CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

By Neil Holbrook

The last twenty-five years have seen an explosion in the amount of archaeological fieldwork undertaken in Britain, and this is almost entirely due to the increase in work generated in response to proposals for various kinds of development. The publication of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (*Archaeology and Planning*; commonly abbreviated as PPG 16) in England on 12 November 1990, and comparable guidance in Wales in 1991 and Scotland in 1994, enshrined the principles that preservation of archaeological deposits was the preferred outcome on development sites, but where this was not required by the planning authorities developers should pay for the costs of archaeological investigation, post-excavation analysis and publication. This changed the ground rules, for the so-called 'rescue' work of the preceding decades operated on a very different basis and with considerably less funding (Rahtz 1974; Jones 1984). Although the terminology may have changed, the essential tenets of the guidance contained in PPG 16 remained little altered in its successor policies, Planning Policy Statement 5 (2010–2012) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2012–present). The next paper in this volume by Bryant and Thomas discusses the legislative and planning context of developer archaeology in England in more detail. The historic towns of England which had substantial Romano-British antecedents have experienced their fair share of development since 1990. In many cases engineered foundation designs involving rafting or piling have been adopted to allow development to proceed whilst ensuring the preservation *in situ* of the vast majority of archaeological deposits. Even when this approach is adopted, however, there is invariably some manner of associated archaeological work, such as preliminary evaluation to establish the depth and preservation of deposits, or limited excavation in those areas where impact is unavoidable. It would, however, be incorrect to assume that no excavations of scale or consequence have taken place since 1990. Quite the contrary, and as the papers in this volume will demonstrate, a series of major investigations have made profound contributions to knowledge of particular towns, and of Romano-British urbanism more generally.

The purpose of this volume is to provide a synthesis and assessment of the contribution that developer archaeology has made to knowledge of the principal towns of Roman Britain. Our emphasis is on the major towns of Roman Britain (*coloniae*, *municipia* and *civitas* capitals) (FIG. 1). Owing to the nature of our sources no definitive list of towns which attained these legal statuses is possible, but for convenience we have followed Millett's (1990, table 4.4) listing of 'public towns'. Thus we have included the possible *civitas* capitals at Carlisle and Ilchester but not considered other towns sometimes suggested to have attained this status such as Chelmsford, Corbridge or Water Newton. We have, however, included Bath given the exceptional quality of its monumental complex of public architecture which contributes towards its status as a World Heritage Site, and the major legionary fortresses and their associated civilian settlements at Chester and York. The civilian settlement at York was elevated to the status of a *colonia*, probably in the third century. We have no knowledge of the legal status that attached to the extramural occupation at Chester. So-called 'small towns' and forts with their associated *vici* which underlie modern towns and cities with strong medieval pedigrees (Cambridge and Newcastle-upon-Tyne for example) fall outside of our scope, as do those major towns which are today largely greenfield sites where little or no development has taken place. Aldborough, Caistor-by-Norwich, Silchester and Wroxeter fall into the latter category and it is pertinent that all have been subject to campaigns of research-driven fieldwork over the last couple of decades (Wilson 2012, 297; Wilson 2013, 292–3; Bowden 2013; Clarke *et al.* 2007; Fulford *et al.* 2006; Fulford and Clarke 2011; White *et al.* 2013). As this study has been funded by English Heritage, the towns under consideration are restricted to England. In

