

PART I: PREVIOUS WORK

CHAPTER 2

LOCATING CALLEVA

The Roman city of *Calleva Atrebatum* appears in all of our early geographic sources for Britain: in Ptolemy (2.3.2), the Antonine Itineraries (*Itinera* VII, XIII, XIV and XV) and the Ravenna Cosmography (106.32). Pinning the name ‘*Calleva Atrebatum*’ to the remains of the Roman walled town in the parish of Silchester may seem self-evident now, but its original attribution was very contentious. It was only settled in the early twentieth century, during the Society of Antiquaries’ excavations, when a dedicatory inscription was found erected on behalf of the ‘College of *peregrini* of *Calleva*’ (*RIB* 70). Until then the name of the site had been the subject of heated debate resulting from a lack of good cartographic evidence for the roads of Roman Britain, the influence of a forged historical document and the application of wishful thinking wanting to associate Silchester with major historic events. Wallingford, Henley, Farnham and Reading were all held up at various points as candidates to be the *real* site of *Calleva* the tribal capital of the Atrebates, while Silchester was given other names (Rickman 1840, 413).

Henry of Huntingdon (c. 1080–1160) initiated the many years of confusion with his *Historia Anglorum*, first drafted in 1129, but updated until his death. He was an important source for early Anglo-Norman history, but his earlier sections were somewhat less reliable, drawing upon the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* traditionally ascribed to Nennius. He examined Nennius’ list of the 22 cities of Britain and identified each one with what he supposed to be its medieval counterpart. Crucially among them he associated *Kair Segent* with Silchester (Nennius, *Hist. Brit.* 66a; Huntingdon 1996, 1.3). Today we would identify this placename with *Segontium* (modern Caernarfon in North Wales), but Henry’s attribution came from his reading of Julius Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*, wherein it was stated that five peoples sent embassies to Caesar while he was battling with Cassivellaunus in the south-east of Britain; one of these was the Segontiaci (*BG* 5.21), a people not otherwise mentioned in Ptolemy’s *Geography*. The temptation to situate them in the south-east was natural as this was where the narrative action was located, and given there was no other existing name for Roman Silchester, the ruined remains gained the title. The attribution brought to the site various mythological associations: Nennius had placed at *Caer Segont* the death and burial site of Constantius, father of Constantine the Great (Nennius, *Hist. Brit.* 25), to which Henry’s contemporary **Geoffrey of Monmouth** (c. 1100–c. 1155) added Constantine III’s elevation to the purple in A.D. 407 and the investiture of King Arthur (*Historia Regum Britanniae* 6.5; 9.1).

By the late sixteenth century this association had become established in historical thought and was enshrined in the publication by **William Camden** (1551–1623) of his magisterial work *Britannia* in 1586; he associated it with the name of *Vindomum/Vindomis* mentioned in the road-routes of the Antonine Itineraries, imagining it as the tribal city of the Segontiaci:

... toward the North side of the county, sometimes stood *Vindomum*, the chiefe citie of the Segontiaci, which casting off his own name hath taken the name of the Nation, like as *Lutetia* hath assumed unto it the name of the Parisians there inhabiting, for called it was by the Britans *Caer Segonte*, that is to say, *the Citie of the Segontiaci*, and so Ninnius in his catalogue

of cities named it. Wee at this day called it Silcester, and Higden seemeth to clepe it of the Britans *Britenden*. That this was the antient *Vindonum* I am induced to thinke by reason of the distance of *Vindonum* in Antoninus from *Gallena* or Guallenford and *Venta* or Winchester, and the rather because between this *Vindonum* and *Venta* there is still to bee seene a causey or street-way. (Camden 1610, 269–70)

Only a few demurred; the renowned astronomer, **Edmond Halley (1656–1742)** is the first recorded as questioning the views of the early antiquarians as early as 1718 when such topics were discussed at the Royal Society (Hearne 1902, 178), and he was clearly still bending ears about it four years later:

Dr Halley hath a strange, odd Notion that Stonehenge is as old, at least almost as old, as Noah's Floud. Dr Halley hath also an odd Notion, and he is very positive in it, that Silchester in Hampshire is Antoninus's *Calleva*. But when he is possess'd of a Notion, he very hardly quits it. (Hearne 1906, 350)

The first person to put this idea into print, however, was **John Horsley (c. 1685–1732)**, another Royal Society Fellow, who disagreed with the *Vindomis* identification and bemoaned that Camden had ever stamped his authority upon the suggestion (Horsley 1732, 458). Like Halley, he associated Silchester with the *Calleva Atrebatum* of *Itinera* VII, XIII, XIV and XV in the Antonine Itineraries, stating the claim in his posthumously-published book *Britannia Romana* as part of a detailed and thorough analysis of the geographical sources for Roman Britain (FIG. 2.1).

