

# Archaeological assessment of Wroxeter, Shropshire

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## Summary

*The Roman and early medieval town of Wroxeter was surveyed during the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, a desk-based study of the 64 smaller historic towns in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Archaeological evidence relating to the settlement of Wroxeter was carefully analysed, comprising topographic data, published and unpublished archaeological reports, museum collections, historical maps, and field data recorded by the project team.*

*Detailed evidence is provided on the character and layout of the settlement in three periods of occupation (early Roman civilian settlement, Roman civitas capital and early medieval town). For each of these three periods the available information is analysed and mapped in detail, and a model of the development of the town is proposed. In addition, the evidence for pre-urban occupation is considered, together with evidence of later medieval occupation. All archaeologically-relevant information has been recorded as part of the county Sites and Monuments Record. Specialist assessments of artefacts and ecofacts are included. A detailed archaeological research framework has been developed for Wroxeter, which will inform future archaeological investigations as well as management decisions.*

*The historic core of Wroxeter contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is high potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. As the region's civitas capital, Wroxeter's significance can hardly be overstated. It is the only civitas capital within the study area and its size and quality of occupation reflects this. The potential for understanding how such settlements functioned, their relationship with the rest of the canton and with other parts of the province are all areas of interest.*

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Location and landuse

The urban area of Wroxeter is located at NGR SJ 5608 in Shrewsbury and Atcham District. The town was abandoned possibly in the 7th or 8th century, except for the village of Wroxeter which occupies the southern end of the urban area. A group of houses at the centre of the urban area dates to the 19th century.

### 1.2 Topography, geology and soils

Wroxeter lies at a height of between 50m and 75m OD on the east bank of the River Severn. A stream, the Bell Brook, drains from east to west across the northern half of the urban area and its valley is a major topographical feature within the town. Another stream, also draining from east to west, defines the southern end of the urban area. The site is highest on the east side but the original topography is difficult to determine adequately due to extensive stratigraphic modification and accumulation. The soils are glacial till in the east part and alluvium of the first river terrace on the west side overlying Bridgnorth (Triassic) sandstone (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1:50,000 Shrewsbury).

### 1.3 Chronological outline

**Iron Age occupation.** Despite stray finds of Dobunnic coins and VCP (very coarse pottery) there is no evidence for Iron Age settlement on the site, although it has been pointed out that there is a suggestion of a co-axial pre-Roman field system surrounding Wroxeter (Bassett 1990). This evidence, and the occurrence of Iron Age enclosures within the hinterland (Ellis *et al* 1994), make it likely that some sort of settlement exists beneath the later town. The likelihood of a settlement at Wroxeter is increased by the fact that virtually all civitas capitals are located on or near late pre-Roman Iron Age centres (Millett 1990, 74). It is usually assumed that the Wrekin hillfort 5km to the east was one such centre for the Cornovii, but the possibility of Iron Age settlement beneath Wroxeter cannot be ruled out.

**Early forts and the legionary fortress.** An alternative model to that of development from Iron Age antecedents proposes that the town developed from a military vicus associated with the earliest urban form (Webster 1975, 39-40). The historical background for this period has been extensively interpreted by Webster (1975 and 1988) and seems reasonably clear. The first settlement is likely to be the small fort south of Wroxeter (SA 33) which has been dated to the Claudian period (*c* AD 47). The fort was sited here to protect the ford across the Severn (St Joseph 1951, 54-6).

A number of marching camps lie to the north under and around the later town and these may date to this period or slightly later. The major component of the urban form was established *c* AD 57 by the foundation of a legionary fortress for the 14th Legion. This was used as a base for the gradual conquest of central and north Wales from AD 58 to AD 78 after which the fortress seems to have become a supply depot. Its military life came to an end *c* AD 90 when the new legionary fortress was founded, also on Cornovian territory, at *Deva* (Chester).

**The vicus and the *canabae*.** It has been suggested that a substantial civilian population was attracted to the fortress and that these were settled in two areas. To the north lay the *canabae*, an area of land under military jurisdiction which provided rest and recreation for the troops and a trading area. This was defended on its northern side by a bank and ditch cut along the southern crest of the Bell Brook valley. To the south possibly lay the vicus, the civilian settlement which may have clustered around the ford and the roads leading to the fortress (Webster 1988, 132-6). The road network was also established when the fortress was built, although earlier roads have been detected (Bassett 1990). The main addition was Watling Street which approached the fortress from the northeast and branched into two routes, one heading due west to Forden Gaer bypassing the fortress, and the other turning south, passing through the fortress and crossing the ford to continue to the Stretton Gap.

**Civilian occupation of the fortress site.** It is clear that when the army pulled out of Wroxeter they slighted the defences, as was normal, with the possible exception of those on the Bell Brook valley. The street grid seems to have remained, however, and there is evidence that some of the buildings used by the army were left standing and continued in use after their departure (Webster 1988, 136-40). Neither the extent nor status of the settlement they left behind is clear, but early occupation has been seen in Insulae 8 and 9 (between the public baths and the village) and within the insulae later occupied by the town forum and baths (Insulae 4 and 5). It has been suggested that the focus for the early town lay in the centre of the former fortress, where the main road would still have passed through the town (Webster 1989, 201) but evidence is lacking. It is also thought that the early abortive baths underneath the later forum was a project started when the town was first established, though the reason why it was never completed is unclear.

It is probable that even at this early date the town was the civitas capital of the Cornovii but positive confirmation of this has not been forthcoming. It is clear, however, that unlike

the legionary fortresses at Colchester, Gloucester, Lincoln and York, Wroxeter did not become a *colonia* of veterans. The reason for this is not known but may possibly have been an outcome of good relations between the Cornovii and the Roman administration, or may simply have reflected the fact that an insufficient number of veterans had settled at Wroxeter to make it possible to found a *colonia*. That the local elite were in control of the town thus seems likely (Millett 1990, 74-8) but there is little archaeological sign of their presence at the moment. This may be due to the fact that only the western periphery of the town has been excavated.

The second urban form came into existence during the reign of Hadrian (AD 117 to 138) when the whole town was reorganised and expanded (Webster 1988, 140-3). It may well be that the defences of the town were created at this time but these followed different lines from those of the fortress. The exception was on the east side where they roughly coincide, the new line taking in the presumed *vicus* in the south and the full width of the Bell Brook valley. The defences seem to have been in earth and timber throughout and enclosed an area of 74 ha, making Wroxeter the fourth largest town by area in Roman Britain.

At the same time, the centre of the town was drastically reorganised by moving the main north-south street one city block to the west so that it ran between *Insulae* 1, 4 and 8 on the west of the street and *Insulae* 2, 5 and 9 on the east of the street. The old street line remained in use except at its southern end where it was blocked by the new defences. In the new town centre two major civic buildings were laid out, a forum on *Insula* 4 and a public baths and *macellum* on *Insula* 5. There seems to have been a colonnade along the street frontages of both *insulae* and those to the south. A classical temple was also constructed south of the forum with an enigmatic enclosure behind it which has been interpreted variously as a forum *boarium* or a religious theatre (Ellis pers comm; Webster and Stanley 1963, 118-123).

Substantial town houses are known both from excavation and from aerial photographs but in the latter case the buildings are undated. Nonetheless they indicate that large areas of the *insulae* were built up and that the types of housing indicated cover a full range of building types, from simple cottages to large courtyard houses. Excavations confirm this picture showing a range of building sizes and materials. Mosaics are known from several areas in the town but few have been adequately published. Those that are suggest they are 4th century rather than earlier which might suggest continued prosperity throughout the Roman period.

