

[Cow Roast]

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# **THE ROMAN SETTLEMENT AT COW ROAST, NORTHCHURCH**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The Aim of the Report**

This report has been produced as one of a series of twenty five archaeological surveys of historic urban areas in Hertfordshire as part of the English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey Programme. All the places surveyed were either urban districts by 1900, or could be characterised as urban in the historic past. The project is being carried out by Hertfordshire County Council's Archaeology Section in conjunction with English Heritage, who are also funding the project.

The aim of the report is to provide a framework from which decisions can be made about the management of the archaeological resource of Cow Roast. The report is divided into three parts:

1. A summary of what is known of the archaeological and historical development of the settlement using the evidence from archaeology, old maps and documents, and any surviving physical elements. The evidence is presented as a series of thematic and period maps generated by GIS, accompanied by a brief explanatory text.
2. An assessment of priorities for the management of the archaeological resource of the settlement, including academic research priorities.
3. A strategy which aims to take forward the research and management priorities.

### **1.2 The Sources Used**

The evidence for the report has been compiled from the following primary sources:

- The Hertfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)
- Maps and documents held in the Hertfordshire County Record Office
- Archaeological excavation and survey reports held in the Hertfordshire SMR

In addition, numerous articles, both published and unpublished, have been used; a bibliography is included at the end of the report.

### 1.3 Geography

The ‘Cow Roast’ is the name of an inn at the head of the Bulbourne valley, a major route through the Chiltern hills. Beyond the Tring gap on the Chiltern scarp 4km to the north-west is the Vale of Aylesbury. The river itself rises 530m south-east of the inn; in the Roman period it may have risen further up the valley. The underlying geology is chalk, which outcrops in places along the east side of the valley. The subsoil is predominantly a stiff reddish clay-with-flints; in the valley itself the chalk is overlain with alluvium (Morris & Wainwright 1995, 68). The route through the valley is followed by the old A41 (now the A4251), alongside the Grand Union Canal, and the railway (the West Coast main line). This route is now bypassed on the west by the present A41. Cow Roast itself, which as well as the inn consists of a cluster of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century houses, the canal lock and the marina, lies between the medieval and modern towns of Berkhamsted and Tring, and is at the junction of the historical parishes of Northchurch and Wigginton. It was never a medieval settlement; the subject of this report is the settlement which flourished here during the Roman period. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the route was used by drovers, a landlord of the *Cow Inn* (recorded by this name in 1806; Jolliffe & Jones 1995, 171) provided pens for large herds of cattle here and a resting place for both cattle and drovers. A visitor found the modern name in use in 1818, and assumed it to be a corruption of *Cow Rest*. He also observed (Hassell 1818) that despite very dry conditions elsewhere in the county that summer, the meadows and grasslands along the valley here were ‘luxuriant’. Reliable water and grazing along this natural routeway would have been equally attractive in the Roman period.

### 1.4 Archaeological Events

Knowledge of the presence of substantial Roman remains here has emerged only gradually, despite the major engineering works of the canal (1798-9) and the railway (1837). Finds were made, but not recorded in any detail. They are presented here as Table 1, showing exactly what is known and the vagueness of much of it. In addition, ‘numerous’ Roman coins were said to have been found in the general area of the inn (Evans 1890, 549).

**Table 1: Early discoveries in the vicinity of the Cow Roast inn**

Date	Where found	Description	SMR number
c1798-9	Grand Junction Canal construction?	Roman ‘tiles and coins’ were found in Wigginton parish at about this time ( <i>Gents Mag</i> 1811 pt 1, 388); circumstantial enough to suggest that these may have been found at Cow Roast.	1599
‘1813’	Grand Junction Canal, in vicinity of Dudswell Locks	A bronze helmet was found in excavations for the canal ‘in 1813’. No canal works at Cow Roast or Dudswell took place in 1813 (Faulkner 1972); the date of the discovery is more likely to be 1798-9. The site was ‘near’ Norcott Hill, in Northchurch parish.	1468

