CHAPTER 2. CHARACTERISING THE DEFINED AREA

This chapter seeks to outline the physical limits and characteristics of Wroxeter Roman City (WRC) and to give a brief account of what is known of its history and past research. It thus effectively benchmarks what is currently known of WRC.

2.1 Definition of the study area

The designated area of study is the whole of WRC as defined by the town defences (Fig. 1.2). This is coincident with the Scheduled Area under the current legislation. While not within the designated area, the land immediately adjacent to the defensive circuit is also considered for the purposes of determining whether any extension or revision of the protected area of the site needs to be recommended.

2.2 Ownership and current land use

Working to approximate figures, 70% of the defined area is owned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and managed by EH with a further 20% being owned by the National Trust and the remaining 10% privately owned, including the houses in the village, the Wroxeter Hotel and the areas of open pastureland within the defences owned by the Millington family (Figure 2.1). The current land use within the scheduled area comprises pasture fields delineated by a mixture of hedges, walls and post-and-wire fences. This land use was established in the mid 1970s when the Department of Environment (DoE) acquired the elements of the Raby Estate that coincided with the town. Arable farming of the National Trust fields in the north of the town continued until the 1990s but these areas too are now down to pasture.

2.3 Physical Character of the defined area

2.3.1 Geology and Soils

The solid geology beneath WRC is uniformly Bridgnorth Sandstone of Permian Age with a thick overlying drift geology of 'Boulder Clay', correctly Glacial Till (Toghill 2006, 195-8; 235-6; BGS Solid and Drift Maps 152). The till is poorly sorted with many erratics but is predominantly sandy in character making it very free-draining and thus well suited to arable agriculture. Occasional 'plugs' of solid red clay mark the positions of ice-wedge polygons, these being especially visible in the aerial photographic and geophysical surveys of the northern part of the town (Baker 1992). Analysis of the soils by the Wroxeter Hinterland Project demonstrated that the soils beneath Wroxeter and within a 1km and 5km compass of the site are uniformly of the best four modern grades of farm land classification (Gaffney and White 2007, 244 Table 6.5) (Figures 2.2 & 2.3), Group 1 soils being the best arable land and Group 4 being best for pasture. Furthermore these resources are provided in roughly equal measure indicating an awareness by the Roman founders of WRC of the quality of this particular spot on the Severn.

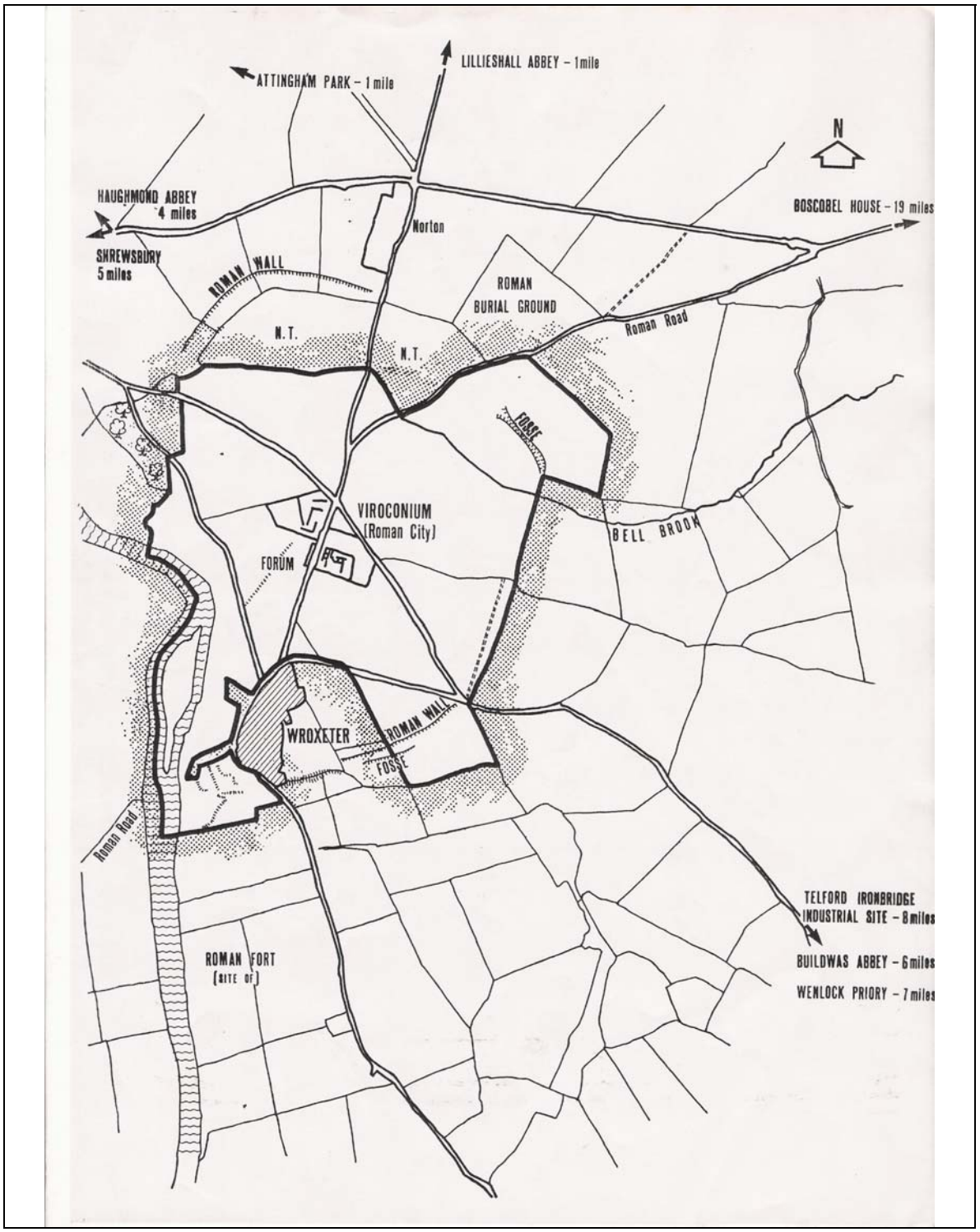


Figure 2.1: Land ownership and land management survey at WRC (Source: White 1976). The shaded strip of land on the east side of the site, from south of the Bell Brook to the B4380, has since been acquired by English Heritage.