The public buildings are very well known and give a good idea of the status of the town and its wealth. The dedicatory slab from the forum confirms that by AD 130 the town was the *civitas* capital of the Cornovii and the size of the baths suggests a capacity of 1000. This could perhaps suggest a population of *c* 7000, a size commensurate with the area enclosed by the defences. The *macellum*, one of only two known in the country, strongly suggests that the population had become heavily Romanised and, probably, urbanised since there is a dearth of substantial villa sites in the immediate hinterland. This may have been a factor in the abnormally large size of the defended area.

**Late Roman development.** It is possible that the status of the town declined in the 4th century since the large and unwieldy territory of the Cornovii was probably broken up into smaller units with Chester and Whitchurch being likely centres for the new *pagi*. Administratively, the town would have come within the province of *Britannia Prima* whose capital lay at Cirencester. The impact of this is reflected in the appearance in the town of Cirencester school mosaics (Cosh and White forthcoming). Some contraction of the town in the 4th century is indicated by the failure to rebuild the forum after it was destroyed at the end of the 3rd century by fire (Atkinson 1942, 105-7) and by the possible re-establishment of the southern Bell Brook defences (Kenyon 1940, 178). Against this view, however, is the continued maintenance of the baths basilica, and possibly the baths, until the end of the 5th century.

Evidence for the foundation of the wealth of the town is not forthcoming but extensive mineral deposits of lead, silver and coal are located nearby and the Cornovii controlled three centres of salt production. In addition, it is likely that there was extensive reliance on animal husbandry, especially cattle and on grain production. Both items were of immense importance to the army whose continued presence on Cornovian territory will have provided a ready market.

**Industry and trade.** Three pottery or tile production centres are known, one a specialised mortarium kiln, and others are hinted at in the area. A glass-working site is also known (Houghton 1973) and an enamelworking site is also suggested (Wright 1872, 159-164). There is extensive evidence for metalworking in the form of crucibles, furnaces and waste-castings in lead, bronze and iron and a stone mould for a pewter bowl hints at another industry. Bone-working seems to have been a major industry, and it is probable that tanning and its associated industries were carried out as well. Cloth production seems to have been less important. Equipment for a surgeon is known from a grave and two oculist's stamps are known. These may be linked to an eye cult, evidence for which was found on the baths basilica site (Barker 1981, 16).

Trade and industry will have been encouraged by the good road network and by the River Severn, which is navigable up- and down-stream of the town. The evidence for secondary trade by road is limited to the settlement at Meole Brace, 10km to the west, which seems to have been a small re-distribution centre (Ellis *et al* 1994). Incoming trade is evidenced principally by pottery, with major imports coming from Gaul (Lyons, Gallic colour-coated, Samian), the Rhineland, Dorset (Black Burnished ware), eastern England (Nene Valley and Calcite-Gritted ware), and central England (Oxfordshire and Mancetter/ Hartshill wares). Large quantities of glass, probably imported from the Rhineland, have also been found. Spectacular confirmation of such trade was provided by the first forum fire of *c* AD 155/165 when dozens of plain Samian bowls, mortaria and Kentish Ragstone whetstones were found abandoned in the gutter. More exotic imports, which suggest considerable spending power, include a large silver mirror (Atkinson 1942, 196-8) and a figurine from a 1st century silver sweetmeat stand (Stokes 1991) both of which are likely to be Italian in origin.

**Religion.** There is considerable evidence for religious beliefs in the town ranging from the two known temples, one classical and the other Romano-Celtic, to minor everyday objects such as Venus figurines, brooches and minor statuettes. Votive offerings of plaster and sheet metal eyes and evidence for a skull cult indicate the continuing native flavour of the cults at Wroxeter. As at Cirencester, there is evidence for a Jupiter Column (Smith 1857) and there are hints of other votive columns (Toynbee 1966). Although there is strong circumstantial evidence that part of the baths became a church in the 5th or 6th century (White 1990, 6), there is no artefactual evidence for Christianity on the site (a "Christian letter" which is said to refer to the town (Fletcher 1905) has been misread (Tomlin 1988, 236-7)). Despite this, it seems probable that Wroxeter had a bishop from the 4th century onwards until its desertion.

**Post-Roman and early medieval settlement.** The full extent and nature of the early medieval urban form is unknown but the minimum extent of the occupation covers an area 300m by 250m in size. At the centre of the known occupation area and situated on the site of the baths basilica is a large town house surrounded by subsidiary structures. To the south, the frigidarium of the baths may have become a church since a cemetery was located at the west end. The buildings on the frontages of Insulae 2 and 6, however, appear to be strip buildings of urban type and similar but less well-understood evidence is seen in other insulae nearby. Dating evidence suggests that the floruit of this phase was in the 6th and 7th century but the status of the town at this date is obscure. Two possibilities are that it was a regal centre or a religious one.

Current opinion favours the latter interpretation since regal status, or even sub-regal status, should be evidenced by artefacts and defensive structures. It is probable that another centre

of occupation was in the south of the town, around the ford, as this area became the later medieval village. The earliest structural evidence here is the church of St Andrew part of which may date to the 9th century. The defences too may have been maintained as there is a late 5th century tombstone from the city rampart on the east side. The presence of this has been used to argue that the late Roman town authorities were employing mercenaries (Webster 1975, 114). The extent of territory controlled by the town in this period has been suggested in outline (Bassett 1992, 13-23). The occupation in the town seems to have ended peacefully, possibly in the late 7th or early 8th century (Barker *et al* forthcoming).

#### 1.4 Place-name studies

The identification of Wroxeter with the town of *Viroconium* is given by the contemporary forum dedication which refers to the *civitas Cornoviorum*. It is known from Ptolemy's Geography that the *civitas* capital was *Viroconium* and, before the archaeological confirmation, Wroxeter had been identified as this site since the 18th century. An alternative form, *Uroconium*, is probably corrupt but might represent the later Roman form of the town's name. The derivation of the ancient, and modern, name for the settlement seems to derive from the Wrekin (Rivet and Smith 1979, 505-6; Gelling 1990, 330-1) again reinforcing the suggestion that the Wrekin was a focus for Cornovian power in the pre-Roman period. The name was perpetuated by the Anglo-Saxon *Wreocensaete*, whose name means either 'dwellers around the Wrekin' or 'dwellers around *Viroconium*' (Bassett 1992, 20).

The tithe map of 1840/2 gives many names for the fields in the town but the only significant ones are those around the ruins of the baths which are called Near, Little and Further Old Works.

#### 1.5 Syntheses of documentary and archaeological data.

There is little evidence that standing remains were visible in the town before the 19th century, the only exception being the Old Work (north wall of the *frigidarium*). This prompted considerable antiquarian interest from the 18th century and there are a number of engravings and watercolours of the wall. The earthworks of the town wall are also mentioned.

Summaries of archaeological information on the town have appeared since the 19th century, the earliest being Dukes (1829). Books by Wright (1859 and 1872) and Anderson (1867) continued this tradition. More modern summaries of information may be found in Fox (1897), Haverfield (1908) and Humphreys (1914) which deal comprehensively with the antiquarian data. Major excavation reports (Bushe-Fox 1913, 1914, and 1916; Kenyon 1940 and 1980; Atkinson 1942) have provided the material for modern synthetic accounts and discussions of the town (Wacher 1974, Webster 1975, Crickmore 1984a & 1984b, Esmonde Cleary 1987).

The present assessment was carried as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in 1993. The text was revised in March 1995 to incorporate the results of fieldwork undertaken by the Survey (see section 1.7). No information published after December 1994 has been incorporated into this assessment (except for Welfare and Swan 1995).

#### 1.6 Cartographic sources

The only surviving Roman boundary of the town is the town wall and the inner defensive ditch on the south edge of the Bell Brook. Nineteenth century maps include the tithe map of 1842 (SRO 2656, 16) and the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 first edition maps (*Shropshire sheet XLII.1-2* (1882)).

