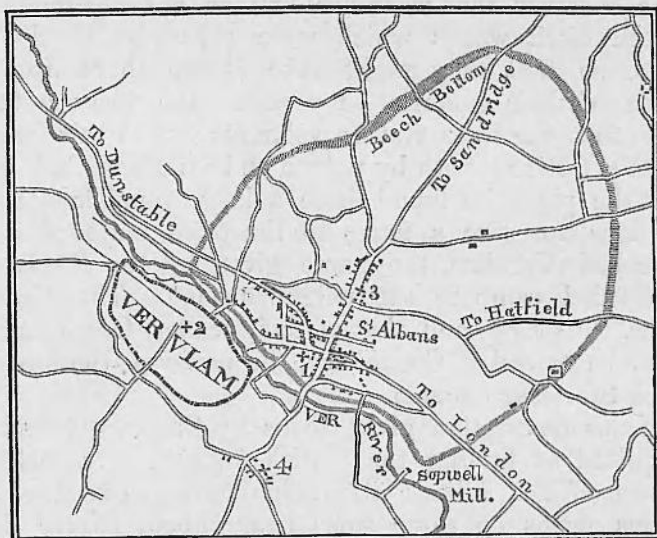


NOTICE OF VESTIGES NEAR ST. ALBANS, SUPPOSED TO INDICATE
THE SITE OF THE BRITISH TOWN OF CASSIVELAUNUS.

Communicated, through Mr. JAMES YATES, F.R.S., by Mr. SAMUEL SHARPE.

THE object of the following brief notice is to bring before the Archæological Institute my endeavours to trace the boundary of the British town of Cassivelaunus, within which St. Albans now stands, adjacent to the Roman Verulam.



Map of the British and Roman Towns of Verulam. From the Ordnance Survey.
Scale, one inch to a mile.

I was led to the inquiry by coming on the "Beech Bottom" in that neighbourhood—a very remarkable ditch, about a mile long, which may be compared to a deep railway cutting, with the earth thrown up sometimes on both sides, though chiefly southwards, or towards the town of St. Albans. Its depth may vary from twenty to thirty feet. Its banks are covered with woods. It is so obviously an

ancient military work that I was naturally led to search for traces of its continuation, with a view to learn what space it inclosed, and the conclusion that I came to was, that the fortified area was about two miles and a quarter long, and a mile and three quarters broad, inclosing the town of St. Albans. Its breadth is measured on the high road from London to Dunstable, and its length, at right angles to that road, by a line from the river, through the Abbey Church, towards the town of Sandridge.

Cæsar, in his Commentaries on the Gallic War, describes the city of Cassivelaunus as fortified by woods and marshes, and then holding a large number of men and cattle, that had come together there as a place of safety.¹ And, to explain what a British town was, to his Roman readers, who might expect to hear of buildings, or at least of dwellings of some kind, he observes, that when the Britons have fortified with bank and ditch woods which were otherwise nearly impassable, so that they might take refuge there from an incursion of their enemies, they called the place a town. He adds that the town of Cassivelaunus was in this manner excellently fortified, both by nature and art; and that when he took the place, he found there a large number of cattle. Cæsar does not give a name to the town, but it was probably called Verulam, the name given by the Romans to their fortified camp in the neighbourhood. The name of the tribe, the Cassii, and that of their leader, Cassivelaunus, may yet be traced in Cassiobury, the name of the hundred in which St. Albans stands.

With this description given to us by Cæsar, we need not be surprised at finding the British fortified area inclosing the town of St. Albans, the neighbouring common and numerous farms on three sides, being about twelve times the size of the well-walled Roman camp on the other side of the river.² Except at the "Beech Bottom" already described, the British ditch has very much been filled up, and its space reclaimed for the purposes of agriculture; and the yearly ploughing has given it an appearance of a natural depression in the ground. But here and there we find

¹ Bell. Gall. lib. v. c. xxi.

² A plan of the Roman city "Verolamium," taken by Stukeley in 1721, has been engraved by the Society of Anti-

quaries in the *Vetusta Monumenta*, vol. i. pl. 8, where many vestiges are shown that have subsequently disappeared.

traces of art sufficiently clear to enable us to follow the line of work on the map. From the west end of "Beech Bottom," it meets the river Ver, opposite to St. Michael's Church: this is its north-west limit. Its south-eastern side begins at Sopwell Mills, on the same river, passing by Camp House. It then turns to the north, crosses the Hatfield Road, and joins the northern end of "Beech Bottom" at the Sandridge Road. But this last portion was that which, from want of foot-paths, I was least able to trace with satisfaction. The fields on the side of the river Ver have evidently once been under water, as described by Cæsar, and would be so again if the channel of the river were neglected; but they were probably, by the help of art, covered with a greater depth of water than would naturally rest there: and the places where the river now falls, and is used to turn mills, are probably the spots where the British threw their banks across it, to deepen the marshes and strengthen their town.

Of the succession of ponds which we are thus making by conjecture, the upper one was long kept up by the Abbots of St. Albans, for the sake of the fish. But the town, on this side, was not fortified by its marshes only. The steep fall in the ground tells us that there was once a bank raised between the town and the river.

The accompanying map, copied from the Ordnance Survey, will best explain what has been said above. And, if it be granted that we have here correctly traced the boundaries of the town of Cassivelaunus, it will follow, that no work of the hand of man in the British Isles can boast of greater antiquity than the ditch called the "Beech Bottom." It is the only one that can be shown to have been made before Cæsar landed on our shores. After the place had been conquered by the Romans it can never have been worth while even to keep the entrenchment in repair.