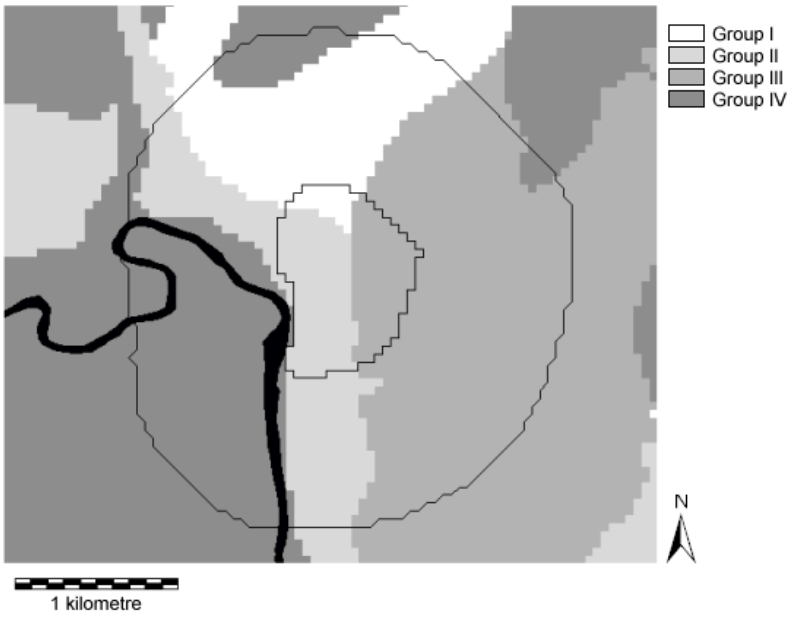


Figure 2.2: Soils within a 1km radius of WRC (outlined) and the course of the River Severn. The radius of the catchment is calculated from the outer limits of the town.

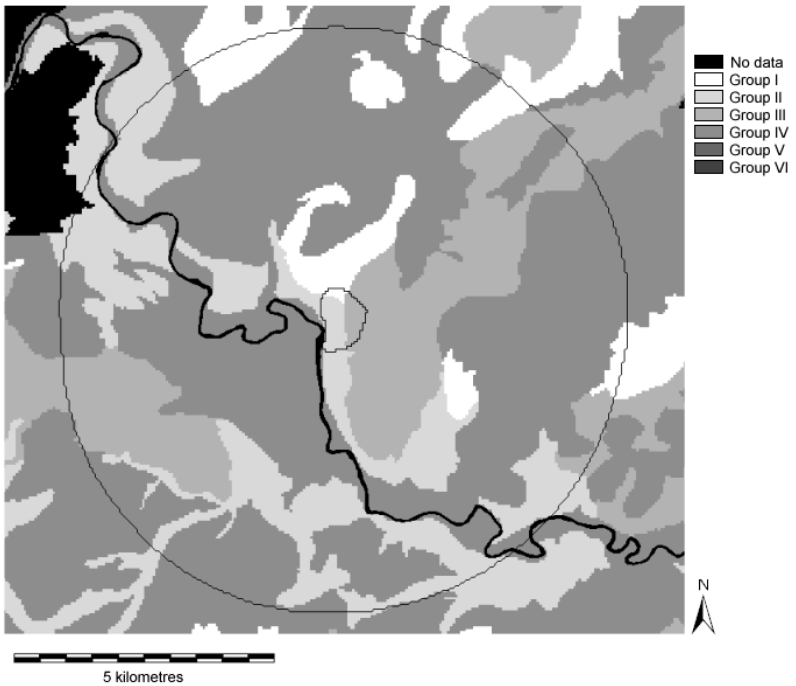


Figure 2.3: Soils groups within a 5km radius of WRC (outlined), with the course of the river Severn.

2.3.2 Topography

WRC was established initially as a fortress (see 2.5.6) so its location was ultimately determined by strategic and defensive considerations, although this is not as obvious as it is at Shrewsbury. Nonetheless, standing at the highest point of WRC, on the southern lip of the Bell Brook where the northern defences of the fortress were located, one is struck immediately by the fine views of the hills to the south, west and north while the

Wrekin dominates the rising land to the east. The main view, to the south-west and west, encompasses the land that was then currently under attack by the Roman army. Defensively, the fortress was protected to the north by the steep-sided valley of the Bell Brook, to the west by the river cliff of the River Severn (Figure 2.4) and to the south by an unnamed but still prominent stream (Figure 2.5). The confluence of the Rivers Tern and Severn lies just to the north-west of the fortress and this too must have formed a defensive line protecting this side of the fortress. The land to the east offers no defensive line but this area was firmly under Roman control when the fortress was established.

At the foot of the river cliff the floodplain forms a level area with currently a diversity of land uses including arable, rough pasture and marshland. Within the river lies an eyot (HAN214) that is steadily eroding at its northern end. The natural river course flows on the west side of this island. The narrower eastern channel was cut in the medieval period to locate fish weirs whose remains are often confused with the location of a Roman bridge (Pannett 1989). Accordingly in the Roman period the land that is now the eyot was part of the terrace below the defences of the Roman town and this extensive reworking of the floodplain makes it difficult to be certain whether there was ever a Roman dock here. At the southern end of the eyot is a broad gravel ford with, on the west bank the Roman road leading to the south-west of Britain (later reused as a link between river traffic and the Shrewsbury – Bridgnorth Turnpike). This natural ford is another reason for the location of the fortress here.

Figure 2.4: HAN218, the river cliff and floodplain from north of 'The Cottage'.

Figure 2.5: Stream bank below Mount Pleasant buildings.