		See VCH (1914), 158; there was much debate about the date of the helmet, but it is now recognised as Claudian.	
1837	London & North-Western Railway construction	Roman masonry is visible in the NE side of the railway cutting, and four coins, cAD 180-340, have come from the field where the building lies (inf David Neal). Nothing was recorded in 1837. In the late 1970s BDAS uncovered a 3m length of flint wall with returns, but considered that the rest of the building had been destroyed by the railway (Zeepvat 1995, 29).	1861?
1859	Wigginton Common(?)	Coin of Cunobelinus, but the common is on west side of parish.	0169
1872?	Norcott Court Farm	'Roman coins & gold ring found' just NE of the railway and SW of Norcott Court Farm (OS 25" plan, 1884). The VCH (1914, 169) refers to this discovery under the heading of Wigginton, although noting that the site is in Northchurch parish; and the same source ( <i>ibid.</i> , 159, under Northchurch) refers to 'Roman <i>fibulae</i> and British coins' from the same place. A bronze brooch in the Ashmolean Museum, found in 1872, may be one of the items (Morris Gazetteer card; SMR 1467); also apparently found in 1872 were two 'British coins', a bronze of Tasciovanus and a bronze of Cunobelinus (0142). In the British Museum are a fibula, 'sickle-shaped object' and pin, all bronze, and two glass beads, acquired by A W Franks in 1893, and which are sometimes also assumed to belong to this find (4853). Neither the Roman coins nor the gold ring are extant and these other items are apparently not certainly associated with the site marked on the OS maps.	0142, 1467, ?4853
1914-18	Berkhamsted Common, Norcott Hill	'During the war [1914-18], when the Inns of Court Officers Training Corps were digging trenches at the Northchurch end of the Common, numerous fragments of Roman pottery were unearthed from the site of what is thought to have been the refuse dump for a large villa situated outside the boundary of the Common. The owner of the site of the villa has not yet consented to submit it to a competent investigation, and it is to be hoped that his consent will not be delayed until the remains have been irretrievably ruined, for many fragments have already been used as road metalling in the lane to Norcott Hill' (Whybrow n.d., 12). Presumably the 'fragments' were Roman masonry or tiles, but the site appears to have been forgotten. It might be identifiable with the building at Dudswell Rise, or Northchurch villa, or possibly that in the railway cutting (above).	1314
c1922	'Dudswell Rise', Dudswell	A 'rough flint floor', roof tiles, a bronze brooch, coins and pottery including plain Samian ( <i>Antiqs J 2</i> (1922), 379-80; Patrick 1958, 93).	1334
c1953	'Dudswell Rise'	'A hypocaust' is reputed to have been found during construction of a tennis court in the garden of the same property as the c1922 findspot (OS records). Nothing further was found, and it possibly means only the presence of tiles rather than a structure.	1334

c1960	Cow Roast	Viatores' survey of the line of Akeman Street: 'In the large field north-west of the junction [Dudswell], formerly the Witchley Hill Common Field of Northchurch, the course marked by a wide, low <i>agger</i> , with much flint in evidence on the surface', and forming one of the boundary baulks between the strip fields; in the side of the tennis court in the playing field 'may be seen a clear layer of flint metalling', leading straight on to the spinney, in which 'the <i>agger</i> is clearly visible, 30 ft wide and 3 ft high', and then alongside the modern lane to New Ground (Viatores 1964, 41-2)	4584
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Serious archaeological investigation began at the start of the 1970s. 'Fieldwork near the canal in early 1972 turned up Romano-British pottery' (Orna 1975), and this came to the attention of the Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society [BDAS]. In response to the planned upgrading of the A41 to motorway standard the society put down trenches on the proposed line south of the Cow Roast Inn and found a mass of pottery and animal bones (*ibid.*). A geophysical survey was then carried out, and the results of this and of aerial photography led to the diversion of the new A41 further to the south-west. The Society worked for some years on sites at Cow Roast, as it was clear that a Roman settlement lay here on Akeman Street. These were largely in response to redevelopment, and during the construction of the marina. Small-scale projects were also carried out in the 1970s and early 1980s (Zeepvat 1995, 29), but none of these produced useful data except for a brief inspection of the building in the railway cutting, and a watching brief on new housing at Boswick Lane, adjacent to the 'hypocaust' at Dudswell. From 1986 other sites were examined on a small scale by the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust [HAT]. Very little has appeared in print on any of these sites, although two reports (Zeepvat 1995, 1997) set out the available records and summarise the finds. The only other available data come from metal detectorists who have been particularly active in the fields around Newground Farm. Many coins and also small metal objects have been and continue to be recovered (Zeepvat 1995, 31).

