Some years ago, Nicholas Fuentes stated a case for Boudica’s last stand being possibly at Virginia Water. This drew a response from Graham Webster, who believed Mancetter, in the midlands, to be a more likely site. Support for each view has come from various authorities, for example Martin Henig for Virginia Water and Sheppard Frere for the Mancetter area. Yet neither suggestion is very satisfactory.

The case for Virginia Water rests largely on the belief that the Roman general, Suetonius Paulinus, had selected London as the point where his troops arriving from north Wales would rendezvous with the Second Legion from Exeter. However, Paulinus did not know the situation in London until he had made a dash to reconnoitre the situation there. He found it unsuitable. If he had used Watling Street, the dash was not through the midst of the revolt. London and Verulamium had not then fallen, though the countryside may have been hostile and the two towns were soon to fall.

Alternatively, the Second Legion may have been expected to use the Fosse Way and rendezvous in the midlands, where there were a number of military installations along Watling Street between Kincazton and Leicester. The base of the Fourteenth Legion was in this area. This would have enabled Paulinus, coming from north Wales, to concentrate his forces before engaging the enemy.

The case for Mancetter involves the rebels temporarily foregoing their profitable murderous plundering of Camulodunum, London, Verulamium and wherever else they could find Romans or collaborators. They would have had to flock up to a hundred miles northwards with their families to seek out Paulinus and his troops, at the behest of a consort queen of another tribe. Unlikely, no matter how inspiring a leader Boudica may have been.

Paulinus faced grave difficulties. He was very heavily outnumbered even when he concentrated all available men. He could not wait indefinitely for the Second Legion, as he had logistical difficulties, especially with food for his men. He needed a quick result. In such a situation the usual Roman strategy against an overwhelming number of quick elusive enemies, which the less mobile Roman legions found difficult to deal with, was to draw the enemy into a set decisive battle. This could be done by threatening their homelands whilst staying concentrated and choosing a site favourable to Roman arms and discipline. This Paulinus did successfully. He had probably moved along the early road that ran from Leicester to Camulodunum, perhaps picking up some men from the defeated Ninth Legion on the way. This strategy explains the presence of so many over-confident families witnessing the battle. It was fought on their own territory, not many miles away at Mancetter or Virginia Water. The description of the site given by Tacitus is much too vague for positive identification, but it may well have been in the Godmanchester – Great Chesterford area. It will probably never be identified on the ground, unless there is an unexpected archaeological discovery or a radical revision of the fruits of earlier excavations or fieldwork.

5. Tacitus Annals, 14.33.
13. Annals 14.34.