The first thing necessary to be done with respect to this *iter*, is to settle the terminus from whence it begins. This in my opinion appears so manifestly to be Silchester; that I cannot help expressing some surprize, that it should hitherto have escaped the observation of so many excellent antiquaries, and that I should now be singular in my opinion: however, I hope the evidence on the side of this sentiment will balance the general authority, that is opposite to it. (Horsley 1732, 457)

Unfortunately Halley's and Horsley's insights, built as they were upon a detailed reading of the Antonine Itineraries and other geographical writings, were immediately undermined by the excavation in the Forum at Silchester of a dedicatory inscription to none other than 'Hercules of the Segontiaci' (FIG. 3.5 inset lower left: *RIB* 67; Ward 1744–5). Given the two hypotheses that Silchester was either *Calleva* of the Atrebates or *Vindomis* of the Segontiaci, John Ward came heavily down on the latter side in publishing this new find. Silchester was now the home of the Segontiaci, the otherwise unknown tribe that had surrendered to Caesar (*BG* 5.21).

William Stukeley (1687–1765) chose to locate *Calleva* at Farnham (Stukeley 1724, 203), while he too christened Silchester as *Vindoma*. In order for this to fit he corrected (*sic*) his published transcriptions of the Antonine Itineraries XIII and XIV, substituting the name *Vindoma* for *Calleva* on these.

This interpretation might not have withstood scrutiny for too long had it not been for the addition to the weight of the evidence of a carefully conceived forgery. In 1747 **Charles Bertram (1723–1765)** alleged he had possession of a hitherto unknown work by **Richard of Cirencester (c. 1335–1401)** entitled *De Situ Britanniae* (Bertram 1757), preserving within it an account of a Roman general in Britain and 18 *itinera* comparable to those in the genuine Antonine Itineraries. These additional *itinera*, together with a description of Britain, appeared to confirm the identification of Silchester as *Vindomis*: 'On their confines, and bordering on the Thames, dwelt the Atrebates, whose primary city was *Calleba*. Below them, near the river *Kunetius* (Kennet) lived the Segontiaci, whose chief city was *Vindonum*' (*De Situ Britanniae* 6.10–11). A copy was sent to William Stukeley who was amongst those to give credence to the manuscript in a paper read to the Antiquaries in 1756, with the material being incorporated wholesale into the posthumous second edition of his *Itinerarium Curiosum* (Stukeley 1776; Rivet and Smith 1979, 182; Piggott 1985, 129–38).

This forgery misinformed and led astray a century of historical writings until it was exposed



FIG. 2.1 Horsley's interpretation of the Antonine Itineraries from *Britannia Romana* (1732, 380).

in the mid-nineteenth century by Karl Wex, Bernard Bolingbroke Woodward and John Mayor amongst others (Mayor 1869). However, it took a long time for the sheer scale of the infection of British historical writing to heal itself. Its impact lives on in the attribution of geographical names still in currency such as 'the Pennines' (an invention mimicking the Apennines of Italy). Ironically the forgery comprised a clever patchwork of information drawn from classical authors, together with Camden and Horsley. Had Horsley's initial identification been adopted the early scholarship surrounding Silchester might have got off to a better start.

The nineteenth century therefore dawned with Silchester generally understood to be *Vindomis* of the Segontiaci, imagined as the centre of one of four territories set up by the Belgae who had immigrated from Belgic Gaul and settled in the South-East; the others being *Venta* of the Belgae at Winchester, *Calleva* of the Atrebatas (variously located, but perhaps at the manor of Coley in Reading) and the invented *Bibracte* of the Bibrici from which was supposed to come the name Berkshire (Beeke 1806, 179–86). Dissenting voices favouring Horsley's identification of *Calleva*

with Silchester were uncommon; most adopted Silchester as ‘*Caer Segont* or *Segontium*’ following the discovery of the Hercules inscription (Kempe 1833, 122).

The breakthrough came with the development of field archaeology. First, Sir Richard Colt Hoare’s mapping of the Itineraries passing through Wiltshire convinced him Horsley had been right (Hoare 1821, 51–7). The problem was then approached from the London side when, in 1837, Sir Henry Ellis displayed to the Society of Antiquaries a survey that had been undertaken by Professor John Narrien from the Royal Military College at Sandhurst (Narrien 1836; 1837; Ellis 1838). This work mapped the main Roman road west from London, starting from Staines, through Windsor Great Park and Swinley Forest, clipping the northern part of the College’s training grounds, and continuing on to Silchester. Subsequent discussion made clear that *Pontes*, the first stop out from London on *Iter VII*, should now be located at Staines rather than Old Windsor. With this revised attribution and on the basis that there were no other significant earthworks or remains to map along the road until Silchester, these remains *had* to be the *Calleva* of the Antonine Itineraries. Kempe and others rapidly revised their opinions to adopt this new baptism (Kempe 1838; Rickman 1840, 401). *Vindomis* was quietly dropped but not all were converts and many hung on to the alternative name of *Caer Segont*.