Work on the new line of the A41 revealed two more sites, known as Bottom House Lane and Crawley's Lane.

**Table 2: Main archaeological events, 1972-1993 (Figure 1)**

Number on Fig 1	Site	Summary	Body responsible
1	Fendley House orchard (CRO)	Some Late Iron Age material; Roman ditches, timber buildings, eleven wells, two bowl furnaces and an inhumation	BDAS 1972-6 (Orna 1975, 1979; <i>Herts Arch Review</i> 10, summer 1976, 199; <i>Britannia</i> 5 (1974), 438; 6 (1975), 257; 7 (1976), 338-9; Zeepvat 1995, 1997)
-	Geophysical survey 1974	Concentrated occupation over large area, probable ditches,	Ancient Monuments Laboratory (Zeepvat

		pits, masonry building	1995, 30)
-	Geophysical survey 1976	Pits and other features, but only at south-east end of survey area	Ancient Monuments Laboratory (Zeepvat 1995, 30)
2	Sewer pipeline watching brief	Occupation including chalk floors; bowl furnaces. More occupation at Newground Farm.	BDAS 1976 (Zeepvat 1995, 1997; <i>Britannia</i> 7 (1976), 339)
-	Marina basin watching brief		BDAS pre-1976
3	Marina buildings (CRM)	Road, ditches, pits, two wells, penannular gullies (?buildings), iron slag	BDAS 1976-9 (Orna 1979; <i>Britannia</i> 8 (1977), 401; 9 (1978), 444)
-	Boswick Lane, Dudswell, watching brief	Pits, ?wells, six bowl furnaces, cremation	BDAS 1977 (Holland 1978; <i>Britannia</i> 9 (1978), 444)
-	Lockharts Field removal of grass tennis courts, WB	Ground removed to depth of 2m, no finds	BDAS 1980 (Note in Scheduled Monument file)
4	Esso Garage redevelopment, limited excavation, WB (CRE)	Ditch and line of pits; roadway	BDAS 1979-81 (Zeepvat 1995)
-	Fendley House pipe trench, WB	Ditch and 2 pits, occupation layer	BDAS 1981 (Note in Scheduled Monument file)
5	Chapman's Garage (HAT 30)	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> and early 2 <sup>nd</sup> cent features, iron slag	HAT 1989 (Zeepvat 1995)
6	Northchurch Service Station (HAT 34)	No finds	HAT 1989 (Zeepvat 1995)
7	Electricity sub-station (HAT 59)	Pits; 2 <sup>nd</sup> century	HAT 1991 (Walker 1991)
-	Bottom House Lane	Two deep wells	HAT 1990-91
-	Crawley's Lane	Rectangular timber building, chalk quarry pits, trackway (all 1 <sup>st</sup> century); 4 <sup>th</sup> cent burial	HAT 1992

## 2 OUTLINE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SETTLEMENT (Figures 2, 3)

### 2.1 Prehistory

Scattered finds of prehistoric date from the surrounding area are not considered here, as they do not contribute to any account of the Roman settlement. The monument to note, however, is *Grim's Ditch*, running along the south side of the Bulbourne valley. This is probably a long-distance boundary marker, which in its original form was a bank and ditch. Much of the bank has been ploughed out. Where excavation has taken place, sherds of Middle Iron Age and later pottery have been found in the ditch fill, demonstrating that the boundary was constructed during the Iron Age. Crawleys Lane has some Neolithic-Bronze Age features (Last n.d.).

### 2.2 Late Iron Age (c50 BC to AD 43)

It is essential to consider whether the Roman settlement, like many others in the county, had its origins in the century or so before the conquest. Only part of the settlement itself has yielded finds of this period, at the east side of the Orchard site where pottery was found in four pits and an adjoining ditch (Zeepvat 1997, 8). In a ditch crossing the lower end of the site was a cremation burial in a jar which was thought to be c30 BC in date, but as this find is now missing no further information is available. The date indicates that the burial was thought to be earlier than the arrival of Gallo-Belgic imported wares, and so earlier than the majority of Late Iron Age settlements in Hertfordshire. The ditch contained Roman pottery, but as this only dates the fill once the ditch had fallen out of use, it may be that the ditch was cut in the late Iron Age.