## 1.7 Archaeological excavations and surveys

Despite the excellent preservation of the Old Work, there seems to have been little antiquarian excavation on the site before 1859. Most discoveries prior to that date were accidental or unsystematic (eg SA 6431). The height and good preservation of the baths suggests that this area was always rough pasture but elsewhere ploughing seems to have levelled the site by the post-medieval period. There is considerable documentary evidence for post-medieval stone-robbing (Leighton 1789; Scarth 1859) and earlier periods are evidenced by an Anglo-Saxon strap-end from the Baths Basilica site (Barker 1976, 8) and Roman masonry reused in the fabric of churches at Wroxeter, Atcham and Upton Magna. Considerable numbers of artefacts have been recovered from the town; indeed coins were so common that they received the local nickname of 'dinders' in the 18th century (Wright 1872, 327).

The first systematic excavations, directed by Thomas Wright, took place between 1859-62 and 1867 and were published definitively in 1872. These excavations took place on the town baths (SA 6442 and SA 6443), in Insula 9 (SA 6457), on the town defences (SA 6401 and SA 6402), the medieval castle (SA 2808) and the cemetery area (SA 67). A minor campaign, again on the baths, was conducted in 1894 and 1896 by George Fox (SA 6444).

The next major excavations were undertaken by J P Bushe-Fox who examined six town houses on the east frontage of Insula 8 (SA 6455). This was followed in 1924-7 by D Atkinson who excavated the site of the forum (Insula 4: SA 6439 and SA 6440). Both excavations were of a reasonably high standard for the period. Atkinson also excavated in the eastern cemetery area (SA 67 and SA 6426) and on the defences (SA 6403).

Attention once again focused on the baths insula after this, and there were minor excavations by Jackson (Morris 1930; SA 6445) and Kathleen Kenyon (Kenyon 1940; SA 6446) to clarify the sequence of building. Kenyon also carried out work on the defences (SA 6405 and SA 6406), and excavated again in 1952-3 on Insula 9 (Kenyon 1980; SA 6459). This was followed by an extensive campaign on the public baths by Graham Webster (Webster 1988; SA 6447 and SA 6448), out of which grew the Baths Basilica excavations directed by Philip Barker (SA 6449). A final excavation on the baths was directed by Mike Corbishley in 1988-9 (SA 6450).

There were numerous excavations on a small scale carried out by J Houghton on many locations both in and around Wroxeter most of which were published but only in cursory form (eg SA 6471). These were often prompted by the increasingly full definition of the town through aerial photographic surveys (Wilson 1984 and Baker 1973). The Central Archaeological Unit carried out a number of excavations in the mid-1970s both for research and in advance of service works on the site. The excavations were located on the defences (SA 6412 and SA 6413), the museum car park (SA 6435) and the forum colonnade and drain (SA 6411 and SA 6441).

Minor resistivity and magnetometer surveys have been carried out in parts of the town (Esmonde Cleary 1991; White forthcoming) and a small excavation was carried out on the defences in 1991-2 as part of this work (SA 6415). Small evaluations have been carried out in advance of building work at two sites within the village (SA 6476 and SA 6478). Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. This was limited to recording the extent of modern developments in the urban area.

*Note: A large number of archaeological trenches have been excavated in the central area, and many trenches are difficult to locate with any degree of accuracy. As a consequence, trenches in the central area are not mapped as separate remains at 1:2500, and trenches in other areas are approximately located.*

## 2 Pre-urban evidence

**Prehistoric period.** Bronze Age flints have been found on the site (SA 1753, SA 2767 and SA 2881) and it is suggested that the landscape had been settled by the late pre-Roman Iron Age (Bassett 1990). Nonetheless, there is no evidence that the site of the town had been occupied in the Iron Age, although a small farmstead remains a distinct possibility. It is assumed that the paramount settlement in the vicinity was the hillfort on the Wrekin which was occupied until it was fired by the Romans in about AD 47 (Stanford 1984; White and Webster 1994). A number of rectangular enclosures have been identified in the vicinity of the town which may be of Iron Age or Roman date (SA 459, SA 460, SA 2250, SA 2469).

**Roman military sites.** A number of forts are known in the immediate vicinity of the fortress (SA 29, SA 33, SA 128, SA 2637, SA 4159, SA 6488). The earliest is apparently that to the south (SA 33) which may have been occupied in AD 47 (St Joseph 1951; Webster 1975). The other forts (SA 29, SA 128, SA 2637 and SA 4159) have all been identified through air photography and are undated but presumably pre-date the fortress. Another camp (SA 6488) may be either an annexe to the fortress or another, earlier, camp.

## 3 Roman fortress and civilian settlement

### 3.1 Roman fortress and early civilian settlement: remains and buildings

There are no remains of the military phase above ground, either as standing earthworks or buildings. It is probable that most of the fortress is deeply buried beneath the later town and has consequently been damaged by both terracing for later buildings and by pitting. In places where such damage has not occurred, survival should be excellent. The apparent identification of military buildings on aerial photographs might indicate, however, that in some areas the remains might be close to the surface. Outside the area of the fortress, early buildings have been identified on the east and west sides of the southern part of Watling Street. A rampart on the southern bank of the Bell Brook valley may also be part of the fortress complex.

A vicus is postulated around the ford at the south end of the town whereas the *canabae* are suggested to lie between the north side of the fortress and the early defences. In the Bell Brook valley and to the north are a number of cropmarks indicative of temporary military camps and complexes of trackways and fields. South of Wroxeter village is another temporary fort.

### 3.2 Roman military and early civilian components

Analysis of the evidence given above indicated the existence of seven urban components. The characteristics of these are summarised below.

**Legionary fortress** (SA 6487, SA 6414). The fortress was established between the Bell Brook valley and the ford. The defences (SA 6414) defined this area and have been excavated at a number of locations (SA 6404, SA 6405, SA 6412, SA 6413). The interior (SA 6487) was subdivided by the *via praetoria* on the west side and the *via principia* running north to south. An intervallum road has been detected inside the rampart line and it has been shown that this was encroached on by later buildings in the life of the fortress. A baths block is suggested to have been situated just to the south of the *principia* (SA 6461) and a granary (SA 6437) is located to the north of this, near the north gate. Rampart buildings (SA 6453 and SA 6463) have been seen on the south and east sides (Webster 1988, 123-136). The defences of the fortress have been seen in both aerial photographs and in section (*ibid*; Kenyon 1940, 176-80; Johnson 1976).

**Town defences** (SA 6483). A single turf rampart and ditch running east to west along the southern crest of the Bell Brook valley has been dated to this period (Kenyon 1940, 176-80; SA 6483). A road ran along the southern side of it. It has been suggested that this formed the defences of the *canabae* (Webster 1988, 136).

**Occupation areas** (SA 6489; SA 6490). Two occupation areas can be provisionally identified, although archaeological evidence is very slight. There is no positive proof of the site of the civilian *vicus* associated with the fortress, although it is suggested that it lay beneath the present village (Webster 1988, 136). This would place it by the ford taking Watling Street across the Severn, and in an angle formed by roads (SA 99, SA 6484 and SA 108). After the defences of the fortress were slighted, civilian settlement quickly extended northwards along the developing north-south street (SA 6455). This may be seen as an extension to the earlier *vicus*. The full extent of the *vicus* settlement is provisionally identified as an urban component (SA 6489).

The area to the north and west, defined by the fortress and by the early defences (cf SA 6483), is identified as the site of the *canabae* (SA 6490). As yet there is no archaeological evidence for this supposition. Part of this area became the site of the early unfinished baths (SA 6440) which some have argued is military in origin (Frere 1987, 102 n.20) and others early civil in origin (Ellis pers comm; Webster 1993).

