

**EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY
FOR
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**THE ROMAN TOWN OF SANDY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

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Preface

All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology (formerly Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service) cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background to the Project*

English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. This report is an archaeological assessment of the Roman town of Sandy and forms part of the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) for Bedfordshire. This survey of the 12 historic towns of Bedfordshire is funded by English Heritage (EH) and jointly managed by EH and the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council (BCC). The survey is jointly undertaken by staff of Albion Archaeology (formerly BCAS – Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service) and the Heritage and Environment Section (HES) of BCC.

The EUS comprises three stages, Data Compilation, Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Compilation, drew together the accessible records of the history and archaeology of the town. This led to the second stage, represented by this Assessment report, which provides an appraisal of the archaeological and historic data in order to define areas of archaeological potential. The Strategy stage will draw on the Assessment to develop a strategic framework for the management of the archaeological and historic resource of each town. It is hoped that the proposed strategy for each town will be adopted as supplementary guidance notes for the relevant District plans.

The chronological framework used in the Assessment reports to describe each town's development (normally section 5) reflects the periodisation used in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Any broad dating system of this kind has limitations in the face of the mass of detailed evidence that exists for each town. It has, therefore, occasionally (*e.g.* Bedford in the Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods, or Luton in the early industrial period) been necessary to use slightly different chronological divisions. In addition, the town of Sandy is exceptional in its own right because only the Roman town has been included in the Bedfordshire EUS.

1.2 *Structure of this Document*

This report has been compiled using a number of sources of data including the Albion/BCAS Project Database, the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), and the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS).

The scope of the document is limited to an assessment of the Roman town of Sandy, and does not cover the medieval village or the post-medieval town. The reasons for this are, firstly, Roman Sandy occupies a green field site quite separate from the later medieval settlement and on the edge of the present town (unlike the Roman small town of Dunstable, which was on the same site as the later medieval town). Secondly, Sandy in the medieval period was basically a medium-sized village without a market, and therefore does not meet the criteria for categorisation as a small town. The village grew into a



sizeable settlement only with the arrival of the railways in the mid-19th century.

The location and topography of Roman Sandy are described in Section 2. A short summary of historical sources and archaeological investigations is presented in Section 3. The archaeological background and development of the town is described by period in Section 4. Section 5 comprises an assessment of the state of survival, importance and character of the town. Areas of archaeological potential are presented in plan form at the end of this report.



2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

The Roman town of Sandy is in Mid Bedfordshire District, c.13km to the east of Bedford at TL18974457. The historic towns of Biggleswade and Potton are located to the south and east, respectively (Fig 1). The modern town of Sandy is situated immediately to the north-west.

The exact limits of the Roman town have not been established, but the area of greatest density of archaeology can be sketched out. It is located on what is still largely a green field site to the south-east of the modern town. The core of the known area comprises the present-day Municipal Cemetery, Chesterfield to the south, and part of the railway station and marshalling yard to the north-west. The London mainline railway runs north-south through the site of the Roman town. The Stratford Road also runs roughly NNW-SSE through the site intersecting with the High Street/ Potton Road, which runs NW-SE through the northern part of the Roman town.

The focus of the town was an embayment, or break, in the Greensand Ridge – undoubtedly an important strategic point even before the Roman period, as reflected by the three Iron Age hillforts that overlook the site. The main Roman road from Baldock to Godmanchester heads directly for the break in the escarpment. The Roman settlement was sited on the road at the point where it turns slightly to take account of these topographical constraints.

The site is fairly flat, with the average height of present ground level at about 31m AOD. The cemetery was situated on a small knoll known as Tower Hill to the north-west of the main settlement. This was quarried away to provide ballast for the railway in the late 19th century. Just 500m to the west is the River Ivel, which flows roughly northwards to join the River Great Ouse about 5km away. To the south and west the land slopes gently towards the river. To the east, the site is overlooked by the steeply wooded slopes of the Greensand Ridge.

The position of Sandy within the regional network of Roman roads is shown on Fig 1 (inset). In Roman times the settlement may have been at the junction of up to five roads, although some of the local ones are partly conjectural.

Significant local place-names are ‘Stratford’, implying the existence of a street fording a stream, and ‘Chesterfield’ itself, implying the existence of stones or walls in the field.



3 REVIEW OF MAIN SOURCES

3.1 *Antiquarian Discoveries and Ideas*

The site of Roman Sandy was once well known as a collecting place much frequented by early antiquarians. Stukeley, Aubrey and Camden – to mention only three of the most famous – all visited and wrote about the site. Roman coins known as ‘chesterpieces’, as well as other artefacts such as rings and brooches, were often found on Chesterfield by local market gardeners who cultivated parts of the site.

The earliest record of artefacts dates to the 17th century when John Aubrey and William Stukeley wrote about finds from Chesterfield. In his *Monumenta Britannica* (unpublished), Aubrey described an urn that was “red like coral” (probably a samian vessel). A reference to the urn was first published by Camden (1695) and also appears in Stukeley’s *Commonplace Book* (unpublished). Other writers who have used Aubrey’s unpublished manuscript as a source include Warren in 1779 and Gough who revised Camden in 1806. Stukeley also describes “vases, urns, lacrymatorys, lamps, and immense numbers of coins”. Finds from this period probably include a silver ring set with cornelian and bearing the image of an eagle, a metal mirror of speculum, and a bronze handle from a jug bearing a Medusa mask (Johnston 1974).

In 1673, Blome applied the place name *Salinae* – from Ptolemy’s *Geography* – to the Roman town at Sandy (Simco 1984). This erroneous reference was repeated by Camden in 1695, Evans in 1864, and Ransom in 1886. In actual fact the name *Salinae* implies salt production (very unlikely for Sandy) and Ptolemy’s latitude and longitude place it about 10 miles south-west of Chester (see the OS map of Roman Britain 1956). Beldam in 1868 and Bradley in 1883 both published reasoned arguments against the association of *Salinae* with Sandy (Johnston 1974). Blome’s 1673 description of a walled city of great extent was probably also confused, relating in part to the nearby Iron Age hillfort known as Caesar’s Camp. He also describes the Chesterfield area as “nothing but a warren”, and it seems clear that there were no upstanding building remains surviving at that time (Simco 1984, 114). The passage is quoted in full below:

“Also at Sande and Chesterfield, near adjoining, which is now nothing but a warren, stood the famous city of Salena of the Romans, which by the ruins of its walls (in many places yet to be seen) doth declare it to be of large extent.” (Blome 1673)

The construction of the railway in the mid-19th century uncovered numerous burials and revealed further evidence for the Roman town, while the quarrying of Tower Hill between 1850 and 1910 destroyed the Roman cemetery to the west. This meant that there was a period of about 70 years during which major discoveries were being made. Both inhumations and cremations were found, dating mainly from the Roman but also from the late Iron Age and the Saxon periods. The sequence of these discoveries has been partially



reconstructed from old records by D Johnston (1974, 40-41), based on unpublished work by Mr Alan Johnston, and is discussed later in this report.