Although little pre-Roman material at Cow Roast has been found it may await discovery in another part of the complex; re-examination of the finds could alter the picture. A large amount of pottery from one feature at the Marina was 'datable to the conquest period' (Zeepvat 1997, finds appendix, 4) and may include native products. The great numbers of coins from Cow Roast include a proportion of pre-Roman issues, and 11 Iron Age coins were found in the excavations. Some came from the Esso site (note by A Thompson in the Scheduled Monument file). Two others, bronzes of Tasciovanus and Cunobelinus, were found in 1872 east of Cow Roast itself, south of Norcott Court Farm (SMR 0142; VCH 1914, 159). Late Iron Age occupation is also recorded at Dellfield (Thompson & Holland 1976). Whether there was domestic settlement in the valley is unclear. Much of the evidence from the limited area which has been excavated comes in the form of burials.

Some evidence has been found for the relationship of the valley with settlement on the plateau above, between the Bulbourne and Gade valleys. Survey work carried out here on National Trust land and Berkhamsted Common in 1985-9 'revealed extensive evidence of late Iron Age/Romano-British settlement and agriculture' (Morris & Wainwright 1995, 68). As almost none of the land surveyed has been ploughed in historical times earthworks survive in some numbers. Ten settlement sites were identified with associated late Iron Age and earlier Roman pottery, and several of these sites had enclosures and field systems. At four sites (Ashridge sites 3, 9 and 10, and Hudnall Common) ironworking slag was found on the surface with late Iron Age pottery (Bryant 2001).

These sites and at least four shaft furnaces at Dellfield, Berkhamsted (Thompson & Holland 1976), in conjunction with two shaft furnaces found on the line of the Tring bypass in 1974 (SMR 6069), constitute 'the largest body of [late Iron Age] ironworking evidence in southern England' (Bryant 2001). It is assumed that the source of the iron was bog ore from the Bulbourne valley. This is 'a very thick iron pan caused by percolating iron salts that accumulate between layers of soil, usually between peat and alluvium in valley floodplains' (*ibid.*). No study of local deposits has been carried out, but the Bulbourne valley does have extensive areas of alluvium and peat; hence the assumption that the ore was obtained from local deposits. Available also was woodland for fuel and for production of charcoal, both essential for smelting, and the river valley for transport of the product, whether bloom or finished articles. 'By the time of the

Roman conquest, most of the iron used in Hertfordshire was probably smelted here' (Niblett 1995, 19) and it may well have been sent much further afield.

### **2.3 Early Roman (later 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries)**

Such a resource as useful as the Bulbourne valley iron works would have soon drawn the attention of the Roman authorities. By the end of the first century AD the Cow Roast settlement was well established. Many brooches found at Cow Roast were made in the pre-Flavian period, before AD 70 (see below). A series of timber slots and post-holes on the Orchard site dated to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century and represent at least one rectangular timber building, contemporary with two pits and a well. 'Most of the features recorded at Chapman's Garage and the Substation site also appear to belong to this period' (Zeepvat 1997, 8). A penannular gully at the Marina may represent a circular building, a roundhouse (Zeepvat 1997, 12). That this native form continued to be built decades after the conquest is apparent from finds in London and elsewhere. The function of such a structure here need not have been domestic, and it may have been a slighter construction such as a windbreak. 12m south-east of the penannular gully was a substantial roadway 6m wide and with side ditches, running NE-SW. Another road with side ditches, running NW-SE, was recorded in the corner of the Esso site and was also late 1<sup>st</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup> century in date. These two fragments may be part of a much larger network through the settlement, which must have connected with the highway. Aerial photographs suggest...

*Akeman Street* was presumably constructed through the valley in the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century. This was one of the major routes from the heart of the Roman province to its wilder edges, from Verulamium to Alcester, Cirencester and the borders of Wales. It would be surprising if the Cow Roast settlement did not extend from the river to the highway, although no finds have yet been made on the Akeman Street frontage.