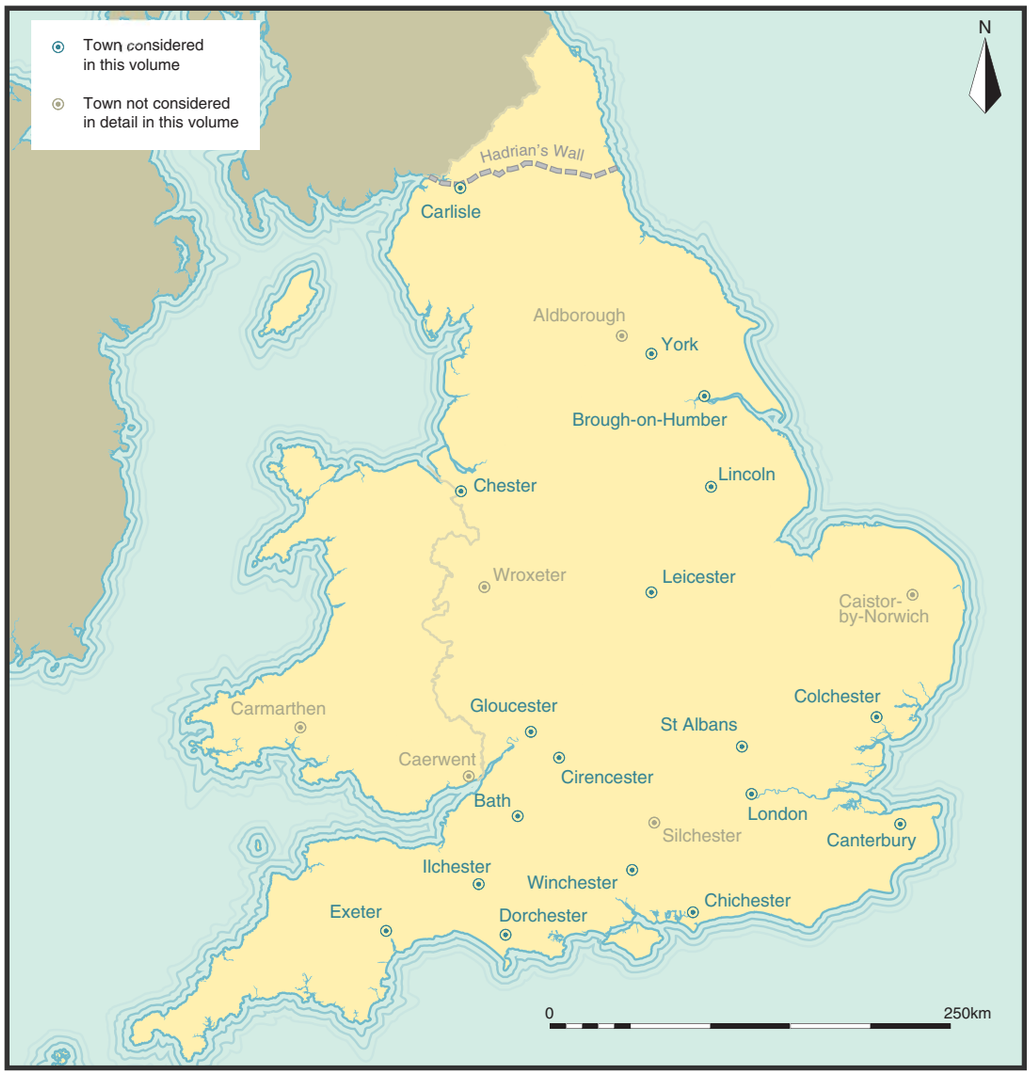

FIG. 1. The major towns of Roman Britain.

the event the omission of the Welsh evidence is not too great a drawback as Davies and Burnham (2012) have recently summarised the advances in knowledge of Roman Wales for the period 1992–2012. Little developer work has occurred at Caerwent and Carmarthen (and the latter is only a possible *civitas* capital) since 1990, although research work at the former continued until 1995. That work which has occurred in Carmarthen between 1990 and 2002 is summarised by James (James 2003, table 1.1). At Caerleon the only development-led investigation of note was the 1992 cemetery excavation at Abbeyfield (Evans and Maynard 1997), although research-driven geophysical survey and excavation has occurred since 2006 inside the fortress and in the western suburb where a monumental complex of uncertain function has been revealed between the amphitheatre and the river Usk (Guest and Young 2007; Chapman 2011, 323–6; Guest *et al.* 2012).