Captain Peel, who bought the land for the branch railway from Sandy to Potton formed a small museum from the numerous artefacts found. One of these was a Roman sword that he adapted for his own use; he was supposedly fighting with it when he fell at the mutiny of Lucknow (Johnson 1974). In 1856 three fine bronze bowls were found (Kennett 1969). These are thought to be 4th century in date and probably represent a hoard. A hoard of ironwork was also found on Tower Hill at about this time. It included numerous cart fittings and tools. Other finds probably from Tower Hill were glass vessels containing ashes and an oculist's stamp on a slab of steartite. For a comprehensive list of finds from this early period of investigation, and also for full references, see Page (1908, 9-11), Johnston (1974, 41-47), and HER 444.

Further burials and other artefacts were found along the course of the Stratford Road to the south of the main settlement (HER 11309). Skeletons were observed in about 1900 while digging up the track which is now Stratford Road (Johnson 1974, 41). It should be noted that Stratford Road follows roughly the course of the Roman road to Baldock, although for a considerable stretch the ancient road runs in the field just to the east. Importantly, the field known as Chesterfield (with the implications of the name for Roman remains) used to extend much further south than it does today – all the way to the foot of Galley Hill.

3.2 The Viatores Group

The Viatores Group carried out a detailed study of the Roman road network in the South-East Midlands region (Viatores 1964). This involved a great deal of fieldwork as well as documentary and cartographic research, and has particular relevance for the study of Sandy, where several of the roads meet. Some of the roads listed are, admittedly, based on conjecture, but their work nevertheless has great value as a source of hypothetical road courses that can be tested by excavation. Possible roads in the Sandy area are shown in Fig 2.

Route 22 is the main road from Baldock to Godmanchester, a by-road of the important route that linked London with the legionary fortress at Lincoln. In Chesterfield, much of its metalled surface has been removed during this century because it disrupted ploughing. Route 224 heads westwards in the direction of Bedford and eastwards in the direction of Potton. Route 225 heads in a north-west direction through the centre of the modern town of Sandy, and could be represented by the present course of the High Street.

A critique of the Viatores work was put forward by Simco (1984, 78-9) who questioned the validity of route 225 on the basis of inadequate evidence. The eastern stretch of Route 224 as encountered further to the west in the Cople area has many enigmatic qualities, and has been interpreted by some as a Neolithic cursus. It has two parallel ditches but no apparent metalling, and may in fact be an unfinished road. Simco suggests it could have been made by a local chieftain rather than by the Roman authorities.



3.3 Modern Archaeological Investigations

In the 1950s, D Johnston carried out several small investigations to locate the Roman roads at Sandy (Johnston 1964, summarised in Johnston 1974). These were mostly pipe, cable or construction trenches along the supposed lines of roads. The main north-south road (Viatores route 22) was sectioned at The Bungalow on Stratford Road (Johnston 1955, 1974). Here it was found to seal a NW-SE running ditch that may be late Iron Age in date. A 'hearth', and other settlement evidence of similar date, was found on the western lip of the ditch. The foundation of the road was dated by pottery evidence to the 1st century AD. The excavator thought that the ditch was filled in and sealed at the time the road was constructed, probably not long after the Conquest.

Johnston also reported on important work carried out by the Cemetery Keeper, Mr H Gurney, who retained finds and made observations during the digging of modern graves from the 1950s to the 1970s (HER 11313). There was some evidence of buildings in the form of layers of crumbled brick and surfaces of sandstone slabs, as well as a metallised surface and numerous finds of pottery and other artefacts. A map and summary of the information obtained is reproduced in Johnston (1974, 37-9). Unfortunately, most of the artefact assemblage was dispersed when Mr Gurney died.

In 1957, a small excavation was carried out by C F Tebbutt on Cox Hill, about 800m to the north of the settlement core. A section in the side of the sand-hills near the railway line revealed a large rectangular pit containing late Iron Age pottery and flint flakes (HER 453). Mr Tebbutt also excavated and recorded a large hearth of early Iron Age date on The Pinnacle (HER 1496). Finds are in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Excavations at the Sandy Lodge hillfort (HER 1164), on the Greensand Ridge about 800m to the south-east of the settlement core, were carried out in 1968/9 by James Dyer (1971). The excavator concluded that this small fort, enclosing about 2 acres, was probably early Iron Age in date and may have been unfinished. No structural features were found in the interior. The site was unrecognised up to the 1960s so there are no early references to it.

A small watching brief was carried out by A Simco of Bedfordshire County Council at 5 Stratford Road in 1979 (HER 11323). Two trenches were excavated for a house extension very close to the Roman settlement core. A pit containing Iron Age pottery was found, as well as unstratified Roman pottery. This project was later incorporated into BCAS records under the umbrella project number 212.

BCAS - now Albion Archaeology - have undertaken several projects within the assumed limits of the Roman town (HER 444). The most extensive, and most important, was the watching brief, evaluation and subsequent excavation in the south-west corner of the Municipal Cemetery (BCAS project 89). This began in 1987 when human skull fragments were found during the digging of a modern grave. The discovery led to an archaeological evaluation that revealed extensive Roman stratigraphy. Full-scale excavations, carried out in



three seasons from 1989 to 1991, confirmed the existence of a small Roman town. Several clearly defined occupation phases dating from the 1st century BC to the 5th century AD were identified and a number of Roman buildings were located, with stratigraphy surviving beneath a layer of hillwash material up to 1.5m deep. Although not fully published, the cemetery excavations provide by far the most detailed information about the Roman town (BCC 1988, 1999; BCAS 1996; Dawson 1990, 1991, 1995, 1997; Dawson and Maull 1992).

A watching brief (BCAS project 238) was carried out during construction of farm buildings at Woodside Farm, immediately to the south-east of the modern cemetery in 1995. Some Roman structural evidence including wall footings, timber slots, and a possible metallised surface were observed (unpublished BCAS records).

A watching brief (part of BCAS project 212) was undertaken at the Stables, Stratford Road, to the south of the Municipal Cemetery, in 1993. A V-shaped ditch containing Roman pottery of 1st or 2nd century AD date, sealed by a colluvial layer dating from the 3rd or 4th century AD, was revealed during construction of stable buildings. Machining ceased at 1.2m below ground level and further archaeological deposits may have remained unexposed (BCAS 1993).

Remains of a substantial, high-status building comprising a mortared wall, surfaces, and refuse pits were exposed during the installation of a septic tank in 1994. This site, project code SCP 94, is also sometimes taken as part of project WB 212. Roman pottery, tile, structural ceramics relating to heating, animal bone, and iron nails were all recovered (BCAS 1994). It has been suggested that the wall represents part of a possible 'mansio', built sometime in the late 2nd – early 3rd century AD (Dawson 1997). However, it should be remembered that only about 1m of wall – with seven courses surviving – was actually exposed. Several interpretations are possible and more evidence is required.

More recently, in 1999, a watching brief (SRS 554) was undertaken to the south of the Roman town during a barn conversion at 6 Stratford Road. Human skeletal remains were exposed during the initial groundworks and subsequent investigation of the construction trenches revealed thirteen individual graves dating from the Romano-British period. These are probably associated with the burials found nearby in 1900 (HER 11309). The size of the cemetery could not be fully ascertained, but it was believed to extend along the roadside beyond the development area (BCAS 1999). Any account of the discoveries in this part of Stratford Road should take into consideration the finds of inhumations and urns by workers digging the road in 1900 (HER 11309).