### **2.4 The 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries**

The available ceramic evidence suggests that the settlement was at its peak in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and into the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Most of the wells on the Orchard site date to this period, as do several pits, and a group of postholes which may represent another timber structure in the centre of the site. A chalk floor was seen in the vicinity of the earlier postholes. The two bowl furnaces, evidence of ironworking, dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. More residue from large-scale ironworking, in the form of over two tons of slag and cinder, was found at the Marina. This was contemporary with a group of large pits, two wells, and a square feature filled with charcoal. Also industrial may have been a line of pits along a ditch on the southern part of the Esso site; these features were filled with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century rubbish. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century they had gone out of use. Only one new pit in the line contained 3<sup>rd</sup> century pottery.

#### ***Ironworking***

Associated with the two furnaces on the Orchard site were tapslag and smithing waste (Zeepvat 1997, 12; finds appendix, 36). At least four more such furnaces were seen in the sewer pipe trench (Zeepvat 1995, 23; 1997, fig.7); a furnace bottom and slag came from Chapman's Garage. Iron objects from the excavated sites, on the other hand, are comparatively few, suggesting that bloom for transport elsewhere was the end product, and not finished items. Six furnaces and some wells were recorded at Boswick Lane (*Britannia* 9 (1978), 444; Holland 1978). The dating of all of these sites is consistent with production continued from the late Iron Age and heavy production throughout the second century. The wells, which would not have all been in use at the same time, provided a considerable supply of water. Charcoal for smelting must have come from the neighbouring hillslopes.

### ***Other industry***

Unusually large numbers of brooches and other copper-alloy objects of considerable variety have been found at Cow Roast, and it is possible that some of these objects were made here (Orna 1979; Zeepvat 1997, finds appendix, 22). The brooches include many of pre-Flavian date (*Britannia* 7 (1976), 339; 8 (1977), 401).

Other manufacturing was of bone objects. The finds include finished pins, sawn bone and antler, and horn-cores (Zeepvat 1997, finds appendix, 32). Also interesting are two containers of pigment: a mixture of haematite and chalk in a vessel from the Orchard site (*Britannia* 6 (1975), 257), and calcium copper silicate or Egyptian blue in a pot from the sewer pipeline (*Britannia* 7 (1976), 339). Both of these may have been for painting wall plaster. Presumably also connected with some industrial activity is a group of Dressel 20 amphorae found on the Orchard site (Zeepvat 1997, 12-13). Each vessel had had its neck and handles sawn off, evidently to serve a secondary function after their use as containers of traded goods.

Most of these finds were stratified in the pits and wells, and date to this period of intense activity at Cow Roast (the 2<sup>nd</sup> century). Some of the copper-alloy objects found at the Orchard site 'point to a military connection with the site' (Zeepvat 1997, finds appendix, 22; *Britannia* 7 (1976), 338-9). These include a fragment from scale armour. Also from the Orchard was a bone sword-grip, and from the Esso site came an iron pilum head. It is possible that such fittings were merely among the range of items made here, but it is also possible that metal- and bone-working here was in some way, or at some time, under military supervision. Niblett (1995, 25) points out that such finds of military metalwork tend to be found on roads used by the army, such as Akeman Street.

Cow Roast lay in close association with the higher ground to the north. On the plateau all the sites which could be dated in the 1985-9 survey belonged to the period before the later 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Morris & Wainwright 1995, 70). The woodland which was characteristic in historic times of the area surveyed (*ibid.*) would have been the source of the large quantities of charcoal required for ironsmelting, and it is likely that the woodland was coppiced.

### ***Related sites in the vicinity (Fig. 2)***

Other iron-smelting sites have been found close to Cow Roast in the Bulbourne valley. As at the Orchard site, Boswick Lane at Dudswell and Dellfield both had burials succeeded by furnaces.

Occupation at *Boswick Lane, Dudswell*, began in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (*Britannia* 9 (1977), 444; Holland 1978). The earliest feature was a Neronian cremation burial accompanied by at least two pots. On the west side of Boswick Lane were three pits containing Flavian material, and a bowl furnace. East of the lane were another 19 pits and five bowl furnaces; some of the pits may have been well-shafts. They contained pottery dating from the Flavian period to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The place name means 'Dodd's spring', indicating the presence here of a spring feeding the river Bulbourne (Gover, Mawer & Stenton 1938, 49).