**Street system** (SA 6491 and Roman roads SA 66, SA 99, SA 108, SA 6484, SA 6486). It seems likely from careful analysis of the street grid that some roads are likely to be pre-Roman in origin (Bassett 1990; SA 6484 and SA 99). These were utilised by the army who diverted a street (SA 99) so that it ran through the centre of the fortress, crossed the Severn at a ford and continued (as SA 108) to Church Stretton and Leintwardine. Watling Street (SA 99) entered the fortress from the north-east, but an earlier pre-fortress line for the road is indicated by a westward continuation (SA 6486) which probably crossed the Severn at Atcham (White forthcoming). A northern route (SA 66) to the fort at Whitchurch was probably established when the fortress was constructed, as this is probably when the northern part of Cornovian territory was secured. Within the fortress, the street system has not been securely established other than the *viae principalis*, *praetoria* and *sagularis* (Webster 1988).

**Extramural area** (SA 6499). An area of occupation is defined outside the early civilian defences (cf SA 6483). This component is not differentiated in any detail as there is insufficient archaeological evidence to do so, but is known to contain cemeteries and other activity.

Evidence of the early cemetery (SA 67, SA 6424, SA 6425) is focused northwest of the fortress. The only definite cemetery associated with the fortress is that identified on either side of the Watling Street (SA 99). Four military tombstones in all have been located although one of these (SA 6432) was from a different location further west. This stone, commemorating a cavalry trooper, might have been a pre-fortress burial since such troops did not generally serve with the legions. If so, then its find spot may mark an early, pre-fortress cemetery south of the fork between roads (SA 66 and SA 99). Of the other stones, two were associated with cremations and belonged to legionaries serving with the 14th and 20th legions. A single cremation from one of the sites excavated by Bushe-Fox suggests that there may also have been some burials towards the south (Bushe-Fox 1913, 12).

To the northwest of the fortress, on the north side of the Bell Brook valley, lie two areas of trackways and fields which, while both pre-date the 2nd century defences, apparently do not connect with each other. That to the north of the later defences (SA 30) consists of a Y-shaped trackway with a network of small sub-rectangular fields attached. That to the south consists of a regular network of small plots with occasional circular (?) structures. It is suggested that the former is an early field system while the



latter represents market gardening associated with either the fortress or the early town (Ellis *et al* 1994, 110).

### 3.3 Roman military and early civilian urban form

**Definition and classification.** The military and early civil urban form (SA 6492) has been defined and mapped, based on the extent of the identified urban components. Although the size and extent of the fortress is known, that of the associated civilian settlement is not clear. The early civilian town's extent has been demonstrated to be roughly the same as that of the legionary fortress and its associated civilian settlement. The evidence summarised above indicates that Wroxeter's earliest urban form was a legionary fortress, probably with associated external suburbs. This became the nucleus of the first Roman town which was established as the *civitas* capital of the *Cornovii*.

**Survival.** Excavations have demonstrated that the survival of the remains of the fortress and early civil town depends on later activity on the site. Where there are later public buildings, there is considerable evidence of destruction but elsewhere survival is good.

## 4 Roman *civitas* capital

### 4.1 Roman *civitas* capital: remains and buildings

The only surviving piece of masonry above ground is the ruins of the town baths on Insula 5. One part of this (the Old Work) has never been buried but the other walls have been exposed since at least 1859 (Wright 1859 and 1872). Ploughing and stone-robbing have caused severe damage in places but where topsoil is over 1.0m thick, such damage may be minimal and even where the topsoil is relatively thin late deposits may still survive. The town defences appear as an earthwork on the south, east and north sides but much of the surviving circuit is generally only of the ditch rather than the rampart. There is considerable evidence for buildings within the town both through excavation and aerial observation.

### 4.2 Roman urban components

Analysis of the evidence summarised above indicated the existence of 21 urban components. The characteristics of these are summarised below.

**Civic centre** (SA 6439 [& SA 6440], SA 6497). The civic centre lay to the west and east of Watling Street in the centre of the town, occupying all of Insula 4 (SA 6439: forum) and Insula 5 (SA 6497: public baths and *macellum*). Both complexes have been thoroughly excavated but the forum is less well understood than the baths.

The forum (SA 6439) overlies the site of the unfinished baths house (SA 6440). It was orientated east to west and consisted of an east range, a courtyard colonnaded on all sides, a basilica on the west side and beyond that a west range. External colonnades were noted on the east and south sides only. The complex was dated by an inscription cut in 129-130. Fire destroyed the complex on two occasions, in *c* 155-165 and in the late 3rd century. After the second fire, large parts of the complex do not appear to have been reconstructed but the forum was not abandoned since the east range showed signs of continued occupation if not refurbishment (Atkinson 1942, 104-113). Excavation evidence is fairly extensive for the forum (SA 6439) and the early baths (SA 6440).

The baths (SA 6497) seem to have been begun at the same time as the forum but were not dedicated until *c* 160-170. There is extensive archaeological evidence from this insula (cf SA 6442, SA 6444, SA 6445, SA 6446, SA 6448, SA 6449, SA 6450). It has been suggested that the baths were converted from the unfinished remains of a

public building (forum?) (Kenyon 1940, 180-5; Webster 1993), but the archaeological evidence merely indicates that there was an hiatus in the building operations. It is now thought more likely that the baths were always intended as such (Ellis pers comm; White in press). One of the major changes in plan effected when construction resumed was the creation of a courtyard market (*macellum*) in the southwest corner of the *insula*.

There was considerable evidence for modification of the baths suite once it was completed. Mostly this involved filling in a *natatio* and extending the western baths suite across the *palaestra*. The baths basilica, which was attached to the north side of the baths, seems to have remained relatively unchanged through its existence but there was considerable evidence for repair and renewal throughout the baths complex. Archaeological excavations suggest that the basilica at least was maintained into, if not throughout, the 5th century (White 1990; Barker *et al* forthcoming).

**Public enclosure** (SA 6437). Apart from the civic centre, other public buildings have been difficult to identify without excavation. An enclosure excavated in 1914 (Bushe-Fox 1916, 20-2) has been interpreted as a stadium (*ibid*), a temple theatre (Webster & Stanley 1963, 118) and a *forum boarium* (Ellis pers comm). This enclosure is defined as an urban component (SA 6437).

**Town defences** (SA 6482). The defences seem to have been created at the same time that the road system was reorganised. All of the legionary defences seem to have been slighted but the east side of the fortress and later town defences coincide. To the south, this line was extended in an arc as far as a brook running east to west, to a point just downstream of the ford. To the north, the new defensive line was taken across the Bell Brook valley and over the crest of its northern side. The west side was largely dictated by the river cliff of the first terrace but the northwest corner continued this line to meet with the northern section. The total area enclosed was 74 ha (180 acres). There seems to have been minimal losses on the west side (Brown 1976).

A number of excavations have been carried out on the town defences which allow a fairly clear picture of the construction history to be established (eg SA 6401, SA 6402, SA 6403, SA 6406, SA 6408, SA 6409, SA 6410, SA 6411, SA 6415). The original defences seem to have been in turf and timber; although it has been suggested that the gates were of stone (Wright 1872, 98-9; Houghton 1977, 219), there is little firm evidence for this. In all cases, the foundation for the wall is of clay and cobble about 2.0m wide. Outside of this wall was a substantial V-shaped ditch up to 15m wide.

The defences were reorganised in the 3rd or 4th century (Webster 1961) and it has been suggested that the wall line was established in ashlar masonry to which bastions were added (Baker 1968). There has been little to substantiate either suggestion and it seems increasingly likely that the defences were always in timber and turf (Barker 1985). The previous ditch was filled and a new wider but shallower one excavated further out. Some of the spoil was used to create a counterscarp in places. It has been suggested (Kenyon 1940, 178) that sometime in or after the 4th century the defensive line was once again established south of the Bell Brook and that the northern defences were abandoned. Unfortunately, it is not possible to establish whether this was the case or not.