In the area of modern Sandy, at least one inhumation was exposed in the foundation trenches of a house extension at 13 The Avenue (WB172). No dating evidence was recovered but it has been suggested that the skeleton may



date to the Romano-British period (Dawson 1995). Watching briefs at St Swithun's Church (WB83), 59-61 High Street (WB85) and 56 High Street (WB97), all located to the north-west of the Roman town, also failed to uncover surviving archaeological deposits. An excavation in Engayne Avenue (Dix and Aird 1983) located evidence of Roman settlement about 1km to the north of the Municipal Cemetery. This is likely to represent an outlying farm rather than part of the Roman town. In support of this view, Dawson mentions the results of watching briefs at Stonecroft and Bedford Road (missing from BCAS records) in the area between the cemetery and Engayne Avenue. No archaeological deposits were found, leading to the view that both these sites were outside the Roman town boundaries (Dawson 1995, 168).

No archaeological deposits were observed during excavation of the Sandy Relay Pipeline (WB210) in 1996. The trench was excavated between the east end of Sandy High Street and Beeston, about 1.1km to the south-west. Where the pipeline extends south from the High Street, along the western side of the railway line, it is no more than 165m to the west of the Municipal Cemetery. The absence of archaeological evidence may be quite significant in determining the limits of the Roman town (although there was probably damage to archaeological deposits during railway construction). An evaluation in advance of building work off New Road to the west of the Roman town (WB190), produced evidence of medieval occupation, but no surviving deposits of Roman date.

No archaeological deposits were observed during a watching brief at Sandy Lodge (WB213) to the north of the Roman town. (Note: there are two places called Sandy Lodge – this one is different to the hillfort to the south of Chesterfield).

From 1989-1994 large scale excavations at Warren Villas (WV 486), 1km to the south of the Roman town, uncovered evidence of Iron Age and Roman farmsteads and field systems – of considerable interest for shedding light on the character of the town's agricultural hinterland (Dawson and Maull 1996).

A desk-based assessment (RKB 828) of meadows to the west of (the former site of) the cemetery on Tower Hill was carried out by Albion Archaeology in 2002 (Albion 2002a).

In the same year a small evaluation was conducted at Woodside Farm (WSF 819), close to the site of previous investigations. This produced significant evidence of structures within a very limited area of excavation (Albion 2002b).

Excavations (if referred to by project number) are shown on Fig 3. Fig 2 shows those earlier sites denoted by HER numbers.

3.4 HER Evidence

For convenience of use, all relevant HER entries from within half a kilometre radius of Chesterfield have been tabulated below. Some of these are also



discussed in the text. Where possible, the location has been shown on Fig 2. For further details the HER records themselves should be consulted.

HER No	Description	Grid Reference
432	Saxon Cemetery, on present site of railway bridge, see Kennett (1970)	517700 248900
442	Caesar's Camp, univallate Iron Age hillfort, never excavated, but 1 st cent BC pot found here	518000 249000
444	Roman settlement, Chesterfield, general number	518100 248500
445	Galley Hill Iron Age hillfort, never excavated, SAM 27164	518500 247800
447	Iron Age coins from Sandy, various provenances, many of Cunobelinus	no map reference
453	Iron Age pit, Cox Hill, excavated and recorded by C Tebbutt 1957	517700 249500
462	Roman occultist's stamp, found in 1873 near railway station, now in British Museum	no map reference
505	Roman Road, Baldock-Sandy-Godmanchester. Side route of main road from London-Lincoln. Viatores route 22	no map reference
1164	Sandy Lodge promontory hillfort, unrecognised up to 1967. Excavated 1968-9 (Dyer 1971). May be of early Iron Age date. Possibly unfinished. SAM 27163	518700 247800
1165	Mesolithic occupation on or near Sandy Lodge. Three cores, twenty blades/flakes, two microliths	518700 247800
1496	Iron Age hearth, The Pinnacle. Excavated by C Tebbutt, 1950s. Early Iron Age finds (Johnston 1955)	517800 249200
1501	Belgic cemetery, remains of five vessels including pedestal urns, found to north of Roman cemetery. Ibex-headed pin and numerous other finds (Johnston 1955)	517900 248800
1505	Beaker wrist-guard. Polished blue green slate bracer, from Tower Hill area	517700 248600
1897	Roman Sandy, general number, many antiquarian references	no map reference
1996	Iron Age objects and pottery, including bronze ring and late Iron Age horse trappings	no map reference
2434	'Stone axes' Stratford Road. Local tradition that Stone Axe Farm is named after finds of axes on the land	518500 247500
3033	East Place. So-called 'Danish Camp'. Possibly site of old manor house	517290 248830
3321	Possible site of ford where Roman road would have crossed stream, inferred from the name 'Stratford'	518520247280
4498	Medieval ridge and furrow	no map reference
5396	St Swithun's Church, first mentioned 1240,	



	mostly 14 th and 15 th century	
8495	Municipal Cemetery, opened 1891	517970 218480
9821	Saxon urn, found on Sandy-Potton railway in 19 th century (Kennett 1969)	no map reference
10803	Roman Road surface, marked on Bedford Museum map, near to HER11312	517520 248980
11262	Roman finds from 19 th century, various	no map reference
11309	Roman burials, Stratford Road. Inhumations and urns, observed in 1900 while digging track	518270 247820
11310	Roman pottery, All Saints' Churchyard, London Road	516480 249510
11311	Belgic and Roman Occupation, excavation at The Bungalow. See Johnston 1955, 1974	518080 248290
11312	Roman Road, Sandy Fire Station. See Johnston 1974	517520 248980
11313	Roman finds from Municipal Cemetery. In 1948, a road surface found running at right angles to main north-south road. Also skeletons, pits, hearths. See Johnston 1955, 1974	518000 248700
11316	Bank and pottery, Stratford Road. Small bank between railway and road, taken to be agger of possible Roman road (Viatores 1964, 238)	518300 2437500
11317	Roman coins found by metal detector user on Sandhills.	517800 249200
11318	Roman cemetery, Tower Hill, removed by quarrying. Many 19 th century references	517700 248700
11319	Roman finds, Sandy-Potton railway, including hoard of three Gallo-Roman bronze bowls found in 1856	no map reference
11320	Roman finds/Iron Age coins, north of Sandy, many 19 th century discoveries north-east of Tower Hill and on northern slopes of Caesar's Camp	no map reference
11321	Roman coins, Sandy Lodge	no map reference
11322	Roman finds, Hazells Hedge, along course of Roman road to Godmanchester	518000 250000
11323	Belgic and Roman finds, 5 Stratford Road. Small watching brief of excavation for house extension in 1979 (A Simco). Two trenches. Iron Age pit, and unstratified Roman finds	518060 248320
11324	Roman finds, miscellaneous and unprovenanced. A large number of finds, mostly from 19 th century, with references. Includes plaque of Mercury, cart and horse fittings, anvil, etc	no map reference
13712	Cropmark, west of Galley Hill. Three sides of rectangular feature. Uncertain validity	518410 247850
13714	Cropmark, Chesterfield. Square enclosure with two adjoining circular features. Uncertain validity	518200 248150
13715	Cropmark, Chesterfield. Three closely associated rectangular features. Uncertain validity	518200 248250



13719	Cropmark, west of Chesterfield. Rectangular feature. Uncertain validity	517800 248200
13729	Sandy Warren. Area E of Chesterfield and Galley Hill. 1300 acres, part of Sandy Manor in 1670	no map reference
14816	Roman coins, Stratford Road, 3-6 bronze coins found by metal detector in topsoil	no map reference
16033	Celtic silver coin of Cunobelinus, found by metal detector at 57 Cambridge Road in 1984	
16116	Roman skeleton, 13 The Avenue, BCAS project WB172	

Table 1. HER finds and sites

3.5 Geophysical Survey

In 1996 a geophysical survey of part of Chesterfield was commissioned by Bedfordshire County Council and undertaken by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford (GSB 1996). About two hectares were covered by the gradiometry survey and one hectare by the resistance survey (the two areas partially overlapping). Extremely high responses were obtained, with indications of streets/roads, enclosures, large pits and buildings. In particular, the greatest density of readings appears to suggest that the large rectangular cropmark visible in the oblique aerial photograph (see discussion below) extends into this area, and indeed that many buildings and other archaeological features are situated within it.