Figure 2.6: Bell Brook valley, eastern half from east.

Figure 2.7: Aerial view of Bell Brook valley, western half from SE.

Following the foundation of WRC the entire Bell Brook valley was taken into its defensive circuit despite the fact that it is 11m deep at its eastern end where it enters the town (Figure 2.6). The brook soon becomes shallower and on the western side of the town is only 1m or so deep (Figure 2.7). The former line of the northern defences of the fortress was used as the entry point for the town aqueduct and the location of a cistern (Johnson and Ellis 2006). The land shelves away to the south and west from this high point and there are hints that in places the Roman town will have stepped down in slight terraces to accommodate this slope. This is detectable in the archaeology from the location of houses seen as cropmarks. The southern end of the town and the land on the northern lip of the Bell Brook in contrast is relatively flat.

2.4 Vegetation and Ecology

WRC is predominantly down to grassland, established in the mid 1970s within the DCMS holding using commercially available seed. Since that time, substantial colonies of nettles and thistles have established themselves in some fields. The grassland is thus predominantly species-poor in character although there has been no modern ecological survey to assess whether there is any sign of increasing diversity of flora. An exception to this are the former glebe fields, behind the Wroxeter Hotel, which do not seem to have been ploughed since the 18th century (D. Millington, pers comm.).

The comments below relating to the ecology of the site (with the exception of the assessment of the river bank and margins) are based on a rapid and superficial survey carried out by the authors. On the river bank and water margin the presence of blue water-speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*), hints at a greater diversity of species requiring further assessment. In the marshy area by the river there is a significant colony of bulrushes. While insect life is likely to be rich so far only the presence of the nationally scarce white-legged damsel fly has been recorded.

Wild flowers are rare but there is a large and significant colony of snowdrops on the banks below Mount Pleasant Cottage. Horseradish grows in abundance on the verges, especially in Patch Lane (HAN404) while cow parsley, dog rose, red and white campion, honeysuckle and white bryony are found in many of the hedgerows and verges. The Blewit mushrooms, poppies, buttercups, daisies, clover and birds-foot trefoil found on the baths site (HAN206) demonstrate greater diversity of flora than are found elsewhere in Wroxeter perhaps reflecting the lack of cultivation in this area since 1859. Horse Mushrooms and Puff Balls are found in the fields west and south of the baths. The stone walls found in the village (notably around The Cottage, are covered in arborealized ivy forming a valuable wildlife habitat.

Three small areas of woodland exist in the town. First is the sycamore plantation located at the northern end of the village, at the junction by the hotel (Figure 2.8; HAN216). The plantation is up to 150 years old since on the tithe map of 1843 this area was occupied by houses. The plantation trees are redeemed ecologically by the undisturbed understorey while extensive arborealised ivy grows on the stone walls defining the field boundaries at this point. The insect life on the ivy supports the bat colony that roosts in the church tower. Ismore Coppice, outside the north-west quadrant of the town, is earlier in date and is predominantly oak, and beech with English elm at the fringes. It is quite open and seems to have been established in the late 18th or early 19th century, perhaps as part of the Attingham Park improvements. Finally, there is a small scrubby woodland north of the turnpike road as it leaves the north-west part of the town. This is of

uncoppiced hazel, birch and arborealised elder with willow and alder. It has presumably grown up in the last century (Figure 2.9). This woodland lies on the south bank of the Bell Brook which is itself quite heavily wooded with pollarded willows and, more numerous, substantial alder trees (Figure 2.7). In the eastern part of the Bell Brook valley, north of the Bell Brook growing on the steep slope are a number of substantial hawthorns. Isolated oaks to the north of the defences at the north-east corner hint at former field boundaries. The hedges throughout the town are mostly hawthorn with some ash and appear to be consistently 18th or even 19th century in date.

Figure 2.8: Sycamore plantation HAN216 from the west. Note ivy growth on tree boles and on boundary wall HAN408 in the foreground.

Figure 2.9; Copse and scrub north of Bell Brook at western entrance to town.

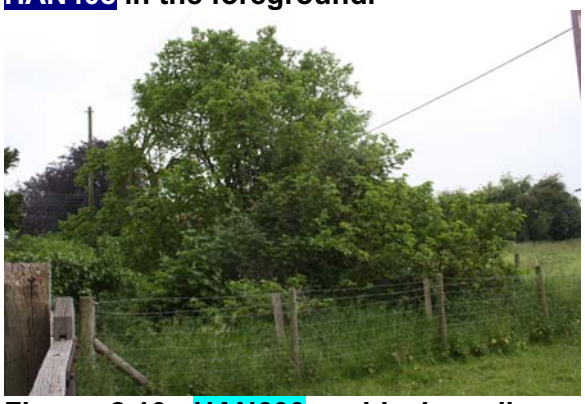


Figure 2.10: HAN600, a black mulberry (*Morus nigra*) in the field opposite the Wroxeter Hotel. Note protective fencing.

Figure 2.11: *Leylandii* hedge flanking the holloway to the ford (HAN411) at The Boathouse (opposite the Church of St Andrew).

Trees within WRC are otherwise rare. Some large oaks can be found at the southern end of the town, on or near the defences where the well-preserved elements of the ramparts lie. Further oaks are found along the banks of the stream running up to the River Severn. To the north and also on the river cliff is a small and distinctive colony of Scots Pine in front of The Cottage. These may have been planted to screen the house from the view of Cronk Hill across the river. On the other side of this building, adjacent to the road, are some fine mature sweet chestnuts. Within the village, there are a number of specimen trees, especially in the grounds of the Wroxeter Hotel (1935 jubilee copper beech), church (Scots pine) and Old Vicarage. North of Topsy cottage is a magnificent black mulberry (Figure 2.10), now fortunately fenced off to protect it from livestock, as is

a veteran oak opposite the church (HAN600 & 601). The English elm that used to be prominent around the hotel grounds seem now to be entirely vanished. Both (HAN106) and Boathouse Cottage (HAN116) are defined disfiguringly by *Leylandii* hedges (Figure 2.11). The short section of the same sort of hedge (currently untrimmed) between the hotel and church similarly disfigures this part of the village and makes viewing the east end of the church virtually impossible. In the centre of the town, by the education room and small cottage, the ashes have nearly all died and been felled but one oak survives. Adjacent to the farmyard wall are an arborealised elder and two formerly prolific damson trees, the latter representing the last remnants of the cottage gardens tended by the tenants in 1 & 2 The Ruins. In the adjacent museum car park are some field maples, rowans and hawthorn. On the eastern ramparts, where the former green lane leaves the town, there is a prominent clump of ash while the green lane is itself bordered by ash and hawthorn.