**Insulae and occupation areas inside the town defences** (SA 6419, SA 6423, SA 6430, SA 6436, SA 6438, SA 6452, SA 6453, SA 6456, SA 6460, SA 6461, SA 6462, SA 6463, SA 6464, SA 6466). Aerial photographs provide evidence for defining regular *insulae* and less regular occupation areas throughout the area enclosed by the town defences (SA 6482). The dated sequences of occupation from excavations at Wroxeter are limited to the central *insulae* (*Insulae* 8 and 9), but other more peripheral areas have also been examined.

The most thorough examination has been in Insula 8 (SA 6438) where Bushe-Fox's excavations revealed a sequence beginning with an early civil phase of timber strip-buildings along the street frontage. These were then modernised in the later 1st century with more substantial but still timber replacements which were decorated with painted plaster and had *opus signinum* floors. Finally, some of the houses were amalgamated to form a courtyard mansion with attached baths suite. Others were renewed in timber framing on dwarf stone walls. All of these buildings had stone or timber porticos which suggests that they were probably shops or workshops as well as houses (Bushe-Fox 1913, 1914 and 1916; SA 6455).

In Insula 9 (SA 6460), a similar sequence was excavated in less detail by Kenyon and Webster (Kenyon 1980; SA 6459). This concentrated on one courtyard house which had been built in the late 2nd century and rebuilt in the 4th century. Beneath were two phases of timber construction.

Both of these sites are a microcosm of the typical buildings identified from aerial photographs. Courtyard and L-shaped buildings are relatively common (cf SA 6438), as are simple rectilinear houses, such as that excavated by Houghton in Insula 14 (Houghton 1969) and winged corridor houses (cf SA 6423). Many of the excavated houses have signs of mosaic flooring, including the simple rectilinear houses, and some high quality examples are known (Cosh and White forthcoming). The density of buildings known within the insulae varies considerably and most seem rather sparsely scattered, usually on the frontages, but this may have more to do with depth of deposits and types of building material used than with any real distribution pattern. Certainly, there is likely to be under-representation of timber buildings and given that the proven depth of stratigraphy in the central area is as much as 3.0m, it is impossible to estimate the real extent of the occupation. The excavation of the defences in 1991-2, which partially stripped an area inside the defences, showed that even here there was considerable evidence of settlement just inside the town's periphery (Esmonde Cleary 1991).

Nonetheless, it can be said that there are some areas which are apparently less favoured for settlement, such as the slopes of the Bell Brook valley and perhaps the more isolated and peripheral areas of the town which might have been given over to market gardening, as was apparently the case in the northwest quarter (SA 6418; Ellis *et al* 1994, 110). It is also possible that the centres of the insulae were also relatively lightly settled since even in Insula 8 there was considerable evidence for garden plots and open yards behind the densely settled frontages.

A number of temples and other possible religious sites have been located or suggested. These include a classical style stone-built example excavated by Bushe-Fox (1914, 2-9) and a small Romano-Celtic example seen on aerial photographs (SA 6419). Both occupy enclosures (*temenos*) and it has been suggested that some of the buildings around the temple in Insula 8 might be part of a religious complex (Temple Bezirk; Webster and Stanley 1963). A number of small votive statuettes and altars have been recovered (Haverfield 1908) but none of the dedications of the latter are known. Fragments of a Jupiter column hint at a temple to *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus* which should ordinarily be in the forum insula but no evidence was found for such a building (Smith 1857).

The site of a glassworks (SA 6471) has been investigated in the south of the town, which was reworking cullett rather than creating its own melt (Houghton 1973). This could be tied in with bead making, evidence for which was located on the baths basilica site (K Pretty pers comm). It is clear from other excavations that there were a number of other industries in Wroxeter, most notably metalworking, but the evidence of manufacturing areas has not been located. The east side of Insula 5, the site of the town baths, did produce evidence for a water-related industry, possibly tanning, dyeing or fulling (Barker 1981). Elsewhere on the same insula, in the pre-baths phase,

Wright located evidence for what he believed to be an enameller's workshop (Wright 1872, 159-164). Boneworking seems to have been another major industry and this is presumably tied in with the possible leather working industry discussed above. Some of the porticoed houses on Insula 8 are suggested to be workshops but it is not known what these were producing.

**Street system** (SA 6493 and Roman roads SA 66, SA 99, SA 108, SA 6484, SA 6485, SA 6486). The street system stayed much as it had done during the military and early civil period with one or two major exceptions. Most important of these was the discontinuation of the main north-south section of Watling Street which had originally been the *via principalis* of the fortress (Webster 1988, 123-5). This was cut at its southern end by the new defences and was replaced by the new north-south road, one insula to the west of the former line. This road hence ran along the former fortress' west defences.

A new east route (SA 6485) was also established, running north of Insulae 4-6. It did not, however, supplant Watling Street (SA 99) which continued to enter at the north-east. The continued presence of cemeteries on this latter road showed that it was of greater importance. The north road (SA 66) did not change from its military position and the same is probably true of the west road (SA 6486). This latter road did decline in importance, however, as the town authorities ensured that the main route lay via the centre of town, across the ford at the south (SA 108). From there, those wishing to travel north-west had to cut across to Meole Brace (Margary 1973, 344; White forthcoming).

The streets defining the insulae show clearly that they were established in two phases. The earlier was that laid out within the fortress which presumably relates to the early civil town. This covers Insulae 2, 3, 5-7, and 9-14, and defines insulae of either 150m by 75m or of 75m square. The later grid was laid out when the new defensive line was established and defined Insulae 1, 4, 8, 15 and 16. This grid is much less well-organised and some of the insulae are extremely irregular in shape (eg Insula 8).

**Extramural settlement** (SA 6500). An extensive area of extramural occupation is identified outside the town defences (cf SA 6482). This boundary of this component is fairly arbitrary and is intended to be inclusive. The component contains a range of activity which cannot be differentiated based on the present level of archaeological evidence, but includes cemeteries, industrial production sites, and occupation.

Evidence for the cemeteries of the *civitas* capital have been recorded at a number of sites (SA 30, SA 67, SA 75, SA 6417, SA 6424, SA 6425, SA 6426, SA 6428). The best known and most heavily investigated of the cemeteries is that located on both sides of Watling Street to the northeast of the town. The site has been known since 1752 when three tombstones were recovered, two of them military and one civilian (Ward 1755). There is also some evidence for the provision of stone mausolea but these survived as foundations and occasional ashlar blocks only. Cremation vessels indicate that the cemetery was in use through the first and second centuries but many of the grave groups are not securely known.

Other cemeteries of uncertain extent are known on the north road, where a tile cist sealed with clay was found containing an urn and a coin of Trajan (SA 75). On the northwest side, the complex of cropmarks just beyond the town defences shows clear evidence of enclosures filled with regularly aligned pits which are commonly interpreted as inhumation cemeteries (Esmonde Cleary 1987, 160). If so, and the suggestion remains untested, this might suggest that the focus for burial shifted to this quarter in the later history of the town, perhaps because the Middle Crows Green cemetery was full. A minor excavation in the vicinity (Houghton 1971) found the cremation of a cat in a cist (SA 6417).

Few cemeteries are known in the south of the town except for two urns and a lead casket found in the village and one possible example found during an evaluation (W Walker pers comm). Other inhumations found in the village and in Insulae 4 and 5 are considered to be early medieval or medieval in date since they contravene Roman civic law.

There are two known industrial sites northwest of the town. Closest to the town was a mortaria kiln (Swan 1984, 579; Faiers and White forthcoming; SA 130) apparently producing Severn Valley pottery and Rhaetian-style mortaria from the mid-2nd century into the 3rd century. To the southwest of this was a tile kiln (SA 90).