The location of the gradiometry survey and a representation of evidence it provided, combined with the aerial photographic evidence is shown in Fig 4. Together the aerial and geophysical evidence put a different complexion on this central part of the site, providing a context within which to view the results of individual excavations.

3.6 Aerial Photographs

A series of vertical aerial photographs showing Chesterfield and the surrounding area can be consulted in the Bedfordshire County Council HER. These are tabulated below.

Year	Scale	Type	Film/Run/Photo
1996	1:10,000	Col	Aerofilms/96/C/565, Beds, Run 19, 1693
1991	1:10,000	Col	Aerofilms/91/Col/114, Beds, Run 19, 1396
1986	1:10,000	B/w	HSL UK 86 94 Run 6, 9223
1981	1:10,000	B/w	HSL Beds 81 1 136 , Run 6, 8690
1976	1:10,000	B/w	HSL UK 76 25, Run 5, 1866

Table 2. Vertical aerial photographs

On some of these photographs, the Roman road is visible in places as a pale, linear parch-mark crossing Chesterfield. Other cropmarks have been identified but these are likely to represent the remains of agricultural buildings and other modern features (HER 13712, 13714, 13715). More work on the vertical photographs is required.



Year	Type	Film/Run/Photo
1984	Oblique B/w	Northants CC, SF 2503/25

Table 3. Oblique aerial photographs

The one oblique photograph taken of the north part of Chesterfield in 1984 shows three sides of a large rectangle with rounded corners orientated roughly north-south. Considering that the photo was taken in July, and that the cropmark shows up as light rather than dark, it seems likely that it represents a pattern of streets rather than a ditched enclosure. The rectangle is about 120m wide on its southern side, and can be seen to extend northwards into the field where the geophysical survey took place. As already noted, it seems to fit with patterns noted in the geophysical data, which picked up indications of streets on roughly the same orientation (for a rough synthesis, see Fig 4). Some re-interpretation of the site in the light of this evidence might be necessary.

3.7 Maps

The Sandy Enclosure Award map of 1799 (BLARS MA 14) shows Chesterfield as it was before the construction of the Great Northern Railway, extending all the way to the foot of Galley Hill. The extensive use of the field for market gardening is demonstrated by the division of much of the field into allotments (Fig 5). The Chesterfield allotments are also shown on the Sandy Parish map of 1850 (BLARS PM/1/1).

The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884 shows the damage caused to the site by the building of the railway cuttings, station, bridge and marshalling yards. The quarrying of Tower Hill for ballast, which effectively destroyed the main part of the Roman cemetery, is also shown. The area of sand quarrying has been greatly enlarged by the time of the 2nd Edition OS map, 1901. The 3rd Edition OS map was published in 1926.

The value of taking recent maps into consideration was shown by the work of Mr Alan Johnston, who reconstructed the progress of quarrying from 1850-1910 (summarised in D E Johnson 1974). This enabled him to work out a rough sequence/spatial development of burial phases from the late Iron Age through to the early Saxon period.

3.8 Metal Detector Finds

A few metal detector finds have been reported to museums (see HER 11317, 14816, 16033), mostly in the early 1980s. Perhaps the most important find was the late Roman pewter dish found, exact location unknown, at Bank's Farm, Sandy (Greep 1984). Nevertheless, the number of recorded finds in no way corresponds to the considerable amount of metal detector activity that has undoubtedly taken place in Sandy over the last 30 years. The absence of a basic record of metal detector finds means that this remains one of the great untapped sources of potential information on Roman Sandy.



3.9 **Museum Archives**

A considerable number of artefacts from Sandy have found their way into Bedford Museum, the University of Cambridge Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, the Ashmoleum Museum in Oxford and the British Museum. A brief search of the Cambridge museum archive, for example, revealed 50-60 relevant entries. Some of these have documentary information associated with them, hinting at excavations otherwise unrecorded and long since forgotten. Many discoveries probably remain to be made in museum basements.

3.10 **Summary of Main Sources**

The most complete account of early finds is to be found in Page (1908) and Johnston (1974). Johnston summarises work up to 1974. The Viatores (1964) deal extensively with the Roman roads of Bedfordshire, including those of Sandy. Recent excavations within the Municipal Cemetery are unpublished but summarised in several papers by Dawson (1990, 1991, 1992), who has also reassessed the status of the Roman town (Dawson 1995). The Victoria County History volume II (Page 1908) has a section on Roman discoveries at Sandy with a comprehensive list of early references, as well as a section on the medieval village of Sandy and its development in post-medieval times into a small market town. A good general background and a gazetteer of the Roman period in Bedfordshire, as well as a critique of the Viatores' work, is provided by Simco (1984). Albion (formerly BCAS) have produced reports on several excavations and, together with Bedford Museum, hold most of the excavation records. The HER contains numerous entries about finds and sites in the area. Other important evidence is supplied by the geophysical survey (GSB 1996) and the one oblique aerial photograph (HER 444). Supplementary evidence is provided by vertical aerial photos, museum archives and maps. Bedfordshire and Luton Records and Archives Service hold maps of Sandy dating from 1799.

A popular booklet, *Roman Sandy*, outlining the excavated evidence within a broad account of life in a Roman town was published by BCAS with Sandy Town Council and Lafarge Redland Aggregates (Dawson 1997). Paintings in the book are from reconstructions in oils by the artist Peter Froste. Originals are held by BCAS.



4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMAN TOWN

4.1 *The Background of Prehistoric Settlement*

Sandy is rich in prehistoric remains dating from the Mesolithic period onwards. Dyer (1971) discovered a Mesolithic flint scatter within or near the Sandy Lodge hillfort. An assemblage of microliths, cores, blades and flakes (HER 1165) is now in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Stone Axe Farm on Stratford Road is said to be named after stone axes discovered in the fields (HER 2434), although these may have been sandstone slabs ploughed up from the Roman road. There are Neolithic axes from the Sandy region in the collections of Bedford Museum. An archer's bracer or wrist-guard of polished blue green slate, and of classic Beaker type, was found near Tower Hill (HER 1505) – perhaps indicating that the origins of the cemetery might be very old indeed. A Bronze Age awl has also been found in Sandy, the exact location unknown (HER 4347).

Up to seven early Iron Age pots are reported to have been found in a garden on the slopes of Caesar's Camp hillfort in 1905 (University of Cambridge Museum archives). Other early Iron Age artefacts were found during excavations at Sandy Lodge hillfort by Dyer (1971).