In terms of fauna, the main species known on the site are badger (various locations), fox, rabbit (especially on the monument), rat (farm buildings) and mole. On the river bank and island, water vole and otter are known to use the river. These are in addition to the bats already mentioned. Until the 1980s, hares were commonly observed in the fields and may still be present. There are no notable species of rare bird but a colony of rooks resides in the sycamore plantation while a small colony of white doves occupies the farm buildings.

2.5 Heritage

2.5.1 Initial investigations

The initial phase of excavation at WRC may properly be characterised as antiquarian rather than archaeological in character, i.e. it was a reaction to discovery of ruins on the site during the course of other works. In this category can be placed the accounts of heated rooms recorded in 1701 (Lyster 1706) and 1785 (Turner 2008) and the discovery of a mosaic in Wroxeter Village in 1827 (Cosh & White 2006). Contemporary with these are the records of the three tombstones found in 1752 (Ward 1755) and, at a later date, the fragments of the Jupiter Column and other carvings (Roach Smith 1854). One might also mention the discoveries and records of stray finds reported on especially by Thomas Farmer Dukes in his Manuscripts in the Society of Antiquaries (MS 218) and in the William Salt Library, Stafford (MS 461 & 473; Dukes 1799-1859). Key among these is a drawing of a Bronze Age pygmy cup (Dukes MS 461 fol.S and 473 fol.S). This item has been rediscovered in the collection of Shrewsbury School (Biddulph & Woodward 2000).

Research excavations at the site can be said to have begun with Thomas Wright whose work on the town baths on *insula* V are most cogently summarised by Mackreth (2000). This text is based on the many accounts Wright published of his work, not least the site guide that ran to seven editions up to the final year of his excavations in 1867 (Wright 1859-67.) and his book on the site (Wright 1872). Small-scale explorations of the baths on *insula* V were continued by George Fox (Fox 1897) and Kathleen Kenyon (Kenyon 1940) before the state acquired the site in 1947. These works had been financed by the owners of the site, the Shropshire Archaeological Society who before the First World War had secured the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, J.P. Bushe-Fox to excavate for three seasons (1912-14) on *insula* VIII north of the village (Bushe-Fox 1913, 1914, 1916). Starting in 1923, the Birmingham Archaeological Society financed the excavation of what turned out to be the forum on *insula* IV, directed by Donald

Atkinson (Atkinson 1942). The site custodian, John Morris, also seems to have been active in the inter-war years in conducting small excavations around the town, including a mortarium kiln (Faiers 2006; Morris 1935).

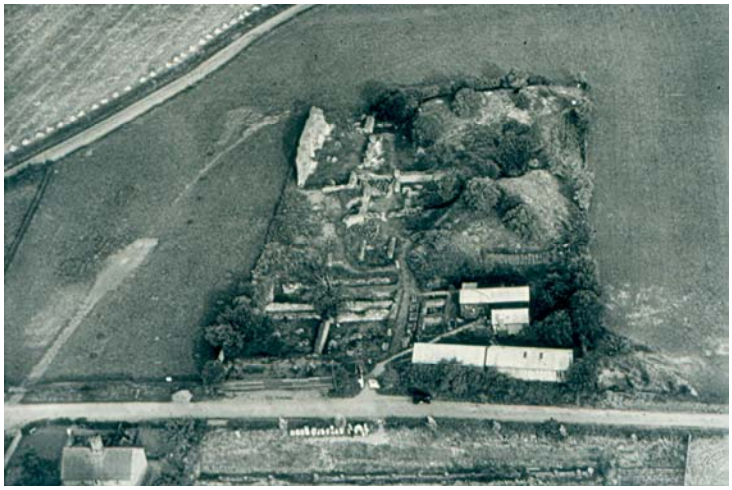


Figure 2.12: Aerofilms view of Wroxeter Baths, 1929 (NMR AFL03 25 28868).

The earliest known aerial photographs of the site are those published in the Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society for 1929-30 (Morris 1930) (Figure 2.12). These were taken commercially by Aerofilms, the costs being met by Sir Charles Marston, President of the Society. The prints and negatives have recently been acquired by the NMR (AFL03 525 28866-8). Another photograph, taken a decade later in 1938 by Group Captain Livock, is also held in the NMR (GEL 9370 frame 369).

2.5.2. Wroxeter discovered

Following the Second World War, the public visiting area was sold by the Shropshire Archaeological Society to the Ministry of Public Buildings & Works (latterly DoE). Consolidation of the baths began, coinciding with a small University of Birmingham-run training excavation on a town house south of the baths (White 2006). By 1955, the training excavation was working on the baths, a programme that extended to the baths basilica and continued to 1990, directed by Graham Webster and Philip Barker (Ellis 2000; Webster 2002; Barker *et al.* 1997).