Research-motivated fieldwork has understandably been scarcer in modern town centres, but not entirely absent (for example geophysical survey in Cirencester: Holbrook 2008, 83–5; Booth 2009, 267–9; Darvill *et al.* 2013). There has also been some work associated with improved display and interpretation of archaeological remains, such as the re-excavation of Chester amphitheatre and that associated with the Carlisle Gateway City Millennium Project (Wilmott and Garner 2009; Zant 2009). And more may follow: at the time of writing proposals to re-expose and put on permanent display the legionary baths in Exeter are once more under consideration. Research work forms a valuable complement to the developer work and highlights an important distinction. Whereas

research excavation at greenfield sites can (largely) be targeted to answer specific archaeological questions, commercial work is located where development is to take place (which is itself determined by a complex set of factors relating to economic regeneration and town planning). Commercial work, therefore, frequently examines locations which might not be chosen for research investigation as they may initially appear to have less obvious potential. But conversely, it is often just these sites, especially in the extramural areas, where the most startling and unexpected discoveries are made.

No hard or fast rule to determine the area of study around each town has been adopted in this volume. Instead authors have adopted a flexible approach so that extramural areas which contain valuable evidence for suburban occupation and burial activity, as well as pre-urban Late Iron Age and Roman military activity, are fully considered. As will be apparent in the following papers, much investigation has occurred outside of the historic walled areas, often with much reward.

This volume presents a geographical and thematic approach to the new evidence that has accrued from the developer work. It does not profess to be a comprehensive synthesis, but rather seeks to highlight those areas where most new knowledge has accumulated since 1990. The state of research at the dawn of the developer-funded era was captured in various syntheses published between 1989 and 1995, and these provide a convenient benchmark against which to measure subsequent achievements (Esmonde Cleary 1987; Todd 1989; Wacher 1989; Burnham and Wacher 1990; Wacher 1995). Various publications have sought to capture and synthesise information for individual towns, both within the framework of the urban archaeological assessment programme supported by English Heritage, and in semi-popular accounts in the Tempus/History Press format (for an example of each format for the same town, St Albans/*Verulamium*, see Niblett and Thompson 2005; Niblett 2001). This volume, however, is the first attempt to take a look at the new evidence on a national scale since the early 1990s.

This volume has been produced as part of a more wide-ranging project examining the potential of commercial archaeological investigations to further our knowledge and understanding of the Roman period in England. The products of many commercial investigations are reports which are collectively referred to as grey literature. This can be defined as unpublished reports on fieldwork investigations undertaken as part of the planning process which are produced in very small numbers and have a very limited distribution (although accessibility is improving markedly thanks to on-line initiatives such as OASIS; http://www.oasis.ac.uk). A previous paper reported on the principal conclusions from an earlier phase of this project which examined four pilot areas of England (Fulford and Holbrook 2011). One of these areas was Essex, and a review of the grey literature in the urban core of Colchester quickly established that this process and the associated contextualisation of the material was a substantial undertaking requiring considerable local knowledge, especially where investigations were of limited extent (Holbrook 2010). The urban archaeological databases and assessments discussed below by Bryant and Thomas are likely to be the best mechanism to achieve this, although the difficulties (and effort involved) in producing high quality syntheses should not be underestimated. For reasons of practicality, therefore, this volume concentrates on conventionally published work, although some authors make use of selective grey literature reports. It is stressed, however, that no systematic review of the grey literature from the major towns of Roman Britain has been undertaken.