The existence of three hillforts illustrates the importance of Sandy in the Iron Age period. By far the largest is Caesar's Camp (HER 442) which has a single rampart and ditch enclosing an area of about seven acres immediately to the north of the Roman town. The fort commands views not only over the Ivel and Great Ouse valleys to the west, but also over the gap in the hills to the east, and may have been specifically sited to control this route. The site has been described as a Belgic hillfort (Hawkes and Dunning 1930) although there has been no archaeological excavation at the site to substantiate this.

Galley Hill hillfort (HER 445) and Sandy Lodge hillfort (HER 1164) are both situated on hill-spurs just to the east of the southern tip of the old Chesterfield. They are clearly visible from each other, separated only by a dry valley. Again, it is worth pointing out that they overlook the north-south routeway (later the Roman road). Galley Hill hillfort is a small promontory fort of rectangular shape with single rampart and ditch. It has never been excavated. Sandy Lodge hillfort is smaller still and was subject to limited excavation by Dyer (1971). He argued that the fort was unfinished. Only sherds of early Iron Age date were discovered.

Numerous Iron Age coins have been found in Sandy. These include HER 447, 11320 and 16033. Many of the coins are from the reign of Cunobelinus. It has been suggested that Sandy may have been the site of a tribal mint (Dawson 1997).



Evidence for a late Iron Age cemetery (HER 1501) was found to the north-east of the Roman cemetery. The remains of five vessels (including three pedestal urns) were discovered 'below the south-west pavement of Potton Road, close to the Cemetery Keeper's Cottage'. One of the urns contained calcined bones. Also found was an ibex-headed pin and numerous other artefacts, some of which are now in Bedford Museum, although it is not clear if these are from the same place.

An Iron Age pit was found on Cox Hill (HER 443) and a large hearth of similar date on The Pinnacle (HER 1496). Other Iron Age finds from Sandy are listed under HER 1996.

Excavations at The Bungalow on Stratford Road (Johnston 1955, 1974) uncovered an Iron Age ditch sealed beneath the Roman road. Occupation evidence was found on the lip of the ditch. The occupation ceased and the ditch was backfilled when the road was built in the 1st century AD (HER 11311). An Iron Age pit was also found on the watching brief at 5 Stratford Road (HER 11323). In the Municipal Cemetery excavations, the possible drip-gully of an Iron Age round-house was discovered, although as the excavator points out, this could actually be Roman in date (Dawson 1995). Also found was a silted up stream course that served as a place of deposition for over thirty Iron Age coins. Deposition of coins and other artefacts in watery contexts was a common feature of religion in the Iron Age. It is thought that the stream may have been situated near to a focus of religious activity, such as a grove or temple (Dawson and Maull 1992).

The fact that evidence for Iron Age occupation tends to underlie the Roman stratigraphy in several different places perhaps indicates that the settlement has its origin before the Conquest, and there have even been suggestions (yet to be substantiated by hard evidence) that a small oppidum may have existed here.

4.2 The Roman Period (AD43 - AD410)

4.2.1 Roads and Streets

Johnston states that more is known about the roads at Sandy than any other aspect of the Roman town (Johnston 1974). Certainly the roads and trackways have continued to receive attention. Simco (1984) devoted an entire section of her *Survey of Roman Bedfordshire* to roads and more recently Dawson's (1995) reappraisal of Sandy also discussed the layout of the roads and streets. A small figure in the back of the popular publication *Roman Sandy* shows finds from the Roman town in relation to the main roads and streets, although it is not stated on what evidence this layout is based. Some of the stretches of roads shown are clearly hypothetical, joining up known stretches.

The Roman road running between Baldock and Godmanchester via Sandy, (Viatores Route No. 22), is a side road of Ermine Street (Viatores Route No. 22). This road approaches the Roman town from the SSE and then turns through approximately 30° and heads NNE towards Godmanchester. The road shows up on some vertical aerial photos as a faint parch-mark running through



Chesterfield. A ford is thought to have existed over a stream (its course now diverted) at Stratford.

In 1955 Johnston excavated a section through the road at The Bungalow on the east side of the current Stratford Road to the south-east of the Municipal Cemetery. A cambered, metalled road at least 5.18m wide was revealed, comprising successive layers of rammed gravel 0.36m thick overlying a foundation layer of larger stones. A single sherd of samian ware pottery of the 1st century AD was recovered from the lowest layer, dating the construction of the road. A contemporary gravel layer, 1.83m wide and c.0.18m thick, was uncovered on its west side. The road directly overlay and sealed a ditch and other evidence of occupation from the pre-Roman/ early Roman period (Johnston 1964).

A trench excavated through the northern stretch of this road at Hazells Hedge revealed a layer of red sand, 5in. (c.0.12m) thick, overlying a clay foundation (Johnston 1974).

A Roman road (Viatores Route No. 224) heads west from Sandy towards Bedford. This route has been largely recognised from parallel cropmarks identified on aerial photographs. The fact that no metalling is visible on the aerial photographs has led to the suggestion that this may be a prehistoric cursus monument. Simco suggests that either this route was never finished or that it was laid out by a member of the local aristocracy rather than the central authorities and that it may have failed to attract traffic (Simco 1984).

The Roman road between Sandy and Ravensden (Viatores Route No. 225) has been dismissed by Simco (1974) on the grounds that it exhibits little sign of Roman engineering. It should be noted, however, that sections of route 222 (above) and route 224 do not appear to have been surfaced. Metalled surfaces have been observed on the line of route 224 and route 225 in pipe trenches in the Cemetery Keeper's garden, the Railway Station and the Fire Station (Johnston 1974). Dawson suggests that these may be streets laid out within the Roman town. A metalled surface laid out at right-angles to the Godmanchester Road (route 222) was uncovered in the Municipal Cemetery (Johnston 1974 and Simco 1984). This surface may continue the alignment of the disputed route 224. It is almost certainly one of the town's internal streets.

A street aligned roughly NE-SW was uncovered during the excavation within the Municipal Cemetery. The metalled road was between 2m-4m across and had been resurfaced on several occasions (Dawson 1995). Although this road is mentioned in several publications, there is no published description of its construction.

Evidence from the oblique aerial photograph combined with that from geophysical survey suggests that the main north-south road splits into two to run either side of a rectangular area of dense building and other settlement activity, with a cross-street linking the two (Fig 4). The rectangular area enclosed by the streets may represent the original core of the town, with other



streets constructed as the town expanded to the north and west (and perhaps also to the south and east).

4.2.2 Defences

Despite antiquarian references to stone walls, probably confusing the lowland settlement and cemetery site with Caesar's Camp on the nearby hills (Simco 1984), there is no indication that the Roman town at Sandy was ever fortified.

4.2.3 Buildings

Much of the evidence for buildings within the Roman town is fragmentary and inferred. Building rubble in the form of brick, tile and sandstone has been observed in the Municipal Cemetery. Evidence of burning and sandstone rubble associated with the east-west 'street' may be the remains of a roadside building. Sandstone blocks associated with metalling to the north-east of the modern chapel may also represent the remains of a Roman building. A possible floor of flat sandstone slabs was uncovered in the south of the Municipal Cemetery. Building rubble, comprising sandstone blocks, flue tile and roof tile was recovered from the surface of Chesterfield to the east of the Municipal Cemetery. These observations are catalogued in Johnston (1974).