The site at Bridgewater School (*Dellfield*), Berkhamsted, was truncated before investigation, and much information was lost (Thompson & Holland 1976). Four Late Iron Age cremation burials were found adjacent to four or five shaft furnaces which may themselves be pre-conquest.

## **2.5 Later Roman**

Change is observable in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Much of the Orchard site was cleared and the wells and pits were backfilled. One new pit was dug, and in the south corner of the site was the inhumation burial of an adult woman (Zeevat 1997, 11). Pottery of the period AD 270-330 came from a well at the Marina. The level of activity, on present evidence, had fallen considerably. The iron industry had clearly declined. Despite the likelihood of coppicing, one reason for this decline may be a result of intensive manufacture of charcoal over the previous two centuries and subsequent deforestation of the woodland on the plateau (Niblett 1995, 60). Very little sign of occupation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries was found in the survey (Morris & Wainwright 1995, 70). But at Cow Roast itself a series of spreads and layers over much of the Orchard site contained potsherds of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, and a little 4<sup>th</sup> century material came from two pits and a gully. 4<sup>th</sup> century coins make up well over half the total number from this site, and this shows that while the nature of the activity here is still obscure, the finds reflect continued use (possibly in timber buildings). The same is true at the Marina. Here 4<sup>th</sup> century pottery was comparatively sparse, but again 4<sup>th</sup> century coins were numerous. One 4<sup>th</sup> century coin came from Chapman's Garage (Zeevat 1997, finds appendix, 9). At the Esso site nearby, however, no contemporary activity was found; nor did anything of this date come from the smaller excavations and watching briefs. It appears that by the fourth century parts of the settlement had gone out of use. This difference in date between pottery and coins is also apparent at the building at Dudswell (below).

The Orchard and Marina coins were minted between AD 317 and 402, and may have continued to circulate for a number of years in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Lack of other dating material in the 'dark earth' deposits on the Orchard and Marina sites means that it is not possible to say when the settlement was finally deserted.

## **Masonry buildings**

Several of these are known, and Niblett (1995, 60) suggests that at least some were comfortable villas standing well away from the noise and smoke of the industrial works.

#### *Dudswell Rise*

This is the name of a house built on the main road near Dudswell Lock, and was new when the discovery of a 'rough flint floor' was reported in 1922 (SMR 1334; *Antiquaries Journal* 2 (1922), 370-80; Patrick 1958). On this cobbled surface were broken pots, a copper alloy ring-brooch, coins of Tetricus I, Carausius and Constantine I and part of a quernstone; also found were roof tiles, plain Samian, and 'Castor ware'. The fine wares indicate a 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century date, while the coins cover the period AD 270-337. No further details have become available and the finds do not survive. Construction of a tennis court in the garden c1953 located what was said to be a hypocaust, but further examination found nothing (Ordnance Survey records). It is not recorded whether the 'hypocaust' was a solid structure, or merely a dump of building materials. The site is little more than 100m east of the furnaces found at Boswick Lane. Akeman Street runs past both sites.

#### *Northchurch villa*

This building, excavated in 1973, lies on the north bank of the river, 1.5km south-east from Cow Roast and 500m east of Dudswell. Although close to the water and liable to subsidence and flooding (Neal 1976, 5, 11), the site was first occupied in the period AD 60-75. A simple masonry house of four rooms and corridor was put up in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century and rebuilt on a larger scale (ten rooms) a few decades later, only to be abandoned c170. Flooding may have been the cause, possibly a side-effect of deforestation (see above; Neal 1976, 11). At some time in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, however, the place was reoccupied and repaired, and enlarged in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century with a new bath-suite. It was not a luxurious house, having no tessellated floors, but one room had finely painted wall-plaster. No trace of the ironworking industry was found, but the disadvantageous position close to the water may have been deliberate. Neal (1976, 130) suggests that it may have been an ideal site for a fish farm or something similar, and it did have a water-leat. He also suggests (*ibid.*, 126) that by the early 4<sup>th</sup> century the house may have been part of an estate, with a new and larger villa constructed elsewhere. How it relates to the Dudswell Rise building is unknown, since so little is known about the latter. The 'villa' said to lie somewhere close to Berkhamsted Common and the lane to Norcott Hill (see Table 1) could be either of these, or another building the position of which has been lost.