As early as July 1945, aerial reconnaissance over WRC had recommenced and had an immediate impact first through the work of J.K. St Joseph whose first sorties over the site in 1945 and 1947 found the auxiliary fort to the south of the town and a town house immediately south of the baths (St Joseph 1951), the results being evaluated shortly afterwards (ibid, 54-6; Kenyon 1980). He continued to fly over the site notably carrying out the extraordinary vertical aerial photographic survey of WRC during the drought of 1976 (eg CUCAP RC8 BC 04). The bulk of aerial photographic survey over the town was carried out by Arnold Baker and latterly Chris Musson. Arnold Baker was one of a group of ex-RAF men who did so much to revolutionise aerial photographic survey after the war (Wilson 1982, 13-14) (Figure 2.13). He was working early enough to capture some key earthworks that no longer survive, including the Wroxeter aqueduct (Baker 1992; Webster and Hollingsworth 1959) (Figure 2.14). The aerial photographs taken in the immediate hinterland of the town have enabled the development of a considerable degree of understanding of the evolution of the landscape around it (Whimster 1989;

Welfare and Swan 1995). Another new technology, geophysics, was also tested at this time with a magnetometer survey being carried out as early as 1950s (Houghton 1960).

Figure 2.13: Dr Arnold Baker (rear cockpit) on another Wroxeter flight.

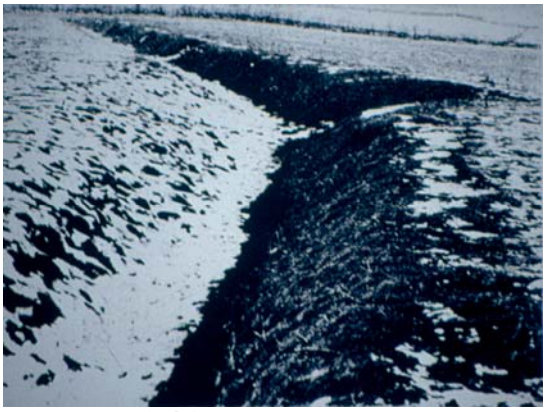


Figure 2.14: Wroxeter aqueduct (HAN557) photographed by Dr Graham Webster before its destruction.

2.5.3 The State intervenes

In 1973 the site of Wroxeter was purchased by the DoE from the Raby Estate. As a result a feasibility study was carried out (White 1976) that resulted in a targeted programme of excavations to allow for the creation of a car park and provision for services (Ellis and White 2006).

State funding of the excavations carried out by Webster and Barker continued until 1985 in the former case and 1990 in the latter. The contribution of these excavations to British archaeology was significant both academically and developmentally. Webster's excavations were able to locate for the first time the long-suspected fortress beneath WRC and to clarify the sequence of development within the baths themselves. Barker's excavation was able to demonstrate an extended period of occupation at the core of the site that added more than 200 years to Wroxeter's existence as a Roman town. Technically, the excavations were recognised World-wide as innovative and of a supremely high standard. Both excavations were renowned too for the quality of their training, the legacy of which has been highlighted recently (Everill and White, in press). The resulting collection of artefacts from these excavations is one of the largest stratified collections from anywhere in Roman Britain and, if studied to their full potential, will offer important new insights into the use and development of Roman material culture. This is especially so in the 5th to 7th century levels where Wroxeter has unique potential to transform our understanding of the material culture of the Brittonic peoples who preserved the legacy of Rome by their resistance to the Anglo-Saxon invasions (White 2007).

These excavations were brought to press as a result of substantial research programmes funded by English Heritage. In their turn EH funded further research in the form of two other initiatives to explore the wider context of the Roman town. The first of these was the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey which was carried out by Hereford and Worcester Archaeological Unit from 1991-3 (White and Dalwood 1994) the results of which are available on-line through the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). The second was the Wroxeter Hinterland Project (WHP) run from 1994-7 by the University of Birmingham and funded by the Leverhulme Trust with post-excavation work funded by

English Heritage. The focus of the WHP was inevitably outside the town but the project did research in the immediate hinterland and, critically, carried out the first complete geophysical survey of any Roman town in Britain (Gaffney & Gaffney 2000) (Figure 2.15). The results, in combination with the aerial photographic evidence, have enabled the compilation of an atlas of all visible buildings in a Romano-British town for the first time (White, Gaffney and Gaffney, forthcoming). A further dimension to our understanding of the evolution of the town after the Roman period has been the Historic Landscape Character assessment (HLC) which was funded by English Heritage again as part of a national initiative.

Figure 2:15: The gradiometry survey of WRC produced collaboratively by GSB Prospection and English Heritage.

Despite the impression that a great deal is known about the town, it is worth emphasising that the sum of the excavated area of Wroxeter is between 5-10% with the bulk on three *insulae* (IV, V and VIII; HAN504, 505 & 508). The rest of the town is virtually unknown archaeologically and there are still entire modern fields within Wroxeter that have never been sampled through excavation.

2.5.4 Buildings and other surveys

The primary building record for the site is the DCMS Listing (Appendix 5). This has only one Grade I listed building, the Church of St Andrew (Figure 2.16). The associated gates, with their re-used Roman columns and bases (Figure 2.17), are listed Grade II, as are all the other buildings and structures in the listing. These comprise the Grange next to the Church with its folly made of medieval and Roman masonry (Figure 2.18), Glebe Cottage (Figure 2.19) and the Old Post Office (Figure 2.20), these latter being possibly 16th and 17th century in origin. These structures represent the last remaining core of the village although the Old School House (Figure 2.21), lying between the Glebe Cottage and the Grange, looks to have elements in its structure that would merit consideration for listing, as do the farm buildings in the adjacent courtyard. Other formerly historic structures in the village are substantially altered, including Topsy Cottage, the Wroxeter Hotel (the former Vicarage) (Figure 2.22) and The Boathouse. The remaining buildings in the village are brick buildings formerly belonging to the Raby Estate and provided for its tenants in the mid 19th century, including the English Heritage owned Mount Pleasant Cottages (Figure 2.23).

Figure 2.16: The north side of St Andrew's, Wroxeter (HAN111).

Figure 2.17: The gates of St Andrew's with re-used Roman columns (HAN120).

The Grange and its gazebo, HAN112 & 113 (right).

Figure 2.19: Glebe Cottage HAN115.

Figure 2.20: The Old Post Office HAN113.

Figure 2.21: The Old School House HAN114.

Figure 2.22: Wroxeter Hotel HAN110.

