



THE TOWNS OF ROMAN BRITAIN:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF
COMMERCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SINCE 1990







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Edited by

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Britannia Monograph Series

No. 27

Published by the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
Senate House Malet Street London WC1E 7HU
2015



BRITANNIA MONOGRAPH SERIES NO. 27

Published by the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

This monograph was published with the aid of a grant from Historic England

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British Library Catalogue in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 907764 41 0



Front Cover illustration:

Excavations at Princesshay, Exeter, 2005–6. (© *Exeter City Council*)

Back Cover illustration:

A Roman eagle sculpture found by archaeologists from MOLA in the City of London in 2013.
(© *MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology)*)



Produced by Past Historic, Kings Stanley, Gloucestershire

Printed in Great Britain



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SUMMARY

The last twenty five years have seen an explosion in the amount of archaeological fieldwork undertaken in Britain in response to proposals for various kinds of development. The publication of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Archaeology and Planning) in England in 1990 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. The historic towns of England which had substantial Romano-British antecedents have experienced their fair share of development since 1990 and a series of major investigations has made profound contributions to knowledge of particular towns.

This volume provides a synthesis and assessment of the contribution that developer archaeology has made to knowledge of the major towns of Roman Britain (*coloniae*, *municipia* and *civitas* capitals). Those major towns which are today largely greenfield sites where little or no development has taken place fall outside our scope. This volume does not profess to be a comprehensive synthesis of all the work that has occurred since 1990, but rather seeks to highlight those areas where most new knowledge has accumulated. It is, however, the first attempt to take a look at the new evidence on a national scale since the early 1990s.

The volume commences with a review of the legislative and planning framework within which most commercial archaeological work has been conducted since 1990 (Bryant and Thomas). This is followed by two cases studies: London (Perring) and York (Ottaway). Perring discusses the very considerable new evidence from London (he estimates that over 200 excavations in London and Southwark have encountered significant Roman remains since 1990). By contrast at 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. Three regional reviews 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 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. The volume concludes with a review by Fulford of the overall contribution of development-led work to our understanding of Romano-British urbanism. He identifies the non-publication of excavations as a major issue in almost every town, often compounded by the lack of dissemination of the results of work undertaken before 1990. This weak record of publication is a major issue which stifles future research and hinders the effective management of the historic environment in these important places. Fulford concludes by identifying areas where improvements in investigation and reporting practices should be sought in the future.



RÉSUMÉ

Les vingt-cinq dernières années ont vu exploser le nombre d'opérations archéologiques entreprises en Grande-Bretagne en réponse aux demandes de divers types d'aménagement. La publication, en 1990, de la note 16 *Planning Policy Guidance* (Archéologie et Aménagement) en Angleterre consacre les principes qui favorisent une préservation des vestiges archéologiques sur les sites aménagés tout en stipulant que, là où les autorités ne requièrent pas cette préservation, l'aménageur doit financer les opérations archéologiques, les études post-fouille ainsi que les publications. Les villes historiques d'Angleterre aux antécédents romano-britanniques notables ont connu un développement considérable depuis 1990, entraînant une série d'opérations majeures qui ont profondément contribué à la connaissance de ces villes.

Ce volume offre une synthèse et une évaluation de la contribution que l'archéologie préventive a apportée à la connaissance des villes majeures de la Grande Bretagne romaine (*coloniae, municipia* et capitales de cités). Nous n'avons pas pris en compte ici les villes majeures qui sont aujourd'hui des terrains pratiquement vides n'ayant connu que peu ou pas de développement. Ce volume ne prétend pas être une synthèse complète de l'ensemble des travaux menés depuis 1990 mais cherche plutôt à mettre en lumière les zones ayant accumulé des connaissances essentiellement nouvelles. Il s'agit en revanche de la première tentative d'analyse des informations récentes à l'échelle nationale depuis le début des années 1990.

Le volume débute par un examen du cadre législatif et administratif à l'intérieur duquel la plupart des opérations archéologiques préventives ont été menées depuis 1990 (Bryant et Thomas), suivi de deux études de cas: Londres (Perring) et York (Ottaway). Perring présente les apports considérables pour la ville de Londres (il estime que plus de 200 fouilles à Londres et Southwark ont mis au jour des vestiges romains significatifs depuis 1990). À York par contre, le pôle principal des nouvelles découvertes est fortement basé sur la banlieue et sur les informations qui peuvent s'additionner en compilant une série de petites opérations. Trois études régionales traitent des autres villes du sud-est de l'Angleterre (Fulford), du sud-ouest (Holbrook), ainsi que des *Midlands* et du Nord (Bidwell). Colchester, Winchester, Exeter et Leicester se démarquent en livrant la plupart des nouvelles découvertes, avec à nouveau une prépondérance des opérations en banlieue. Plusieurs de ces opérations ont mis au jour d'importants éléments funéraires et vestiges d'inhumations, ce sujet étant abordé à l'échelle nationale par Pearce. Deux autres études thématiques traitent des progrès accumulés par les études de la faune (Maltby) et des plantes (Robinson). La récolte, l'analyse et les rapports concernant l'étendue des éléments biologiques et du mobilier constituent une des avancées capitales de l'ère de l'archéologie préventive. Ce volume se termine par une étude de Fulford sur la contribution générale des travaux préventifs à la connaissance de l'urbanisme romano-britannique. Fulford identifie l'absence de publication des fouilles comme un problème majeur pour la plupart des villes, souvent aggravé par le manque de dissémination des résultats de fouilles entreprises avant 1990. Ce faible nombre de publication est un obstacle essentiel qui paralyse la recherche future et entrave l'efficacité de la gestion de l'environnement historique dans ces lieux remarquables. Fulford conclut en identifiant les zones où, à l'avenir, des améliorations sont souhaitables au niveau des pratiques de recherche et de rapports.



ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Im Vereinigten Königreich ist die Anzahl der Rettungsgrabungen im Vorfeld von Bauvorhaben innerhalb der letzten 25 Jahre explosionsartig angestiegen. Die 1990 veröffentlichten Richtlinien für Archäologie und Bauplanung in England (Planning Policy Guidance Note 16) legen fest, dass Bodendenkmäler vorzugsweise in-situ erhalten werden sollten. In Fällen, wo dies nicht durch die Bauplanung vorgeschrieben wird, sollen die jeweiligen Bauträger für die Kosten der Ausgrabung, archäologischen Aufarbeitung und der Publikation aufkommen (Verursacherprinzip). In diesem Zuge wurden seit 1990 in einer Reihe englischer Städte mit romano-britischen Wurzeln umfangreiche Ausgrabungen durchgeführt, die substantielle neue Erkenntnisse zur Stadtgeschichte geliefert haben. Dieser Band legt eine zusammenfassende Analyse und Bewertung der Erkenntnisse vor, die Ausgrabungen unter dem Verursacherprinzip zur Geschichte der größeren Städte (*coloniae, municipia, civitates*) im römischen Britannien beigetragen haben. Städte, auf deren Gebiet keine oder nur minimale Wiederbebauung stattfand („greenfield sites“) werden nicht behandelt, und dieser Band versteht sich auch nicht als umfassende Synthese aller Forschung, die seit 1990 stattgefunden hat. Stattdessen werden vor allem die Bereiche hervorgehoben, in denen die meisten neuen Erkenntnisse gewonnen wurden. Dabei handelt es sich um den ersten Versuch einer solchen Bestandsaufnahme auf nationaler Ebene seit den frühen 1990er Jahren.

Der erste Beitrag von Bryant und Thomas gibt einen Überblick über die rechtlichen und raumplanerischen Rahmenbedingungen, denen die kommerzielle Archäologie seit 1990 unterworfen ist. Darauf folgen zwei Fallstudien: London (Perring) und York (Ottaway). Perring erörtert die beachtlichen neuen Erkenntnisse der Londoner Stadtarchäologie (er schätzt, dass über 200 Ausgrabungen in London und Southwark seit 1990 aussagekräftige römische Funde geliefert haben). York steht im Gegensatz dazu. Hier wurden die meisten wichtigen Entdeckungen der letzten Jahre nicht im Stadtkern, sondern in den Vororten gemacht, und es wird gezeigt, wie die Interpretation mehrerer kleiner Fundstellen im Zusammenhang wichtige neue Erkenntnisse liefern kann. Es folgen drei regionale Studien, die sich mit den Städten im Südosten (Fulford), dem Südwesten (Holbrook), sowie den Midlands und dem Norden (Bidwell) befassen. Als wichtigste Fundorte stechen vor allem Colchester, Winchester, Exeter und Leicester hervor und wieder wurden wichtige Erkenntnisse durch Grabungen in suburbanen Bereichen gewonnen. Pearce gibt einen Überblick über die wichtigsten Grabfunde, die auf nationaler Ebene und wieder vor allem in Vororten gemacht wurden. Zwei weitere Beiträge liefern kritische Zusammenfassungen des Erkenntnisgewinns aus der Analyse von Tierknochen (Maltby) und Pflanzenresten (Robinson). Es zeigt sich, dass die grössten Fortschritte in den letzten 25 Jahren in der Erfassung, Analyse und Interpretation von biologischem und anderem archäologischen Fundmaterial gemacht wurden. Fulford schließt den Band ab mit einer zusammenfassenden Bewertung der Beiträge verursacherfinanzierter Grabungen zur Stadtforschung im römischen Britannien. Er sieht die Tatsache, dass viele Ausgrabungen nicht veröffentlicht werden als das Hauptproblem für fast jede Stadtarchäologie, oftmals dadurch noch verschärft, dass vor allem Grabungen, die vor 1990 stattgefunden haben, selten einem weiteren Kreis von Forschern bekannt gemacht wurden. Dieser Mangel an Publikationen stellt ein grosses Problem dar, das die weitere Forschung wesentlich beeinträchtigt und auch die effektive Pflege der historischen Denkmäler an diesen wichtigen Fundorten erschwert. Fulford endet seinen Beitrag, indem er die Bereiche benennt, in denen nachhaltige Verbesserungen in Forschungspraxis und Vorlage der Ergebnisse angestrebt werden sollten.



Note

From 1984 until March 2015, English Heritage was the government body responsible for archaeological matters in England. In April 2015, that responsibility passed to a newly named organisation, Historic England. English Heritage, however, remains responsible for monuments in state care (such as Wroxeter Roman City). References to English Heritage in this volume should be read with this recent change in mind.