



Gelligaer Roman Fort



Although the Roman army began their invasion of Britain in 43 A.D., the strong resistance of the Silures (the local Celtic tribe) meant that this area was not truly conquered until around thirty years later.

To secure their position, the Romans built a network of forts and roads. The first fort in Gelligaer was probably built in about 75 A.D., mainly of wood and earth at this time. The smaller stone remains that can still be detected were built about thirty years later in the reign of the Emperor Trajan, as shown by the inscribed stone from the south-east gateway.

It was on the road between Cardiff and Y Gaer (near Brecon). The two closest forts to it were the ones in Caerphilly (6 miles to the south) and Pen-y-darren in Merthyr Tydfil (8 miles to the north west).

It was garrisoned by auxiliaries under the command of the Second Augustan Legion at Caerleon (Isca). They were probably a *cohors quingenaria peditata* – an infantry unit of 500 men. Some auxiliary units included both infantry and cavalry but it has been suggested that Gelligaer was purely infantry.

The fort was roughly square in shape and covered about 3 acres. In layout, it was typical of other similar forts. Being built on a ridge between the Taff and the Rhymney Valleys, the resulting view of the surrounding countryside was a defensive advantage.

It was entered by four double arched gateways and was well fortified. There was a wide outer ditch and there was an earth rampart faced on both sides by a stone wall. The wall had corner towers and others at intervals along its length.

The soldiers were housed in six barrack blocks. At the heart of the fort were the headquarters and, next to that, the commander's residence. Other buildings included a workshop with a yard, two granaries and what were probably store-rooms and stables. Outside the main fort but inside a walled extension was the bath-house. Adjacent to the fort was a parade ground that could be used for religious festivals as well as military drill.

Occupation of the fort continued until the late second century and there is evidence that it was reoccupied at some point during the late third to mid fourth centuries. The evidence for this era is limited and so it is impossible to say whether this occupation was military or civilian. The date of the final abandonment is unknown.