The recent excavations in the Municipal Cemetery uncovered occupation from the late Iron Age to the late Roman period (Dawson 1990, 1991, 1995). Several building types were discovered. The earliest consisted of post-built frames founded on wall plates or sleeper beams set in to the soft sand. Later buildings appear to have been founded on pad-stones or dwarf walls of sandstone blocks (Dawson 1995). Most of the buildings comprised only a single room although a few two-roomed examples were uncovered. The excavator suggested they were mainly thatched (Dawson 1997). However, thousands of fragments of *tegula*, *imbrex*, box-flue and brick tile were found in the excavations.

Evidence for a more substantial building was discovered in a single trench to the south-east of the Municipal Cemetery during digging of a cesspit (BCAS 1994). The remains of a wall aligned roughly NW to SE was uncovered in the northern end of the trench. The wall survived to a height of 0.95m and consisted of seven courses of dressed sandstone, bonded by lime mortar, set in a foundation trench. Pottery sherds recovered from the backfill of the foundation trench date to the late 2nd or early 3rd century AD. Patchy surfaces were laid over the backfilled foundation trench adjacent to the wall. Structural and domestic debris was recovered from layers overlying the surfaces and abutting the wall.

The position of Sandy between two major Roman towns, has led to the suggestion (Dawson 1997) that the building may be a *mansio* – an Imperial posting station for the Roman postal service, the *Cursus Publicus*. This inference has little hard evidence to support it, however.

Geophysical survey (GSB 96) located several negative anomalies that are likely to be walls of buildings, as well as a number of ditches which may



represent boundaries of building plots. The area of greatest settlement density is probably enclosed by the rectangular pattern of streets revealed by the aerial photographic and geophysical evidence, in the fields to the south of the Municipal Cemetery.

4.2.4 Trade and Industry

Johnston suggested that Sandy was a centre for consumption and redistribution (Johnston 1974). Dawson refined this argument in the light of the evidence of the supposed mansio. The town may also have acted as a market centre for the redistribution of locally produced goods, though this is not necessarily the case (Dawson 1995). The range of imported wares found at Sandy includes ivory from Italy, silver coins from Trier in Germany, pottery from Gaul and the Rhineland and quernstones from Eifel in Germany. Other pottery found on the site was produced in Oxfordshire, Hadham in Hertfordshire and the Nene Valley (Dawson 1997).

Nearly 60 fragments of quernstone and 12 honestones found in the Municipal Cemetery excavations were examined by the Ancient Monuments Laboratory. These were shown to be of many different types of stone originating from a wide variety of sources, the majority of which were some distance from the find site (Williams 1991).

The presence of quernstones, iron tools and the predominance of spelt grain has led to the suggestion that Roman Sandy retained a largely agricultural character (Dawson 1995). It has been suggested that “a quantity of charred wheat ... amounting to almost 30 quarters” (380kg), found during gravel extraction, may have been the stock of a corn-merchant destroyed by accidental fire (Johnston 1974 and Simco 1984). A possible bronze steelyard weight may have been used to check the weight of grain, or other goods (Simco 1984). Grape pips found amongst other seeds suggest the presence of a local vineyard (Dawson 1997).

Dawson has suggested that there is evidence for zoning within the part of the town uncovered during the excavations in the Municipal Cemetery, although this material remains unpublished (Dawson 1995). The stream bed running alongside the south side of the road was infilled with butchery waste and industrial ash. Dawson suggests that the stream was gradually filled in over a period of time before houses were built over this part of the site in the 4th century AD (*ibid*). The clear implication is that this part of the site was used for industrial purposes prior to the 4th century when it underwent a change of use. The possibility that material was introduced from elsewhere on the site to create the foundations for buildings is not discussed.

Indications of iron-working in the form of hearth bottoms, slag and hammer-scale, were all found during the excavations in the Municipal Cemetery. Crucible fragments found amongst house debris attest to the casting of bronze while silver objects awaiting recasting indicate silver smithing (Dawson 1997), although the evidence is largely unpublished. Johnston suggests that miscellaneous bronze objects among the known finds from Sandy have the



appearance of scrap metal. The remains of a hearth associated with vitreous slag and a possible kiln or oven have been observed elsewhere in the Municipal Cemetery (Johnston 1974). A hoard of ironwork discovered at Sandy between 1893 and 1895 has been interpreted as a smith's hoard (Manning 1964). The exact provenance of the finds is no longer known. Much of the metalwork includes horse trappings, such as a curry comb handle and a farrier's buttress, and also cart fittings such as a lynch pin, axle guard and wheel hub.

Other objects possibly reflect a diverse range of trades. There is an unusual iron chisel, probably for woodworking, a cobbler's last, and an anvil. A mower's anvil, used for beating dents out of the scythe whilst working in the field, reflects the agricultural nature of Roman Sandy. An iron key may have been used in any context. With the exception of the anvil, which is now lost, the iron objects are all deposited in the British Museum. A probable 4th century date has been suggested for them (Manning 1964). Manning allowed the possibility that this hoard was a votive deposit (*ibid*). Despite the presence of the anvil, Simco (1984) suggests that the lack of ironworking tools in the hoard means that it is more likely to be a ritual deposition.

A lead pig, or ingot, "shaped like the prow of a boat," reportedly found in Sandy, indicates lead-working, such as the production of lead coffins which would have been made close to their eventual resting place (Johnston 1974 and Simco 1984). At least two lead coffins have been recovered from Sandy (see below). Unfortunately all of these lead items have been lost.

Evidence of horn-working, in the form of cattle, sheep and goat horn-cores deposited in a pit, has been recovered from one of the graves in the Municipal Cemetery (*ibid*). Carved bone pins were found during the excavations in the Municipal Cemetery (Dawson 1997) and a carved bone comb is known from the nearby site of Warren Villas (Dawson 1995).

Spindle whorls, weaving tablets and needles found during the Municipal Cemetery excavations probably indicate home production rather than specialised weaving industry (Dawson 1997). The cobbler's last may suggest the presence of a professional boot or shoemaker in the town (Simco 1984).

An oculist's stamp from Sandy records the names of Gaius Valerius Amandus and Gaius Valerius Valentinus. These suppliers of eye ointments were probably either brothers or father and son. Their tripartite names suggest that they were Roman citizens (Simco 1984).

4.2.5 Ritual and Religion

Evidence for a religious focus at Sandy in the late Iron Age, in the form of coins ritually deposited in the stream bed, has already been discussed. It seems probable that the Roman settlement would have had its own temple, though this has yet to be found by excavation.



Ritual activity may be indicated by the hoard of bronze vessels (Kennett 1971) and the hoard of ironwork (Manning 1964) found in the vicinity. A circular bronze plaque showing the head of Mercury was found in 1890 (Simco 1984, 58). This has also been interpreted as the head of Medusa or Bacchus. It is usually identified as a 'phalera' – part of ceremonial armour worn during parades. An intriguing alternative suggestion, however, is that it was fixed to the back of a funeral car, which was buried with persons of distinction according to Celtic custom (Heichelherm 1946).