Figure 2.23: Mount Pleasant Cottages HAN117.

The Church of St Andrew is under the administration of the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT). It is a complex building architecturally, managing to exhibit virtually every phase of ecclesiastical architecture in its fabric. The core of the north wall is late Anglo-Saxon while the entire east end is transitional between Romanesque and Early English, as is demonstrated by the apex to the chancel arch in what is otherwise a strictly Romanesque style. It is thought to date to the later 12th century, contemporary with the ecclesiastical association of the church with the Abbey at Haughmond.

The rebuilding of the south aisle in the 14th century is largely lost although part of the Lady Chapel north wall survives with some wall painting visible. The tower is later than this phase since it Perpendicular, at least in its lower sections. The upper sections, incorporating carvings thought to have been brought from Haughmond Abbey, must post-date the latter's dissolution. The south aisle wall was rebuilt after collapse in the 18th century at which time the Mercian Anglo-Saxon Cross of 9th century date was taken down and built into the top course of the new aisle wall while a 19th century porch is the latest structural element. The churchyard gates reuse columns from the Roman site and two square bases found during the excavations beneath Wroxeter Farm in the 1850s. Inside the most prominent elements are the fine alabaster tombs of the Newport family of 16th and 17th century date but there is also an aumbry with a medieval painting of Christ in Glory still visible inside (Newman & Pevsner 2006, 718-20).

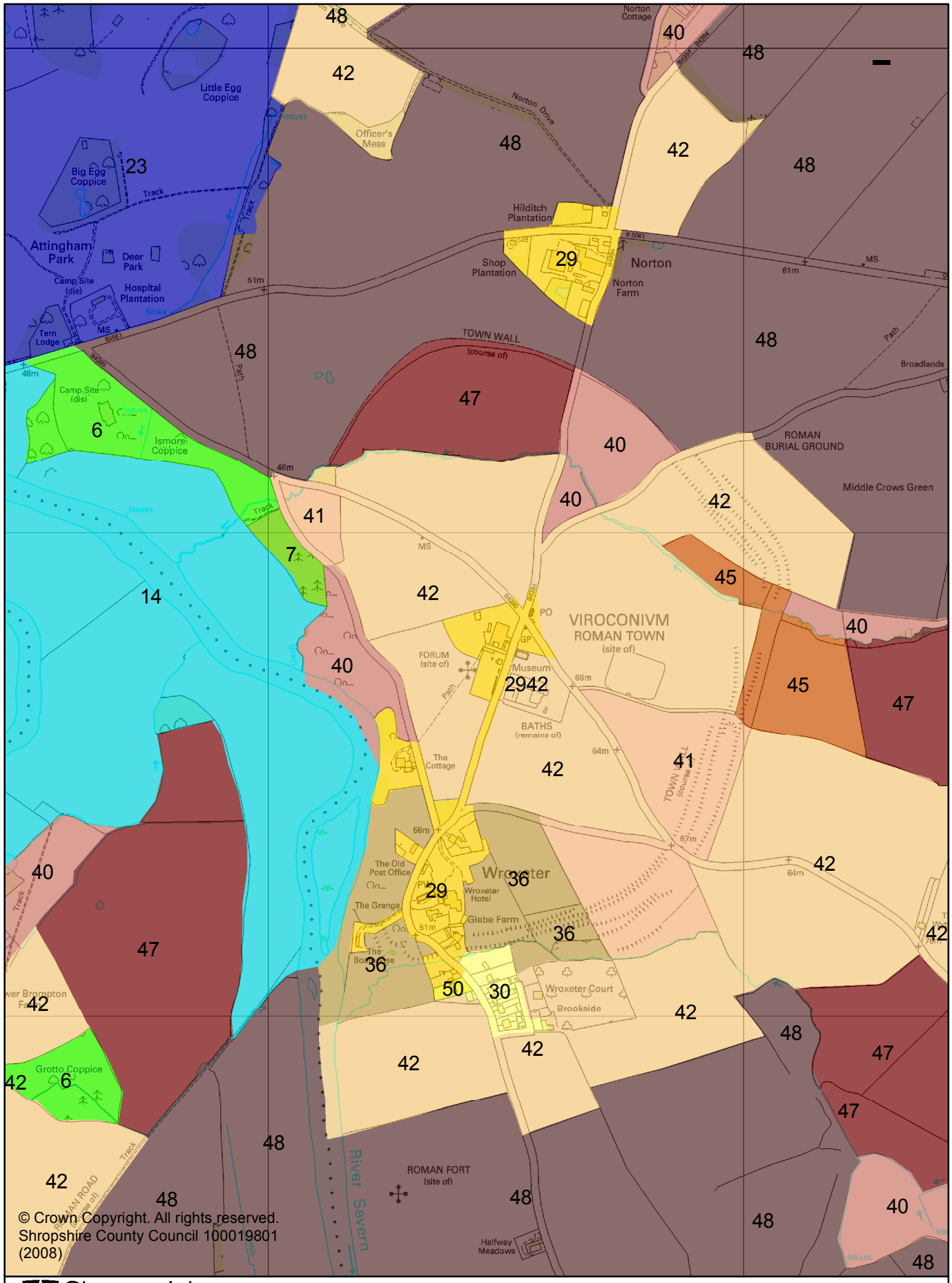
Figure 2.24: HAN100,The former Smithy (latterly the Post Office) at the Wroxeter crossroads.

Figure 2.25: HAN104, 1 & 2 The Ruins. A back-to-back cottage built for Raby Estate tenants. Detached pig sties to right.

The other buildings within the study area are the old Smithy at the crossroads in the centre of the site which is a cottage probably of 18th century date with a late 20th century extension (Figure 2.24), 1 & 2 The Ruins, the former back-to-back cottage next to the farm buildings which is now in poor repair (Figure 2.25), the farm buildings themselves (discussed below) and The Cottage, the house of the former tenant farmer that sits on the river cliff above the River Severn. These other buildings are all 19th century in date.