Complex contorted narratives were written to try and accommodate both the old and new identifications. As the Royal Archaeological Institute toured the site in the mid-nineteenth century Maclauchlan relayed to them John Narrien’s narrative in which Silchester had switched between the tribes of the Segontiaci and the Bibrici at one point, and eventually ended up in the possession of the Atrebates to make it *Calleva Atrebatum* (Narrien 1836, 38; Maclauchlan 1851). Joyce, an early excavator at Silchester, described it as *Caer Segeint*, ‘a stronghold of the Segontiaci, a native British race, who were driven westward before a wave of invasion, when a tribe of Belgic Gauls called Atrebates overflowed out of their own territories into Britain, and securely established themselves in this country’, hence enabling Silchester to be *Calleva* as well (Joyce 1865, 10).

Some dogmatically stuck to the original identification. One particularly vociferous exchange took place within the pages of the magazine *The Antiquary* across the last 17 years of the century. A certain H.F. Napper repeatedly asserted *Calleva* was elsewhere, his favoured location being Calvepit Farm, Coley, near Reading. His arguments were tortuous with many digressions (along the way he explained why Roman London really should have been sought south of the Thames rather than under the City). Various antiquarians courteously countered him, such as the early replies by Hall and Turner (Napper 1883; 1884); but a few years later the argument reignited with the intransigent Napper being combated more aggressively by another antiquarian hiding behind a *nom de plume* of ‘Fitz-Glanvil’ until the editor of the magazine decided that it had gone too far, got too personal, and declined to publish any more on the matter (Napper 1888; 1899a; b; 1900; Fitz-Glanvil 1899a; b; c; 1900). Even as the Society of Antiquaries started their excavation campaign there in 1890, local societies writing up their tours to the site still referred to the city as *Caer Segont* (Anon. 1903), or in its hybrid interpretation as *Caer Segont* of the Britons or *Calleva* of the Romans (Young 1894).

Any equivocation should have finally been laid to rest in 1907 when the Antiquaries uncovered in Insula XXXV a dedicatory inscription to the College of *peregrini* of *Calleva* (RIB 70). From that year the Society’s annual talks and reports were quickly rebranded as ‘Excavations on the site of the Romano-British town of *Calleva*’ rather than at Silchester, and most of the rest of the archaeological world followed suit. However, two small sub-disciplines still held out against the tide of opinion: Arthurian studies and numismatics.

The identification with *Caer Segont* had provided Silchester with several mythological associations, such as being where Constantius, father of Constantine the Great, had died (Nennius, *Hist. Brit.* 25), let alone where the coronations of both Constantine III and King Arthur had been held (Geoffrey of Monmouth 6.5 and 9.1). To this day these associations have not entirely disappeared amongst the uncritical legions of Arthurian enthusiasts, where the name Excalibur has been interpreted as a derivation from ‘*Ex-Calleva*’, and where the sword is imagined to have been drawn from the ogham stone discovered in 1893 (Gidlow 2010; Zenner 2008).

In numismatics two aspects led to reluctance to drop the *Caer Segont* identification. First, a series of coins had been found with 'SEGO' inscribed upon them, which 'naturally' could be ascribed to the Segontiaci. Mid-nineteenth-century narratives by numismatists like Beale Poste envisaged a series of Belgic colonies in southern Britain, the Segontiaci amongst them, who had surrendered to Caesar (Poste 1861, 70, fig. 1). Some of the SEGO coins had been found in the Thames Valley, which was understandable if *Caer Segont* was at Silchester. Nowadays the coins still remain unexplained; however, the findspots multiplied and now have more of a lower Thames and Kentish distribution. The coins also are clearly related to those of Tasciovanus' coin series rather than those of a separate tribe or authority. Whether SEGO represents a place or an individual's name is not known. The series has most recently been reappraised by Holman (1999).

Secondly, the name CALLE was inscribed on issues of Eppillus. In the early twentieth century the distribution of these coins was far more easterly rather than Hampshire-based. To explain this Curwen wondered if there might be two towns called *Calleva* in Britain, Silchester being one, but Bigbury near Canterbury being the other. He considered this to be an obvious home for the Belgic king of Kent as he then believed Eppillus to be. Canterbury's name, *Durovernum Cantiacorum* 'fortress by the alder-swamp of the Kent-men' would then be a nice contrast to *Calleva Cantiacorum* 'the city hidden in the woods of the Kent-men' (Curwen 1937).

For now, in the early twenty-first century, the identification of the town seems secure and uncontested. The Antonine Itineraries and inscriptions mean we are happy to call Silchester *Calleva* of the Atrebates. Caesar's otherwise unknown peoples still await a home.