The large fragment of relief sculpture found in the Municipal Cemetery excavations (Appleton and Dawson 1995) could date from any time between the 1st and 4th centuries. Carved from local sandstone, it measures 1.16m x 0.76m and depicts three figures. One of these could represent Venus, or a Celtic counterpart. Attendant figures depicted, it has been suggested, may be genii.

The lower part of a portable clay figurine, again thought to represent Venus, was also found. While the larger sculptured slab probably belonged to a temple, the smaller figurine may have been part of a household shrine. Another find was the ivory panel of a small casket, showing a human arm emerging from a pattern of oak leaves and acorns - almost certainly a depiction of the Roman god Bacchus. Religious images are also found on other personal possessions such as brooches and rings. One gilded brooch of the early 3rd century has an engraving of a winged Victory, the consort of Mars. The introduction of Christianity is represented by the engraved *Chi Rho* symbol on a late 4th century nail cleaner. Another intaglio ring, found at Sandy in the 18th century but now lost, was said to have borne the image of a flaming cross together with the inscription 'In hoc signo vincas' - 'in this sign may you conquer' – a popular Christian motto in late Roman times (Simco 1984, 60).

4.2.6 Burials

The principal burial evidence derives from the 19th century gravel workings on Tower Hill. The available evidence of the sequence and distribution of discoveries made during quarrying is summarised by Johnston (1974, 40-1). Large numbers of both cremation and inhumation burials were found. This suggests that the cemetery was used for a long period of time, with the earlier cremations dating from the first and second centuries gradually being replaced by inhumations. Two of the inhumations were in lead coffins (Simco 1984, 115).

Burials have also been found within the Municipal Cemetery to the east of Tower Hill in the northern corner of Chesterfield, showing that the Roman cemetery extended into the settlement area. BCAS excavations in this area uncovered 29 inhumations, mostly dating from the 3rd -4th centuries. Some of these were buried in the upper fills of silted up ditches, perhaps indicating that burial space was scarce. The most common grave goods were pottery vessels, which may have contained food and drink. Bracelets were the most frequent kind of personal ornament.



More recently, evidence of a roadside cemetery has been found alongside Stratford Road to the south of the main settlement (BCAS 1999). These inhumations are thought likely to date to the late Roman period.

4.3 Continuity into the Anglo-Saxon Period?

In the Chesterfield area there is no apparent evidence from the most recent excavations for continuity of settlement into the Saxon period. It would appear that the buildings had fallen out of use by the 5th century, though a Saxon presence is attested by urns found in the area of the present railway bridge (HER 432, 9821). At least thirteen Saxon urns, as well as two knives, a bone pin and a silver bracelet, are known to have come from Sandy. The urns are dated to the 5th and 6th centuries. For a full account and further references, refer to Kennett (1970).

The possibility that ephemeral evidence for post-Roman occupation could have been missed is discussed in the following section. However this may be, the presence of both Roman and Saxon burials in such close proximity does imply some continuity of settlement in the transitional Roman/Saxon period, and Sandy should be identified as having considerable potential for shedding light on one of the least understood periods of British history. The conventional division of the past into 'Roman' and 'Saxon' is possibly too simplistic to adequately frame evidence from what was probably a very complex period of transition and change. Issues concerning this transitional period need to be addressed by future excavations.

There is little evidence of Sandy in the middle Saxon period. What is certain is that by the late Saxon period, settlement was based mainly on the other side of the Ivel, roughly in the area of the present church. The Domesday Survey of 1086 records a manor of 16 hides, with land for 16 ploughs. St Swithun's Church (HER 5396) is mainly 15th century but was first mentioned in 1240. An earlier church may have stood on the site in Saxon times.

Between the church and the river is an earthwork known as 'Danish Camp' (HER 3033), which may be the site of an old manor - although Hall (1984) believes it to be a relatively recent flood barrier. A more probable site for a tenth century Danish fortification is Beeston Berries, just on the other side of the river from Chesterfield. The earthworks have now largely been ploughed out or otherwise removed.

4.4 Summary of Town Development

Sandy was an important tribal centre of the Catevellauni in the late Iron Age period. The level ground at the foot of the hills, now Chesterfield, was almost certainly occupied to some degree in the late Iron Age, and the north-south road was perhaps a major trackway at this time. The formal construction and metalling of this road in the 1st century AD probably provided the impetus for the growth of an urban centre here, though it could have developed from a pre-existing proto-urban centre. The original nucleus of settlement may have been the rectangular area bordered on at least three sides by streets, as shown up by



aerial and geophysical evidence. Certainly the road seems to have divided into two to run either side of this rectangle.

Other streets were constructed as part of the expansion of the town during the second, third and fourth centuries AD. There was also considerable roadside development to the south of the main settlement, along the course of what is now Stratford Road. The town probably had a marketplace, a temple, and – it has been suggested – a mansio. On its north-western side was the cemetery. The exact limits of the town are not known, but it exhibits a high degree of planning in what little is known about its layout. At the end of the 4th century the character of occupation seems to have changed, with activity of a more agricultural nature continuing into the first part of the 5th century. The site seems to have gone completely out of use by the 6th century. However, traces of post-Roman occupation on Roman towns are notoriously difficult to identify, and it is possible that evidence has not been recognised. Some continuity of settlement in the general area is indicated by early Anglo-Saxon cremations in the cemetery, but the actual location of occupation is not known.



5 ASSESSMENT OF ROMAN SANDY'S IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

5.1 *Archaeological Potential*

5.1.1 State of Preservation of the Remains

Damage has occurred to archaeological deposits through several agencies. It is probable that the remains of the town were ploughed in Saxon and early medieval times. From the late medieval period on, parts of the site have been intensively cultivated by market gardeners - some of whom used deep trenching and double-digging techniques. Between the 17th and 19th centuries many antiquarians visited the site. They are likely to have carried out their own unrecorded excavations, as well as encouraged the market gardeners to search for and retain coins and other artefacts.

The most damage was done, however, by the construction of the main GNR and the Sandy to Potton district railway lines in the mid-19th century. This cut a swathe through the western half of the settlement area. The construction of the station and the railway bridge destroyed much of the Belgic and Saxon cemeteries. The quarrying away of Tower Hill as ballast took away the principal part of the Roman cemetery.

Since the Municipal Cemetery was founded in the northern part of Chesterfield in 1901 there has been systematic damage by grave-digging (though some of this is recorded). The 1987-1990 excavations cleared a small area of the cemetery site. Metal detector users have probably scoured most of the area of the Roman town, though the technical limitations of their machines mean they have probably not often penetrated through the protective cloak of hillwash material (see discussion below) to reach undisturbed archaeological stratigraphy.

Large sections of the main north-south Roman road were apparently removed during the early part of this century because the metalling was proving a major obstacle to ploughing. Chesterfield was last deep-ploughed in 1972-3. However, Mr Gurney found few signs of occupation debris at that time (notes in HER 444) and it may well be that the damage to the site through ploughing has been over-estimated.