The farm buildings have been the subject of a detailed architectural and archaeological assessment (Hislop and White 2002) (Figure 2.26). This has demonstrated that the buildings were constructed after 1843 but before 1854. The complex was then built rapidly in stages until completion in ca. 1881 when the tenancy changed to Mr Everall, whose family were still tenants when the property was acquired by the DoE. Minor modifications were carried out up to 1901 with the last element being a Dutch Barn built post Second World War (since demolished). The buildings incorporate large amounts of Roman ashlar, especially where visible from the road but the majority of the building is in brick. The buildings have been assessed for Listing but as yet are unlisted and are currently unused.

Figure 2.26: HAN101, Wroxeter Farm, a fine model farm of 1850-1880.



Shropshire County Council
Economy & Environment
The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

Historic Landscape Character (HLC) Map for Wroxeter and environs.
(Annotated numbers refer to 'Current HLC Types' legend - see p.xii)

Scale: 1:10,000

Figure 2.27 (previous page): Historic Landscape Character Assessment for WRC and environs © Shropshire Council courtesy of Dr Andy Wigley. For key to map see p.xii.

The Historic Landscape Character assessment, carried out by Dr Andy Wigley for Shropshire Council, has mapped the farm land associated with the farm complex and its immediate surroundings (Figure 2.27) and his description is appended.

"The fields assigned to the 'piecemeal enclosure' Historic Landscape Character (HLC) type are likely to be amongst the oldest in the area. They were enclosed directly from medieval strip fields after 1746 since they are shown on Rocque's map of that date (Figure 2.28). The fields allocated to the 'reorganised piecemeal enclosure' category have similar origins, but were subject to boundary alterations in the mid-late 19th, probably as part of the rationalisation and improvement of the Raby Estate (this reorganisation was probably also coeval with the establishment of the farmstead at Wroxeter crossroads). The 'paddocks and closes' immediately adjacent to Wroxeter village are also likely to have ancient origins. Prior to the mid-19th century, those to the east of the church were subdivided into smaller plots and a number of buildings existed adjacent to the road. The fields allocated to the 'miscellaneous floodplain fields' category are likely to have been established as wet meadows between the 15th and 17th centuries. The field allocated to the 'small irregular fields' type to the north-east of the Post Office, and the one to the north-west of The Cottage, are likely to be ancient pasture fields. However, the other fields assigned to this category, together with those allocated to the 'other small rectilinear fields' type were all created in the later 20th century. Similarly, the fields allocated to the 'larger irregular fields' type were established through boundary alterations in the in the second half of the 20th century, whilst those assigned to the 'very large post-war fields' category were created in the same period to facilitate intensive arable cultivation.

Figure 2.28: John Rocque's map of Wroxeter produced in 1746 (SA 6900/1).

The 18th century parkland at Attingham has been assigned to the 'parks and gardens' HLC type.

The majority of Wroxeter village has been assigned to the 'pre-1880s settlement' HLC category, whilst the 20th century 'extension' to the south of the stream has been assigned to the 'post-1880s settlement' type.

The majority of the woodland in the area around Wroxeter has been allocated to the 'other broadleaved woodland with sinuous boundaries' HLC type, whilst the south-eastern end of Ismore Coppice has been assigned to the 'mixed woodland with sinuous boundaries' type. Examination of Foxall's transcription of the Tithe Award map for Wroxeter Parish indicates that Ismore Coppice originated as a later 18th or early 19th century plantation. However, Grotto Coppice, on the west bank of the river, may have ancient origins."

2.5.6 Chronological summary of development

Prehistory

While there are Neolithic finds from Wroxeter, including a pot rim and flint tools, settlement probably only occurred in the early – mid Bronze Age, perhaps ca. 1500 BC. The evidence for this comes from the banks of the River Severn where the 3m high alluvial bank overlies gravel shoals with preserved tree stumps (Figure 2.29). Environmental analysis has established that rapid alluviation of the Severn occurred at this time, probably as a result of deforestation of the upper Severn and perhaps the Severn plain itself. This event was crucial as it created a stable river channel requiring fording points. These seem to have been occasionally marked by round barrow cemeteries, as appears to have been the case at Wroxeter (HAN500; White, Gaffney & Gaffney, forthcoming). The discovery of these features probably accounts for the pygmy cup referred to above.

Figure 2.29: The bank of the River Severn at Wroxeter with waterlogged tree-stumps in gravel (foreground).

Figure 2.30: The cliff lane at Wroxeter (HAN407), suggested by Bassett (1990) to be pre-Roman in date.

Evidence for Iron Age occupation (roughly 800 BC to the Roman conquest of AD 43) is again slight but some enclosures can be seen within the geophysics and one was located by Webster below *insula* V. An evolving system of trackways leading to and from the ford has also been suggested (Figure 2.30) linked, it has been argued, to a co-axial field system of a type found commonly throughout Britain at this date (http://www.eng-h.gov.uk/mpp/mcd/cfs.htm; Bassett 1990). The theory has yet to be proven but would be consistent with the existence of the numerous Iron Age enclosures within the Wroxeter hinterland.

Roman

The outline of Wroxeter's development in the Roman period is broadly understood despite the lack of extensive excavation (White and Barker 1997; Figure 2.31; White, Gaffney & Gaffney, forthcoming). The initial phase was military and comprised first the

auxiliary fort south of the later town of *Viroconium* and currently itself Scheduled. This may have been built as early as AD 47 during the first campaigns by the Roman Army in the area. Around a decade later the legionary fortress was constructed to act as the winter base of the XIIII Legion then currently campaigning in mid and north Wales. Three sides (west, south and east) are still easily traceable in the landscape today (HAN551). An annexe may have been created between the west side of the fortress and the river cliff. Temporary camps have been noted to the north of the fortress that were either created as practice camps during the life of the fortress or which pre-date it (Welfare & Swan 1995).