Extramural settlement might be expected along all the main roads leading into the town but none has been identified on the main road (Watling Street) since this area, at least, was utilised as a cemetery. Evidence for extramural settlement at Wroxeter is apparently confined to simple rectangular enclosures which lie at various distances from the defences (ie SA 2469). The area to the west of the River Severn is largely unsuitable for settlement due to flooding, evidenced by fluvial features and by the agger on which the road sits (SA 108). Nonetheless, two enclosures are known which lie just below the 45m contour (SA 459, SA 460). None of these enclosures has been dated, however, and it may be that they relate to the Iron Age rather than Roman period. The industrial suburb on the north-west side has been described above but there is no associated evidence yet for farms or villas.

**Water supply** (SA 27). The town aqueduct was probably established at the same time as the civic baths, ie in the mid-2nd century. It is a clay-lined leat running along the 70m OD contour line. Its course is well-known outside the town but is only known for a short stretch inside (cf SA 6423) and its precise relationship to the baths is not clear. The monument was sectioned just before it was bulldozed and then ploughed away (Webster and Hollingsworth 1959). The main drain has been excavated for much of its length in Insulae 5, 4 and 8.

#### 4.3 Roman civitas capital: urban form

**Definition and classification.** The later Roman urban form (SA 26) has been defined and mapped on the basis of the identified urban components. The available and written evidence confirms that the Roman urban form of Wroxeter can be classified as the civitas capital of the Cornovii.

**Survival.** The site of Wroxeter has been extensively robbed for stone since its abandonment in antiquity. The area outside the town walls has been ploughed since at least the middle ages but much of the interior only seems to have been cultivated since the 16th century. Extensive archaeological excavation has shown that by this time a substantial soil had developed on the site and thus the damage caused by the plough has been considerably over-estimated (Barker 1970, 228-33). Nonetheless, accounts of parchmarks visible in the town and the testimony of excavation shows that in places masonry may lie less than 0.3m below the present turf line (Atkinson 1942, 94).

The most damaged part of the urban form is the defences which have been both ploughed and bulldozed so that ploughing could continue over the ramparts. In places, the rampart has been entirely removed (Esmonde Cleary 1991) leaving only the ditches. These have almost completely silted up leaving only slight depressions in the ground up to 1.0m deep.

The depth of deposits in the town and the quality of its preservation varies considerably. In places, stonework and even quite ephemeral structures can be encountered within 0.3m of present ground surface (Barker 1970, 228-30), but elsewhere the overburden may be as much as 1.0m or more (Calvert *et al* 1902, 164). In general, however, stratified deposits lie at a depth of about 0.3m to 0.5m. The depth of surviving stratigraphy also varies. In the centre of the town deposits can be up to 3.0m to 4.0m deep, although where such depths

have been encountered they generally relate to the public buildings where thick levelling dumps are common. Nonetheless, even in more peripheral areas the depth of deposit is rarely less than 1.0m.

There is only one complex of ruins visible above ground and these were mostly restored to view only in the 19th century. With the exception of this, and the colonnade of the forum which is visible in a 2.5m deep cutting, there is nothing of the components of the urban form visible other than the defences and some of the lines of the streets.

## 5 Early medieval royal/ecclesiastical centre

### 5.1 Early medieval remains and buildings

Two pieces of standing remains may be attributed to this urban phase. The first is the Old Work, the north wall of the *frigidarium*, whose survival suggests its reuse as a building until the medieval period. The second is the church whose north wall incorporates Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque masonry.

Excavated evidence for this phase indicates it was centred on the public centre of the Roman town at least and survives relatively unscathed despite ploughing. Another area of settlement lies around the church but it is not clear whether the two areas were part of the same urban unit or whether the site of the present village became the focus of settlement only after the abandonment of the town centre.

### 5.2 Early medieval urban components

Analysis of the evidence summarised above indicated the existence of five urban components. The characteristics of these are analysed below.

**Occupation areas** (SA 6436, SA 6452, SA 6497). Although there is archaeological evidence for extensive post-Roman/ early medieval occupation, only three components can be defined at present.

The apparent centre of the urban area was a large timber-framed villa-type building on the baths basilica site (SA 6497) which faced south towards the remains of the baths complex. This was constructed within the remains of the basilica as though in a courtyard. Many small ancillary buildings lay to the west, south and east, some of which appeared to be storage facilities. It is presumed that the *frigidarium* of the baths at least was still in use, although it may by this time have been converted into a church since there are burials located outside the west end within the hypocausts and courtyards of the baths. This raises the possibility that the main building just to the north was the residence of Wroxeter's bishop but it could equally well be the establishment of a secular lord.

To the north, on the street and on the southern frontage of Insula 2 (SA 6436), were booths and houses. The houses were built on regularly sized plots and gave every appearance of being strip-houses, although there was little evidence of their having been used as workshops or shops. Similar buildings were noted on Insula 6 (SA 6452).

The three components described above are defined as identical in extent to the Roman insulae, although the nature of occupation may have been very different. The occupied urban area in the early middle ages, here dated roughly 500 to 800, measured at least 300m by 250m and consisted of a variety of buildings, mostly evidenced as rubble platforms packed with mortar. These structures are often extremely ephemeral and unless a sufficiently large area is examined, such archaeology is difficult to interpret. Hence, it is impossible to describe in detail the

nature of the occupation in Insulae 4 and 9 other than to note that the phase did exist there (Atkinson 1942, 110-111; Barker 1968; Kenyon 1980, 15).

Cemeteries both in the baths and its basilica (SA 6443 and SA 6449), in the forum (SA 6439) and in the village (SA 6470, SA 6479) suggest that Roman civic law broke down before the early medieval town was abandoned.

The settlement under Wroxeter village is of uncertain character. It is undoubtedly the case that it became the medieval village, based around a church built at the latest by the tenth century and probably by the ninth, but it is uncertain whether the occupation just prior to this was urban in character. Certainly, it is likely that any riverine trade, on which the town had always been dependent, would have landed here and it may well be that, like other early medieval settlements, Wroxeter had more than one focus (Dark 1993, 22 n.101).

**Street system** (SA 6494, and streets SA 66, SA 99, SA 108, SA 6484, SA 6485, SA 6486). The extent of the post-Roman street system is defined on the basis of current knowledge of contemporary occupation (SA 6494). It seems likely that the major elements of the street system established in the Roman period remained in use into the early medieval period. This has been shown to be the case for Watling Street between Insulae 4 and 5, but the street between Insulae 5 and 2 was shown to have been deliberately reconstructed so that it could not be used by wheeled traffic. It may be the case that other streets were treated in the same way and it seems likely that some encroachment onto street surfaces was seen in the town centre.

It is also probable that the major roads aligned on the town remained in use in the early medieval period. It is not clear whether the west road (SA 6486) was still in use at this period and it may be that it was disused so that people were forced to go into the town centre rather than bypass it. It seems clear, however, that the present northwest to southeast route is a modern one since it cuts diagonally across two insulae (Insulae 2 and 6) which were occupied at this date.

(?)**Town defences** (SA 6482). The Roman defences may still have been in use in the early medieval period, although it is more likely that they functioned more as a barrier rather than as a patrolled defensive line. The discovery of a 5th century tombstone (SA 6427) on or near the rampart may indicate that the *pomerium* was maintained until that date.

### 5.3 Early medieval urban form

**Definition and classification.** The early medieval urban form (SA 6495) has been defined and mapped, based on the extent of the identified urban components. The available evidence indicates that the early medieval urban form of Wroxeter can be classified as a royal/ ecclesiastical centre (English Heritage 1993).

**Survival.** Although the uppermost levels are undoubtedly those that have been damaged most by the later activities of stone-robbing and ploughing, there is considerable evidence in some areas that the upper levels have survived quite well, even in the town centre. In the village, it seems that this period may be severely damaged by grave digging and by later medieval and post-medieval occupation (Moffett 1989; Houghton 1973).

