced to a rusty mould, near these columns lay two amazing strong foundations of a considerable building made of forest stone and grout: the extraordinary floor mentioned above joined to one of them, on this wrought stone I dare say but little.

“ The lately discovered sewer which may be deemed an appendage to Jewry Wall, and as is it were rested at its base this long succession of ages, has been honoured by the happy and inventive genius of man, also with a name which bears no analogy to a sink-hole (an appellation which some might honour this CLOACA of the Romans with). It has been elevated by writers on antiquity who certainly never saw it or knew its course to a subterraneous passage through which men might walk erect even under the River Leir, thence to Bradgate a place three miles from Leicester. Men have talked of lamps burning perpetually within it. Pigs it has been said have been sent down it, and returned with their bristles singed, &c., &c. Some have fixed its entrance at one place and some at another. Thus have men spoken of this embryo something long before its birth. And thus will men continue to treat even visible things like the old wall which to them are incomprehensible.

“ With respect to the opinion given of the sewer I am apprehensive few will cavil at, but with respect to that given of the antient wall some may have their doubts and by maturer judgment may be more happy in their conclusions. Be that as it may, I am firmly of an opinion now that it never was *any portion of a Janus Temple or any other Temple, a Roman bath, or any building of public notoriety*: and that it was nothing more than a principal gate wall, at or near the entrance into the city, from the Foss or Roman road, which passeth within little more than a quarter of a mile westwardly of the river. If the Jewry Wall was built by the Romans (by far the most probable conjecture), the sewer proves that the manner of building it is not peculiar to itself but rather to the age in which it was built. The contents of the sewer, the pottery and the coins, prove to a certainty the sewer to have been made at or prior to the time of the Romans inhabiting this country.

This long hidden vault has been happily the grand repository of historic knowledge which no artful disputant can gainsay. Nothing in this antient place which is daily issuing forth its antiquarian riches has ever been discovered prior to this time of equal importance to the history and age of Leicester.

“I will now just notice the *sewer* and the *old wall* collectively, as they must hereafter I am persuaded be allowed to be labours of the same age, and that age about the birth of Christ. The *old wall*, the river (*i.e.*, the new cut supposed to be made by the Romans) and the *Foss way* lie on lines parallel to each other. The wall is seated on the brow of a gentle rise from the river at an easy distance. Where the sewer commences at the south end of it (meaning near Mr. Robert's house), I am apprehensive might be the grand entrance, the *Janua Gate*. The *Cloaca* I conceive was seated in the centre of this entrance for carrying off the filth of the city into the river, down the declivity as that of Rome into the Tiber, made by Tarquinius Priscus. This like that great work of Tarquinius Superbus called the *CLOACA MAXIMA*, had also its collateral branches: one I saw at the discovery of the *Cloaca* at Leicester which lay in a direction pointing from the grand tunnel north-eastwardly into the city. It was made of very large blocks of free stone, hewn in the centre, like spouts used under the eaves of houses. The principal sewer took not an immediate direction to the river, but led to the stream of the river after it had passed the town: the reason was doubtless to keep the river as pure as possible for use. The old course of the river leads nearly to the lower mouth of the sewer which emptied itself into the river, in a line south-westwardly. The Roman cut passeth just under the town from its commencement a little beyond the Castle mill above the town.

“Floors of tessellated or Roman pavement have been found on both sides of the river, which denote that buildings have stood on their site, one was found within this century near the bath gardens, and another in a cherry orchard near the *Foss way*. But pavements of this sort are numberless, which have been found within the town, eastwardly, beyond the old wall, a strong indication that the old way was the bounding wall of the city—there are others of considerable import still embowelled in the earth.”

The house of Mr. S. Roberts, mentioned by *Throsby*, stood in St. Nicholas Square, where the south-east end of Messrs. Rust & Co.'s factory now is. When an addition to this factory was building the foundation of the continuation southward of the Jewry Wall was laid bare, and either destroyed or used for the foundations of the new building. On the plan herewith (taken from the new Ordnance survey) I have marked the position of Mr. Throsby's discovery and that recently made, but the excavations showed that there was no continuation of the sewer found beyond the centre of the Jewry Wall, and I think it certain that it turned at an angle, and went through or underneath the Wall into

the Town. The portion recently discovered shewed no signs of having been before examined, and it is now left as found, but part of it was filled with concrete and used as a foundation.

Mr. Throsby's idea that it extended to Mr. Robert's house is founded on the direction of the sewer, to where it would strike the West Wall of Ratis if continued in a straight line, and supposing that it then proceeded into the Town by way of St. Nicholas Street which he evidently thinks was a Roman street, I do not think that any of the present streets of Leicester are the original Roman streets. Roman Leicester was destroyed by fire, like other places demolished by the Danes and Saxons, and the burning fragments would soon fill up the narrow streets of a Roman walled town, and when the town was re-inhabited, the buildings would not take the lines of the Roman streets which would be then invisible.

The outlet of this sewer was clearly at the point where the Old Soar joins the canal, which Mr. Throsby says was the new cut made by the Romans, but it shews that this new cut was made subsequent to the Romans, and seems to prove that at the time the sewer was made the cut or canal did not exist. I think there is no doubt it was made in mediæval times when the Castle and Mill were built, and it was what is called the Mill Tail, and was brought under the Walls of the town for defence as a Moat, the whole space between the bottom of the Hill and the Old Soar was most probably, in Roman times, a swamp, and liable to be flooded, and crossed by a raised causeway from Bow Bridge.

Mr. Throsby also assumes that this sewer was the Cloaca Maxima or great Sewer of the Roman City or Camp. It certainly was not the only one, as the High Cross being the highest point in the town and the centre of the Roman Castra, the ground falls away from it on all sides, neither is it large enough for a place of the size of Roman Leicester, but it would appear from Roman buildings having been built over it that it was one of the sewers of the Camp and not of the suburbs.

Mr. Throsby fell into the same error that many others have, that the Roman road called the Fosse way did not come straight to Leicester, but, as he says, passed within little more than a quarter of a mile westwardly of the river, meaning that it followed the road round Leicester now called the Fosse road. I have expressed my opinion in a former paper that this is not only improbable, but was certainly not the case. Roman roads were direct from point to point, whereas this road is remarkably crooked.

There is still a great deal to be discovered of Roman Leicester. The new Railway that is now coming through the town will cross through some part of the centre of the Roman Camp, and some interesting finds may be anticipated, especially as there are some open spaces affected by this Railway which have perhaps not been built on since the Roman occupation. It is to be hoped that all antiquarian discoveries will be preserved and sent to the Museum.