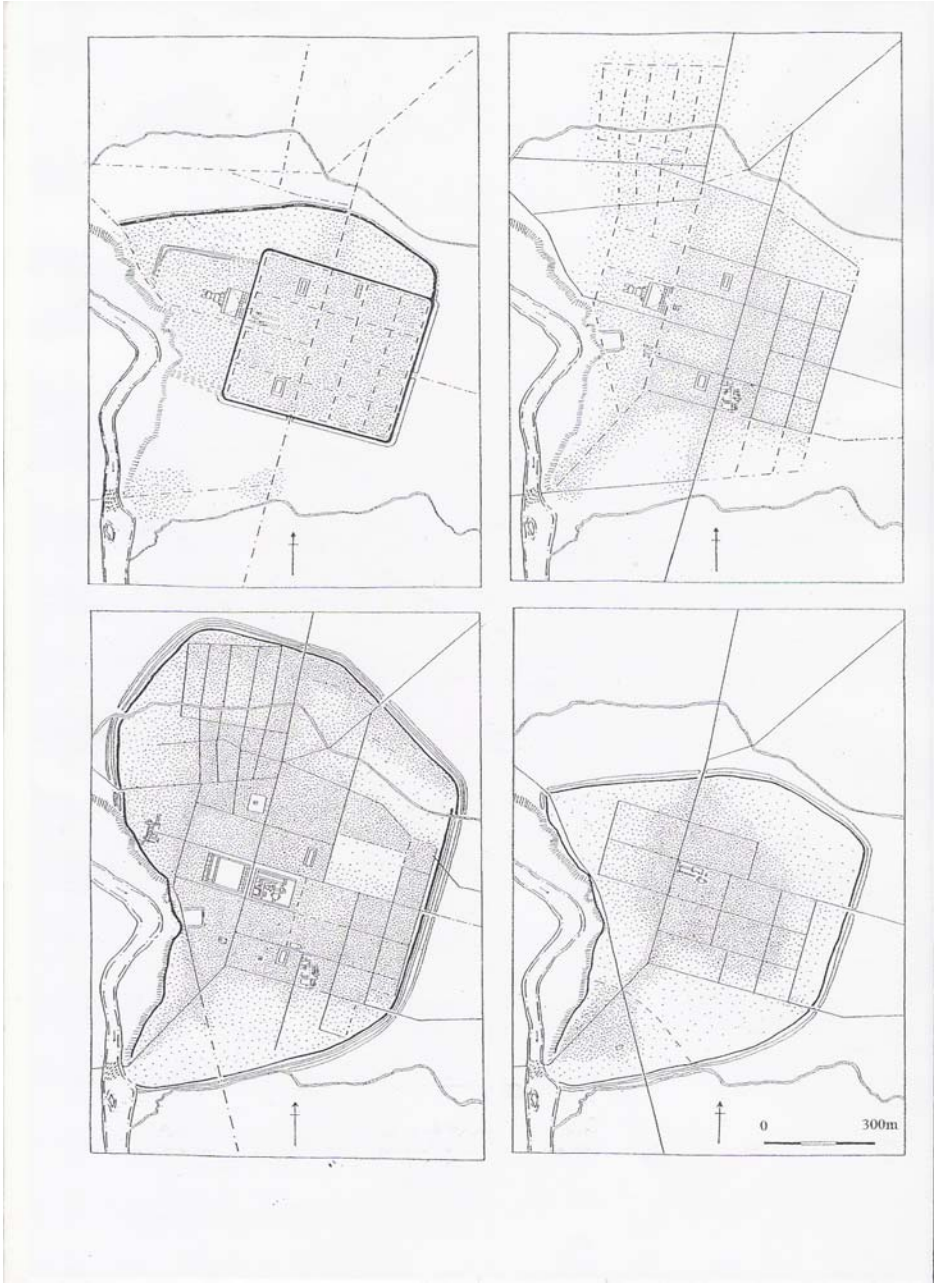


Figure 2.31: The suggested developed of WRC, from fortress (top left) to Brittonic town (bottom right). Source: White & Barker 1998.

Following the withdrawal of the then occupying legion, the XXth in about AD90, the town was laid out using the street pattern established by the fortress but carrying the streets over the levelled defences on all sides but the east and even over the Bell Brook to the north. The area of the town was quadrupled and trackways extended out into the landscape beyond (HAN552; Figure 3.5). Some retrenchment occurred in the 2nd century following the construction of the town defences, which appear to have been in earth and timber. This cut across the earlier street grid at its extremities. Even so, the 78ha. enclosed made Wroxeter the fourth largest town in Roman Britain (HAN553). It was equipped with public buildings of suitable grandeur of conception and design, notably the forum and baths (Mackreth 1987). The recent analysis of the geophysics and aerial photographs have located more than 260 buildings although this can only be a fraction of the total number since most buildings were in organic materials and are thus not easily detected (White and Gaffney 2003; White, Gaffney and Gaffney, forthcoming). While occupation remained strong at the core of the town into the 5th century, lasting even up to the mid 7th century, the extent of this latest phase of occupation is unknown (HAN554). It may even have been polyfocal perhaps with a new nucleus growing up around the ford.

Figure 2.32: The site of Wroxeter's Medieval manor house (HAN306), viewed from the church tower.

Figure 2.33: The green lane (HAN402) leading to Wroxeter's former east gate showing the reverse S shape imposed during the middle ages.

Medieval to post-medieval

The demise of the town seems to have occurred at around AD 650. The earliest medieval evidence is the Mercian Cross of ca. 200-250 years later and it may be that the site was entirely abandoned. This seems unlikely however and it has been argued that there was a Brittonic church and perhaps community here during this hiatus that later formed the nucleus of the medieval church and its village (HAN555; Bassett 1992). Little is known of the medieval village other than the location of the manor house whose extensive earthworks of fish ponds and house platform survive in the fields opposite the Old School House and Glebe Cottage (Figure 2.32) but the final echo of Wroxeter's field system is seen on John Rocque's map and in the reverse-S shape of its lanes (Figure 2.33). The post medieval landscape is effectively that characterised by HLC assessment.