## 6 Post-urban archaeological evidence

The likely date of abandonment of Wroxeter as an urban settlement seems to have been in the later 7th or the 8th century when, on place-name evidence, the Anglo-Saxons occupied the area (Gelling 1992, 76-9). It seems unlikely that the town was ever completely abandoned since the church in the village dates to the 9th or 10th century and is associated

with a 9th century cross-shaft. Thus it seems probable that occupation of the southern nucleus of the town was unbroken, although without the central nucleus of the town, the settlement can no longer be classified as urban. The continued importance of the town in the 8th century and later is demonstrated by the use of the term *Wreconsaete* to define those who lived in this area and by the fossilization of the possible early medieval ecclesiastical arrangements centred on Wroxeter in the Anglo-Saxon dioceses of Lichfield and Hereford (Bassett 1992).

## 7 Specialist assessments

### 7.1 Artefactual evidence

The range of artefactual material is extensive both in date range and in variety of materials. The major collection consists of pottery (2.5 tonnes from Insula 5 alone) which covers the full range of imported wares expected in a major urban site including overseas imports of Spanish, Italian and North African amphorae, South, Central and East Gaulish samian, Lyons ware, Central and North Gaulish slipwares and Rhenish wares, as well as Black Burnished, Malvernian, Mancetter/ Hartshill, Nene Valley, Oxfordshire, Calcite Gritted and other miscellaneous British wares. Local production, represented by Severn Valley ware, is evident in abundance and two kiln sites are located near the town (SA 91 and SA 130). The forum gutter find is indicative of the quantities of goods which were imported into the town (Atkinson 1942, 127-146).

The fortress has produced a number of vessels in bronze and iron and there is evidence in the town for the production of pewter bowls, probably in the fourth century. Glassware has been found in abundance, although complete vessels are generally restricted to the cemeteries. Vessels of first to fourth century date are represented and there is one sherd of possibly sixth or seventh century window glass.

A considerable number of portable metal objects is known from the town, ranging from small votive figures to brooches and bracelets. There is evidence in the form of industrial debris and waste-castings to demonstrate that some of these objects have been manufactured in Wroxeter. High quality metal objects are also known, including a silver mirror (Atkinson 1942, 196-8) and a fragment from a 1st century silver platter (Stokes 1991). Lead and Iron working debris is known from many sites but little evidence for smelting has been recovered and it may be that raw materials were brought in as ingots rather than as ore.

Evidence for bead manufacture and enamelling bear out the impression from the bronze objects of local jewellery workshops. Numerous shale bracelets, rings and pins, and rings and bracelets in jet argue for the importation of other raw materials for jewellery manufacture, evidenced in the case of shale by cores. Similar technologies would have been used in the production of bone objects, mostly pins but also other utilitarian artefacts. Antler is strongly represented in objects and in waste products suggesting the organised collection of shed antlers. Intagli are known in significant numbers and local production cannot be ruled out, although itinerant workers are more probable.

Evidence for professions is limited to the discovery of a surgeon's tool case and other stray surgical implements but two oculist's stamps are known and these may be significant given the discovery of a number of votive eyes in metal and plaster. Writing is evidenced by a diploma and by numerous styli in bronze and iron. The latter are often inlaid and it has been suggested that these might have been locally produced (K Pretty, pers comm). The Wroxeter inscription may be evidence for a professional stone-cutter in the town but the quality of the carving has suggested to some that the cutter was brought in from elsewhere (Atkinson 1942, 177-184).

In contrast, the abundant amounts of worked stone indicate a thriving stone workshops,



one which apparently had artistic links with Trier and the Rhineland (Blagg 1980, 39). Other craftsmen were definitely imported for certain trades, such as the fourth century mosaicists who seem to be been brought in from Cirencester (Cosh and White forthcoming).

Coins are known in abundance (c 9000) and represent the largest stratified group from any Romano-British town (P J Casey pers comm). The sequence is normal apart from one major anomaly, a dearth of *Fel Temp Rep* coins and their copies. The total lack of the last issue period, with the last major coin import occurring c 383-88, as is normal for the northwest region (Casey 1993, 131-2). Few Iron Age coins have been found and mostly these are Dobunnic in origin. There is no evidence that coinage was used by the Cornovii before the Romans arrived.

Organic finds are rare but it is more than likely, given the quantity of animal bone recovered, that leatherworking and the associated industry of tanning was carried out in the town. Spindle whorls hint at spinning, weaving, fulling and dyeing but these may have been at household rather than workshop scale.

## 7.2 Environmental evidence

The bulk of detailed environmental work has been carried out on the Baths Basilica site but all sites within the central area have produced abundant evidence for the faunal environment. Such evidence is less full for the peripheral areas of the town where more acidic soils tend to destroy or severely damage bone and shell. The full range of mammal species expected in Roman Britain are represented including the main domestic species and a wide range of wild mammals. The latter indicate a thriving interest in and exploitation of the local environment also demonstrated by the range of bird and fish species. Shellfish are limited mainly to oysters which would have been native to the Severn and there are only limited varieties of sea water species. Wroxeter's main environmental contribution lies not in the species lists, however, but in the date range of its material which should allow full analysis of the impact of Roman husbandry techniques on the local livestock population.

Detailed floral evidence is at present limited to Insula 5 where analysis of many samples on the Baths Basilica site has produced evidence for spelt, emmer and free-threshing bread wheats in addition to rye, oats and barley. Fruits ranging from blackberries to grapes are also represented and show exploitation of the local environment and the cultivation of cash crops. Tree species are abundantly represented, with the exception of elm, and the presence of gorse hints at rough pasture or heathland nearby. There is no evidence for pollen as yet but there is considerable potential for environmental sampling in the area at the foot of the river cliff which is a waterlogged area.

## 8 Archaeological research framework

### 8.1 Model of urban development

A model of the early and later Roman and early medieval town of Wroxeter has been produced which is predictive and capable of testing through archaeological investigation. This model has both chronological and spatial (landuse) dimensions (see sections 2 to 6) and is based on an analysis of documentary, cartographic and archaeological sources. The model is derived from the current academic understanding of urban development in Britain, and forms one element of a developing regional research framework. The model is provisional and will be subject to confirmation or revision in the future as new information becomes available, or new studies lead to changing understandings of towns in the region.

## 8.2 Chronological framework

The archaeological and documentary evidence indicates that urban occupation commenced in the first century on a new site which was continuously occupied until the 8th century. The framework of the development of Wroxeter from a fortress into a *civitas* capital and thence to its post-Roman form seems reasonably clear but a number of key problems remain. Principal among these is the question of prior occupation of the site and the overall relationship of the Roman military presence to native sites in the vicinity. The evidence for occupation into the 7th century seems secure but the overall extent of the settlement at this period needs further clarification.

## 8.2 Urban landuse

The medieval and post-medieval components identified here (sections 3.2, 4.2 and 5.2) have been mapped and constitute a model of urban landuse for each period. These landuse models are partial and provisional and capable of testing through archaeological investigation. While the examination of most of the components of the urban forms has been widespread, work has tended to concentrate on the central *insulae* of the town. Thus there remain considerable gaps in our knowledge of the settlement. In particular, the impression has been given that through aerial photography much of the extent and nature of the occupied areas of the town is known. As yet there has been little testing of the relationship between the density of settlement indicated on aerial photographs and the actual density. Certain areas of the town are severely neglected, such as the eastern side, and this means that the crucial relationship between the fortress plan, its early civilian successor and the main Roman phase is unclear.

More work is also necessary on identifying industrial areas, especially to see whether there is evidence for the zoning of trades within the town. No evidence has yet been forthcoming about the harbour facilities within the town, which must have existed given the level of imports evidenced by artefacts. Finally, the relationship between the town and its immediate hinterland is still obscure. The apparent dearth of settlement in the suburbs has often been commented on and needs to be explained.

