

Great Archaeological Sites in Neath Port Talbot



4. NEATH ROMAN FORT



When the Romans came to build permanent bases to consolidate their hold on newly conquered territory in South Wales, one of the things that influenced their choice of site was good communications. At Neath the site they chose (centred SS 747 976) lay on the banks of the River Neath a short distance from the sea, enabling supplies to be brought in by ship. It was also an ideal spot in which to co-ordinate the east-west land route, which extended from Chepstow in the east to the west of Wales, with a north-south road leading towards Brecon to join up with the Roman road along the Usk valley.

There are hints that the Romans had already spotted the potential of the site during the first campaigns under Nero, but first fort that has definitely been confirmed was built in earth and timber AD 75 – 80. It was soon replaced by a second, smaller earth and timber fort which was in use for some 30 years before being mothballed. However, the army had not finished with site, as the fort was refurbished at some time between AD 117 and the 120s, with the defences and possibly also some of the internal buildings rebuilt in stone. It seems to have gone in and out of use during the 2nd century, and then reoccupied in the late 3rd century like other forts in the region.

Excavations from the 1940s onwards have told us quite a lot about this fort. Among the first buildings to be excavated were the south-east gate which led to the river, and probably to a bridge across it, and the south-west gate. Both were flanked by towers. The south-east gate, thought to be the *porta praetoria* or main gate, had a double carriageway which would have been spanned by two arches. The south-west gate was only single width, but the carefully cut stone blocks at the doorway to the

only excavated tower were finer than anything that survived at the other gate. Exactly the same embellishment was found when part of the north-east gate was excavated in 2005.

Only a small proportion of the fort's interior has been excavated, mainly in the eastern quadrant and this, as in most forts, was occupied by barracks. Three successive phases of timber barracks were discovered.



Much of the fort at Neath lies under Cwrt Herbert playing fields at Neath Sports Centre, but the two surviving gates are on the opposite side of Neath Abbey Road (A475), with the remains of the south-west gate in the verge (SA10 7SW). The south-west gate is round the corner in Roman Way (SA10 7BH). There is parking at the sports centre. Walking access from Neath railway station is via the footbridge over the river; Neath is on the main line between Cardiff and Swansea. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 165.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The fort as a whole has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00620w, the south-east gate is 01804w and the south-west gate 01806w. You can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about the Romans in South Wales at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/romans_in_south_wales/index.html