

# Fortress Isca

## *A mighty Roman garrison*

One of just three permanent fortresses in Roman Britain, Isca was built at Caerleon by the Second Augustan Legion. How long did they stay? And who moved in after? **Andrew Gardner** and **Peter Guest** explore.



**L**ying on the west bank of the River Usk to the north of Newport in South Wales, the town of Caerleon sits upon the remains of one of only three permanent legionary fortresses in Britain. Known to the Romans as Isca, the fortress was garrisoned by the Second Augustan Legion (*legio II Augusta*) – part of the original invasion force in AD 43 – who built the first timber encampment during the final campaigns in the 70s to subdue the tribes living in Wales. The location was well chosen and the legion overlooked the lowest crossing point of the Usk, while the river also gave access to the hilly

**Above** Recent geophysical surveys of Caerleon (shown in red) overlaid upon the fortress plan.

interior via auxiliary forts at Abergavenny and Brecon. The 5,500 legionaries of the Second Augustan were industrious builders as well as conquerors, pacifiers and colonists, and these men rebuilt Isca in stone and constructed parts of Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall within the legion's first 100 years at Caerleon.

A great deal of material has been recovered in the 150 or so years since John Edward Lee, Newport industrialist and benefactor, began digging in and around Caerleon hunting for antiquities. We now know significantly more about Isca than the other British fortresses beneath Chester and York, or indeed many 