Wroxeter's buildings offer considerable scope for study but future work should perhaps concentrate on private rather than public architecture. Nonetheless, the study of the baths complex has provided unique insights into the management priorities of the town's *ordo* since the pattern of maintenance was particularly clear in places (White in press). Such management strategies are rarely detected in the archaeological record and the mystifying transition from baths house to forum on *Insula 4* would seem a prime candidate for similar work.

When the evidence for private housing has been examined, the quality has also been high. Painted plaster, hypocausts, mosaics, worked stone and other Romanised elements are present in abundance and hint at a well-developed construction industry. The plans of the houses show little variation from those encountered in other major towns of Roman Britain, but the early medieval buildings provide a major new category of structure which need to be properly evaluated. There seems to be little evidence for native architecture within the town area, although this may be heavily underestimated due to the problems of detecting such housing from air photographs. Conversely, there is a corresponding lack of Romanised housing in the hinterland and suburbs. This has often been commented on but the reasons still remain obscure (Esmonde Cleary 1987).

The evidence for trade associated with the building trade seems limited. Nearly all the identified stone has been derived from sources within a 20 mile radius of Wroxeter (Cantrill 1931) which shows how efficient management of such resources could be. There is little evidence of change through time but one area that might be investigated further is the apparent collapse of the tile industry forcing the adoption of roofing slates from the later 3rd century onwards.

### 8.3 Potential for survival of buried deposits

Excavation over most areas of the urban settlement have demonstrated that within its defences archaeological deposits are extensive and generally well preserved except perhaps for the latest levels. The immediate hinterland has been much more severely damaged by deep ploughing and it is unlikely that much survives, particularly on the higher areas. In addition, the soils are considerably more acidic on the periphery than within the central areas of the town leading to significant artefactual and ecofactual losses.

Of particular interest are the deposits at the base of the river cliff on the west side of town which might be expected to provide significant ecological data and perhaps evidence for harbour facilities. Within the town the deposits are generally sealed beneath pasture and ploughsoil and offer artefactual and archaeological deposits of very high quality. These deposits are of the utmost importance in offering opportunities to understand the development of a major town in the Roman period which might act as a comparison both for minor urban settlements in the area and for the more militarised areas to the west.

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in xx 1994. The extent of 18th and 19th century cellarage was mapped, together with the extent of 20th century development (new buildings and major landscaping work). This showed that there was little modern redevelopment within the historic core.

### 8.4 Potential for artefactual studies

The artefactual evidence accumulated at Wroxeter represents an extremely important body of material due to the broad date range which it covers. In addition, the apparent dearth of Iron Age material culture and its rapid replacement by the full material trappings of Roman civilisation represent a major opportunity to understand how new trading areas were developed and exploited. The forum gutter find has, from its finding date, been rightly seen as a major contribution to our understanding of the quantity of material entering the town (Atkinson 1942, 127-146).

The major excavations, particularly in Insula 5, offer huge potential for examining the progress of materialism, the changing patterns of trade during the life of the town and for determining when the region became aceramic (Laflin *et al* 1993, 394-400). The conclusions drawn from this evidence may well have wider implications throughout the province.

Another important element in artefactual studies is the growing body of evidence for industry in the town. Already there is evidence for metalworking, boneworking, leather and cloth production, jewelry manufacture, glassworking and potting. These products must have had an immense impact on the surrounding countryside, a relationship glimpsed at Meole Brace but as yet hardly touched upon. The Meole Brace site also brings to the fore the role of Wroxeter as a redistributive centre for the hinterland (Ellis *et al* 1994, 53-4).

More puzzling perhaps, and a key area for future research, is the lack of trade in the early medieval town. The evidence of the Baths Basilica site appears to demonstrate that despite continuing occupation for over 200 years after AD 400, the town had very little contact with the outside world (Barker *et al* forthcoming).

### 8.5 Potential for study of environmental remains

Wroxeter offers a unique potential for assessing the impact of the Roman conquest on the environment. Its particular importance lies in the wide time-span of over 700 years covered by the sequences within the town. Such a span is essential for tracing often small changes in the environment which may only be detectable cumulatively. More easily

detectable are variations and changes to the quality of Iron Age grain and stock made after the conquest. Maltby for example has pointed to the increasing size of livestock after the conquest in the south-west (Maltby 1979) and has linked this specifically to the introduction of improved breeds by the army.

Similarly, the increased need for the byproducts of the livestock industry may well have had considerable environmental implications for the use of the landscape. This will have been especially true during the military phase when the fortress will have been largely parasitic on the surrounding countryside (Millett 1990, 56-7). Landscape changes have already been noted in the Wroxeter hinterland where there is archaeological evidence for the change from native arable agriculture to cash crop production for the town (Ellis *et al* 1994, 110). Such economic pressures may well have been encouraged and facilitated by technological improvements introduced by the Romans. The construction of the fortress and town itself will have had a major impact on the landscape through deforestation, quarrying and the loss of prime agricultural land.

## 8.6 Summary of research potential

The historic core of Wroxeter contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is high potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. As the region's civitas capital, Wroxeter's significance can hardly be overstated. It is the only civitas capital within the study area and its size and quality of occupation reflects this. The potential for understanding how such settlements functioned, their relationship with the rest of the canton and with other parts of the province are all areas of interest.

## 9 Management framework

### 9.1 Urban archaeological area

The mapped extents of the urban forms defined above indicate the extent of the urban area (Wroxeter Urban Archaeological Area).

### 9.2 Existing protection measures

The different parts of the urban area are afforded different measures of protection through legislation and the planning process. Directly relevant measures are outlined below.

**Scheduled ancient monument.** The defences and the area enclosed within them are a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Shrops 32). The marching camp to the south of the town is also scheduled (Shrops 200). The urban area is owned jointly by the Department of National Heritage and the National Trust, the division running along the Bell Brook and the Horseshoe Lane. An extension on the north-east corner takes in the known area of the cemetery. It is possible that following the current Monument Protection programme that English Heritage may modify the scheduled area.

**Listed buildings.** There is a total of six buildings listed for their historic or architectural importance within the urban area. Although unlisted, other buildings are of considerable historic importance. The management of all historic buildings requires special care and attention, while the management of Listed Buildings is especially important. Listed Buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and unauthorised alteration is a serious offence. This protection is also likely to preserve archaeological remains under and around such buildings and it is important that archaeological and historic building matters are considered together.

In Shrewsbury and Atcham District, specialist advice on the management of historic buildings is provided by the District Council with support from the County Council. Some

grant aid is available for the repair of historic buildings and information and advice is available from the District Council Conservation Officer.

### 9.3 Management approach

The archaeological urban areas of Wroxeter contain earthworks and buried remains relating to Roman and early medieval occupation. The buried remains vary in complexity and depth, and demonstrably contain significant archaeological information. Any future work within the urban area that has a potential impact on earthworks or buried remains should be assessed by the appropriate archaeological body.

The course of action recommended will depend upon the nature of the work and current planning legislation and frameworks. The archaeological response will be based on both the archaeological information summarised in this document and any subsequent archaeological information recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record.

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## 11 Mapping

The illustrations for this report comprise CAD plots of the urban components for each period and a location plot of archaeological remains combined with OS digital map data (1995) at 1:5000. These plots are current at the date of the completion of this report (March 1995). After this date new information will be held by the Shropshire/Hereford and Worcester County Council Sites and Monuments Record.

- \* Historic buildings (listed and other recorded buildings) and urban area
- \* Archaeological remains and urban area
- \* Roman civilian settlement urban form and components
- \* Roman civitas capital urban form and components
- \* Early medieval urban form and components
- \* Observed cellarage and 20th century development
- \* Urban area and scheduled ancient monuments