As a prelude to the papers contained in this volume an attempt has been made to assess the quantity of investigations which have encountered Roman deposits in our towns since 1990. The only consistent, national, dataset was that generated by the Archaeological Investigations Project (AIP) which covered the period up to 2010. The project has now, sadly, been discontinued. The AIP consists of short summaries of interventions drawn from a review of grey literature reports. The AIP never claimed to be a complete record of work done as it relied both upon the thoroughness of records kept by others (principally Historic Environment Records and the organisations undertaking the investigations) and their willingness to co-operate with the project. For an intervention to be included in the AIP it had to be documented in a report that could be located and referenced. A number of investigations, however, are not documented in any kind of report, either one prepared shortly after the completion of fieldwork or indeed in some cases at all. This is particularly the case with excavations. Final excavation reports can take many years to reach publication, and in some cases do not appear at all, as is apparent from a review of the

tables in the papers by Fulford, Holbrook and Bidwell. On a national scale it commonly takes more than five years from the end of an excavation for the final report to be published, and one imagines that the preparation period is greater for urban than rural sites (Fulford and Holbrook 2011, 334). In the absence of final publications, knowledge of certain excavations normally flows from annual 'round-ups' in county and regional journals (where these exist), and nationally in the 'Roman Britain in xxxx' sections of *Britannia* (which cannot be considered comprehensive as it depends upon the voluntary submission of information from individuals and organisations). The AIP treated inclusion within a county 'round-up' as sufficient documentation to warrant inclusion in its listings in its latter years, but this was not the case with earlier entries.

The entries derived from the AIP for the major Roman towns of England have been subjected to data cleaning through examination of the project summaries. The lists had been compiled using a search for the keyword 'Roman'. Upon review it became apparent that this search had captured interventions containing phrasing such as 'no Roman archaeology was found', or which had recovered only residual Roman artefacts. These entries were therefore removed. The cleaned AIP data are presented in Table 1 and are split into two categories: the area within the walls and the area within 1 km of the walls. For each zone the type of investigation has been divided into the categories of evaluation, watching-brief, excavation, and unknown. Evaluations are investigations of limited extent which are designed to characterise the nature of the archaeology present and inform an assessment of the archaeological impact of a proposed development. Such work is reported in grey literature and it is rare that the results will be published in a conventional format. Watching-briefs normally take place after the granting of planning consent and during the construction of a development. This is a typical response when only a low level of archaeological remains is expected or the anticipated remains are unlikely to be of particular significance. Once again watching-brief results are normally only reported in grey literature. Excavations are investigations which seek to provide a full record of the archaeology that is to be destroyed by a development. Where investigations are of very limited

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS UNDERTAKEN AT THE MAJOR ROMAN TOWNS IN ENGLAND BETWEEN 1990 AND 2010. SOURCE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS PROJECT

	Within Walled Area					**Within 1 km of Walls**				
	Type of Investigation					Type of Investigation				
	Watching-brief	Evaluation	Excavation	Unknown	Total	Watching-brief	Evaluation	Excavation	Unknown	Total
London	21	67	24	19	131	16	39	40	7	102
York	19	22	7	6	54	13	27	8	4	52
Colchester	25	18	6	0	49	18	32	9	0	59
Cirencester	10	25	0	2	37	0	5	2	0	7
Chester	3	17	6	8	34	2	6	4	2	14
Chichester	4	5	5	2	16	2	7	1	0	10
Canterbury	3	6	2	0	11	0	2	0	0	2
Winchester	0	7	1	2	10	0	6	6	5	17
Dorchester	0	8	1	0	9	1	4	1	0	6
Leicester	2	2	3	1	8	1	3	3	1	8
Lincoln	5	3	0	0	8	5	8	0	0	13
Bath	0	0	0	1	1	0	8	4	0	12
Gloucester	1	2	0	2	5	3	11	2	9	25
Exeter	2	1	1	0	4	1	1	0	0	2
Ilchester	2	1	0	1	4	1	6	3	3	13
St Albans	0	1	2	0	3	0	3	3	0	6
Wroxeter	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	1
Aldborough	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	3
Brough-on-Humber	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	3
Carlisle	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	2	0	5
Silchester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Caistor-by-Norwich	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
TOTAL	**100**	**189**	**58**	**44**	**391**	**66**	**176**	**90**	**31**	**363**

extent or do not produce particularly significant results, reporting in grey literature is the norm. The expectation is, however, that the more important excavations will be published in a conventional format. The unknown category represents those investigations where review of the AIP summary does not make it readily apparent which of the three previous categories it should be assigned to.