The accumulation of colluvial material (hillwash) probably began soon after the abandonment of the Roman town. A depth of between 0.8m and 1.5 m has been encountered on all excavations in the Chesterfield/Stratford Road area. The layer was thought to be fairly uniform and has often been found to contain unstratified Roman deposits. It has been suggested that the accumulation was building up at the same time as ploughing was taking place. However, the upper layers of the Roman archaeology seem relatively undamaged by ploughing. Furthermore, a recent evaluation at Woodside Farm has suggested that there may be more structure to the lower levels of the colluvium than previously thought (Albion 2002). Is it possible that Sandy has the



unrecognised equivalent (a much lighter variant due to local soil conditions) of post-Roman 'dark earth' deposits known from other Roman towns?

At any rate, the hillwash provides a thick protective cloak which seals much of the site of the Roman town. Excavation has proven that, despite the damage caused by the agencies described above, complex stratigraphy (often well over 1m thick) from all phases of Roman occupation survives. The parts of the site not damaged by railway construction and quarrying can, therefore, be considered to be in a remarkably good state of preservation. The often-stated argument that the site was badly damaged by market gardening (Johnston 1974) should perhaps be challenged.

In sum, excavations have demonstrated that traces of a large proportion of the area of a Roman small town are buried and preserved, with over a metre of Roman stratigraphy surviving beneath a similar depth of colluvial material. The survival of features (including evidence of structures) is excellent. There are good conditions for the preservation of metal artefacts, animal and human bone, as well as charred environmental evidence. The site is well-drained, however, so the potential for finding waterlogged deposits is low. An assessment of the environmental potential of the site, on the basis of the results of excavation, is provided by Robinson in BCAS (1996).

5.1.2 Potential for Further Archaeological Work

Given its excellent state of preservation, the site of the Roman town has great potential for further exploration through excavation. All the major research questions relating to the development of Roman small towns identified by A F Brown (1995), T Brown (1995), Burnham (1986) and Millet (1990) can be addressed. Areas that need further research include:

- The origin of the settlement (and perhaps the north-south routeway) in late Iron Age times, and the possibility that there was an oppidum here prior to the Roman Conquest. The three hillforts nearby have yet to be subjected to a proper study.
- The transition from the late Iron Age to the Roman period.
- The development of the town through all phases of Roman occupation.
- The zoning of craft and trade activities within the town.
- The relationship between the Roman town, its rural hinterland, and the wider region.
- The network of Roman roads leading to and from the town.
- The economic, religious, social, agricultural and military functions of such small towns, and their relationship to the wider road network.
- The nature and causes of the decline of the town towards the end of Roman times.
- The relationship between the late Roman phase of settlement and the presence of early Saxon settlers/mercenaries/*federati*.
- The transition into the late Antiquity and early Saxon period, where there seems to have been a shift away from urban living towards a more rural economy. In particular, there is the question of whether previously unseen



evidence for continued occupation of the site exists, perhaps within the lower layers of the colluvium.

- The landscape archaeology of the Sandy area as a whole, taking into account the Iron Age hillforts on the ridge and the Saxon settlement on the other side of the river, the possible Danish camp at Beeston Berries, as well as the Roman town and roads. There is also considerable potential for the use of environmental evidence in reconstructing landscape and climate history.
- Comparison of evidence from Sandy with other small Roman towns, especially those at Dunstable and Kempston.

5.2 Archaeological Components

The principal components identified below are shown in Fig 6. Although these are the main areas where archaeological evidence is likely to survive, the general area around the Roman town is also of importance. Outlying farms and side-branches of the Roman road system may be encountered almost anywhere in the modern town of Sandy, for example.

- **Component 1. North-south road**
Metalled in the 1st century AD, the route through the gap in the hills was probably important in late Iron Age times. The settlement itself grew up around and along the road, with side streets leading off it. Much of the road surface may have been removed earlier this century, to facilitate ploughing. Note that, while the existence of this road is beyond doubt, all other roads identified by the Viatores group are conjectural - needing to be verified through excavation.
- **Component 2. Cemetery**
This has been largely removed by quarrying. There seems to have been no definite boundary, however, and a number of burials have been found in the area of the settlement core (3) and along the roadside (4). The main part of the Roman cemetery is thought to have been on Tower Hill, with late Iron Age burials to the north-east and early Saxon burials to the north.
- **Component 3. Settlement core**
The limits of the settlement are not known, particularly on its southern side. However, it is likely that the town may be centred on the large rectangular-shaped pattern of streets identified by the oblique aerial photo and the geophysical survey. A particularly strong set of responses was encountered during the survey, and it seems probable that substantial stone buildings are located here.
- **Component 4. Street grid**
The basic framework of a street grid seems to be indicated by geophysical and other evidence, raising the possibility that the settlement, like larger towns, is divided into *insulae*. Further work is required to establish the extent of the grid.
- **Component 5. Roadside settlement and burials**



The area along the Stratford Road to the south of the settlement core has produced a number of burials and other evidence, suggesting that the settlement/cemetery extended alongside the nearby Roman road.

Many of these questions can be addressed, not only through more excavation, but also through further analysis of already excavated data. The investigation of the Municipal Cemetery site is not fully published. An appraisal of the work that remains to be done has, however, been produced (BCAS 1996).

One of the characteristics of the Roman town at Sandy, recognised since the days of the early antiquarians, is the sheer quality of finds. As one expert from the Institute of Archaeology in Oxford said of the finds from the evaluation, “The quality and state of preservation of these artefacts leads one to expect that the results of widespread excavation would be sensational (a word not to be used lightly) in terms of finds of museum quality that are about certain to be recovered” (Martin Hensig, quoted in BCC 1988).

However, it is important to note that many objects originating from Sandy, in Bedford Museum, the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Ashmoleum Museum in Oxford and the British Museum remain to be fully catalogued and described. There is a wonderful opportunity, perhaps, for a postgraduate research project here.

The extensive assemblage of pottery from the excavations is the largest from any site in the county and clearly has the potential to contribute greatly to the refinement of the Bedfordshire Roman pottery type series. Another important assemblage is the large collection of coins. In particular, the large number of late Iron Age coins has been identified by Haselgrove (BCAS 1996) as having the potential to provide new information about ‘the denominational structure of base metal coinages during the reign of Tasciovanus and Cunobelinus’. The assemblage of 1st century brooches, which span the Iron Age/Roman boundary, and the assemblage of late Roman glass, have also been highlighted as of great research interest (*ibid*, 54).

Finds made by metal detector users have never been properly recorded. The site of the Roman town has attracted much metal detecting activity, and it is probably safe to assume that finds of great importance have been made, but at the time of writing Bedfordshire is not covered by any of the Portable Antiquity Officers recently appointed by English Heritage. This is another area identified as having great potential for further work.

The Chesterfield area has proved to be very responsive to geophysical techniques, despite the depth of colluvial material overlying archaeological structures and deposits. Like the excavation nearby, the survey proved that there is considerable survival of features such as streets, walls, buildings, pits and ditches. On their initial scanning of the site, GSB remarked that the responses were the strongest they had ever encountered in Bedfordshire. It could be argued that, because it is non-intrusive, geophysical survey is



preferable to excavation, unless archaeological stratigraphy is actually under threat.

Should Chesterfield (including the fields as far as the foot of Galley Hill) ever be ploughed, a programme of systematic fieldwalking could help to establish the approximate southern limits of settlement.

At present only the nearby Iron Age hillforts of Galley Hill (SAM 27164) and Sandy Lodge (SAM 27163) are protected as scheduled ancient monuments. There is clearly a case for the scheduling of the settlement core of the Roman town itself.



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