Only 30m north-east of the Northchurch house another masonry foundation, which was presumably related to it, was uncovered during building work (BDAS report 1987; SMR 0182). It was a complete circle of mortared flints, with an internal diameter of 8.8m. The floor was covered in a layer of chalk, and had a central chalk feature that may have held a post. On the floor were 80 coins dating to the period AD 244-380, beneath a layer of roof tiles. This strange structure may have been a shrine, or possibly a pool (with fish?) into which coins were thrown, although it is not clear whether the 'floor' could have held water.

### *Rail Copse*

Roman tile and potsherds, and a flint floor, as well as Late Iron Age sherds, and traces of buildings in aerial photographs, have been recorded in the ploughed area south of the wood, part of Berkhamsted Common. The wood itself covers pits (SMR 2534; Scheduled Monument description). A well preserved rectangular earthwork lies to the north. Little else is known about the site, although it is likely to relate to others further north.

### *Railway cutting building*

Very little is known of this building. A trench put down on the north-east side of the railway located a 3m length of flint wall with a return at each end running into the cutting (Zeepvat 1995, 29). It appeared to be aligned more or less north-south. The excavators concluded that the rest of this structure was destroyed by the railway, but there may be more to be found in the field north-east of the cutting. No indication of the building's function is known. Its date is also obscure, although four coins dating to the period AD 180-340 came from the levels over the building (SM Description).

## **2.6 General conclusions on the settlement at Cow Roast**

What is known is limited in nature, but consistent. Some Late Iron Age use of the site is certain, but more burials than domestic occupation have been found. This could suggest a religious focus near the headwaters of the river. From shortly after the Roman conquest the upper Bulbourne valley became the scene of quite intense processing of iron ore, with some manufacturing of metal goods and probably other ancillary industry as well. This may have been stimulated by military demand or even set up or run by the army; although any military connection need not have been long-lived or continuous. Housing for the ironworkers has not yet been identified. Other unexcavated parts of the settlement appear to include several streets and a masonry building. The frontage along Akeman Street was presumably occupied with roadside facilities for travellers and animals.

Some indication of the limits of the settlement is provided by the sewer pipeline, but this may be misleading. The putative temple in the field near New Ground is known only from an aerial photograph; some Romano-British pottery has been recovered from the immediate area of the cropmark (Zeepvat 1997, fig.7). Roman occupation debris is also known from New Ground beyond the blank area and the temple cropmark. The temple may have stood in a precinct with the settlement to either side, and providing a ritual focus at the head of the river here on the highway. Such a focus may have had pre-Roman origins, as suggested above. Cow Roast may be comparable with other sites which had temples at springs on Roman roads, such as Ewell in Surrey, and Springhead in Kent (see Bird 2002). It would be a mistake to characterise Cow Roast primarily as an industrial settlement, as such activity may have been bound up with other, including ritual, factors. So little of the site has been uncovered that only one activity has as yet come to light.

The demise of the industry by the early third century(?) may have been due to external factors; over-felling for the charcoal required; and/or exhaustion of easily obtainable iron ore. A substantial change in the character of the settlement ensued. Many late Roman

coins have been found but there is as yet little other evidence that characterises Cow Roast in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is not surprising considering the very small area that has been excavated. Roadside facilities and the temple presumably continued in use, while outside the settlement itself, the villa(s) continued to be occupied and their estates managed.

## 2.6 Epilogue

The church of 'Northchurch' has Saxon masonry and was probably originally built to serve a Saxon estate, perhaps in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century. By the time that parish boundaries were established in the late Saxon period all trace of the Roman settlement at Cow Roast may have disappeared, although it is possible that overgrown ruins survived to provide a marker at the boundary between Northchurch and Wigginton parishes. The Roman line of Akeman Street was cut between Dudswell and New Ground by one of the common fields of Northchurch parish, which was not enclosed until after the 1839 tithe map was drawn up.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the main road was turnpiked, with a toll gate at New Ground. The inn which came to be called the Cow Roast stood in isolation on this road until the construction of the Grand Junction Canal and its lock and ancillary buildings here in 1798-9.

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