London stands out, unsurprisingly, as the town where by far and away the most investigations have occurred, both within the walls and in the suburbs. This reflects the unique economy of the City of London (within the UK at least) where land values and development budgets can accommodate the often substantial costs of archaeological investigation. The number of investigations recorded by the AIP for London can be compared with Perring's assessment in Ch. 3 that over 200 excavations in London and Southwark have encountered significant Roman remains since 1990. York, Colchester, Chester and Cirencester have also experienced significant quantities of archaeological work, both associated with substantial redevelopments (as at Colchester Garrison) or a large number of smaller ones (as at Cirencester). The low recorded level of work at a number of the other towns is more likely to be a product of weak engagement with the AIP rather than a true dearth of activity. For example, the papers by Holbrook and Bidwell demonstrate the major gains in knowledge that have accrued from investigations in Exeter and Leicester, two towns which are not strongly represented in the table.

This volume grew out of a day conference at the University of Reading on 30 November 2013. All of the speakers at that event have contributed papers, supplemented by a number of other commissioned papers. The volume commences with a review by Bryant and Thomas of the legislative and planning framework within which most commercial archaeological work has been conducted since 1990. This is followed by two case studies: London (Perring) and York (Ottaway). Perring discusses the very considerable new evidence from London, and this can be usefully compared to what has been learnt from York, a major historic city in the North of England with a very different trajectory of development and renewal over the last quarter century compared to the capital. In York the main thrust of new discoveries centres firmly upon the suburbs and the knowledge that can accrue from aggregating a series of individually small-scale investigations. The case studies are followed by three regional reviews which consider the other towns in the South-East of England (Fulford), the South-West (Holbrook), and the Midlands and North (Bidwell). Colchester, Winchester, Exeter and Leicester stand out as the places where most new discoveries have been made, once again with a bias towards the suburbs. A number of suburban investigations have recovered important funerary and burial evidence, and this topic is considered on a national scale by John Pearce. Two further thematic reviews consider the advances that have accrued from the study of faunal remains (Maltby) and plant evidence (Robinson). The collection, analysis and reporting of the full range of biological and artefactual evidence has been one of the major advances of the developer-funded era, although as will be seen, the gains have not been evenly spread. The volume concludes with a review by Michael Fulford of the overall contribution of development-led work to our understanding of Romano-British urbanism. He also identifies some areas where improvements in investigation and reporting practices should be sought.

The editors are grateful to a number of individuals and organisations who have supported the production of this volume. Barney Sloane, Head of the Strategic Planning and Management Division at English Heritage, encouraged us to consider the urban evidence alongside our larger project looking at the contribution of developer archaeology to understanding of the Romano-British countryside. English Heritage generously grant-aided the production and publication of this volume, and we thank Kath Buxton and Tim Cromack for their support and proactive management of the process. Timothy Darvill and Bronwen Russell kindly provided the AIP data used in Table 1, which was reviewed by Nathan Blick and Rob Skinner of Cotswold Archaeology. We are grateful to the successive editors of the Britannia Monograph series, John Peter Wild and Paul Bidwell, for their encouragement, and especially to the Society's Publications Secretary Lynn Pitts for copy-editing the volume and managing the production process. Finally our especial thanks to all the contributors who responded positively to our invitation to speak and write, and for producing their papers in such a timely fashion. This volume appears as we approach the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of PPG 16. Back in 1989 John Wacher was hopeful that the increasing prevalence of developer funding could achieve much for urban archaeology and

looked forward to 'the re-creation of the "total" landscape of each and every city, which must include not only its visual appearance and the appearance of the surrounding countryside, but also the people who inhabited it and their way of life' (Wacher 1989, 114). It will be fascinating to see how far the next quarter century takes us along the journey towards that lofty aspiration.

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