



PART III: THE DEFENCES: EVIDENCE AND INTERPRETATION

These three chapters review the evidence for the defences around the town: the Town Wall, the Inner and Outer Earthworks and the linear earthworks in the vicinity of the town. FIG. 9.3 gives an overview of the evidence for the earthworks close to the town, and the names given to various sections, while FIG. 10.1 shows the linears further afield. Each chapter situates each set of defences within a historiography showing changing perceptions; they then cite the evidence and finally draw conclusions from these.

CHAPTER 8

THE TOWN WALL AND DITCH

EARLIER PERCEPTIONS

The Town Wall, 2.4 km long, now lies bare consolidated with modern mortar, though until relatively recently it was all enveloped with gnarled oaks and hawthorn bushes. These first started to be cleared around the church in the mid-nineteenth century, with an engraving showing the newly revealed Wall in its resplendent glory (Wright and Fairholt 1845); since then all the vegetation has gradually been removed.

From early on the irregular polygonal shape of Silchester meant that many antiquarians imagined the origins of the Town Wall to lie in a much earlier 'British bulwark'; playing-card-shaped towns were certainly Roman foundations, but polygonal towns might be British cities which the Romans had occupied (Leman 1809, 103; Kempe 1833, 123). As Maclauchlan observed on his 1850 plan: 'Though this exterior line [of the Town Wall] conforms to the shape of the ground in some measure, it does not seem to have done so altogether, and, from its irregular outline, it seems probable that it existed before the Wall was built; and, from its general conformity, that there was a rampart where the wall now is before the latter was built' (Maclauchlan 1851, 231). This notion did not survive more than half-way into the Antiquaries' series of excavations. As they were digging a section in front of the newly discovered Lesser West Gate they noticed that the Rampart Ditch cut several earlier features. One of these pits contained clearly Roman samian ware, so the idea of the polygonal Wall being built upon earlier Celtic earthworks was rejected (St John Hope 1897a, 428). The narrative then changed to thinking of Celtic Silchester as having existed within the much larger Outer Earthworks, with the Roman defences marking a contraction of the town in the later second century (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 321).

Throughout the twentieth century most of the interventions along the Wall have related to investigative work as the Wall has been cleared of trees and conserved. In 1937 the fifth Duke of Wellington passed over a stretch on the northern Wall into public ownership; as it was cleared, Cotton dug a number of trenches. Collis' excavations similarly followed upon a southern length of Wall coming into guardianship control in 1966. The trees and blackthorn bushes were cleared

off and a damage assessment made alongside a search for dating evidence. The rationale for Fulford's interventions was similar in the mid-1970s and again in the 1990s. Gradually their work has refined the dating evidence of the defences.

THE EVIDENCE

The detailed evidence for the Town Wall is provided, first running round the gates in sequence, clockwise, then all of the other interventions along the line of the Wall and Ditch. The locations of the excavations are shown in FIG. 8.1.

THE EAST GATE

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1821 | Area three feet square excavated (Bartlett 1854). |
| 1872 | Excavation of East Gate (Joyce 1881b, 345–8). |
| 1908 | Excavation of East Gate (St John Hope 1909a, 474–6). |

ADDITIONAL NEAR-CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

Lectures (Joyce 1876a, 55–6; St John Hope 1909c); note (Anon. 1908a, 211).

DESCRIPTION

The location of the East Gate, obscured by the modern buildings in the area, remained contentious for many years. Emerging knowledge of the precise location of the main east–west road had caused consternation since Stair's first plan of the site because to the east its projected path was blocked by an intact section of Wall rather than the expected gate to London. Maclauchlan had tried to solve the riddle by imagining a parallel road came in through a more southerly gate, under where the Manor Farm was situated, leading directly into the Forum (Maclauchlan 1851). Despite an early excavation recorded in this area in 1821, which revealed 'ashes and fragments of bones, deer's horns etc.' and a 'diminutive bronze axe' at about 0.8 m depth (Bartlett 1854), as well as two coins of Maximian and a British B (Boon in Fulford and Timby 2000, 163), the actual location of the gate was only definitively established after fortuitous investigative work by Joyce. In 1872 he arranged for the Ordnance Department's surveyor to project the line of a known stretch of the Roman road east of the town back west to the Wall. This line actually intersected the Wall just south of the currently known location of the gate, but close enough to a section where the Wall was broken away and a modern trackway entered the town to encourage Joyce that the gate might be there. A rapid trench revealed it was indeed there, albeit at a curious angle to the Roman street-grid (Joyce 1881b). This left the question unanswered as to how this new East Gate at an angle linked to the orthogonal layout of the streets (Joyce 1876a, 55–6).

Details: Joyce's excavation provided a full plan, while the Antiquaries largely confirmed the earlier account.

Destination: London.

Gateway: a double carriageway, comprising two parallel passages with arches 3.66 m wide and passages 4.88 m long. There were guardrooms, and it was similar in design to the West Gate, but fractionally more substantial.

Other information: the gate only survived at foundation level with a modern service drain already cutting through it by Joyce's time. Nothing was ascertained of the street metalling or any possible blocking; nor did any excavations of the ditch in front of the gate take place to investigate whether there was a bridge or causeway.

THE SOUTH-EAST GATE aka THE 'SLUICE GATE'

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

- 1892 Excavated, reported with results from 1893 (Fox and St John Hope 1894, 230).
 1976 Re-excavated (Fulford 1984).

ADDITIONAL NEAR-CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

An interim note (Frere *et al.* 1977, 418).

DESCRIPTION

The Antiquaries investigated a drain which came out of the *Mansio* bathhouse heading south-east; this ran towards the Town Wall and in 1892 they excavated where the line of the drain and the Wall intersected and discovered what they called the 'Sluice Gate'. Boon (1974, 105) questioned this interpretation and Fulford's re-excavation in 1976 concluded the concept of the Sluice Gate was a misinterpretation and it was simply for pedestrian access with a drain beneath. The geophysics revealed that it is located where the earlier Inner Defences ditch passed under the later Town Wall. The Inner Defences ditch carried the wastewater from the Public Baths and probably also drained a lot of the other conduits from the town, so the drainage function of the gate was probably fundamental to its positioning. The construction of the Wall over this deep infilled ditch probably also explains why the Antiquaries found wooden piles under the construction here (Fox and St John Hope 1894, 321).

Prior occupation: Fulford observed no evidence in his re-excavation for occupation on the site prior to the Wall foundations being constructed, though the geophysical results suggested it was built over the infilled Inner Earthwork.

Rampart: the earthwork had been built on marshy ground onto which branches of oak, birch and alder overlain by brushwood of hazel, oak and willow or poplar had been laid to stabilise the foundations of the earthen rampart.

Destination: the exit provides not only water egress, but also easy pedestrian or single horse access from the *Mansio* and the south-east of the town out to the fields and the large rectangular building enclosure in LP 3000 (see p. 254).

Gateway: a single entrance *c.* 1.2 m wide with a central drain running beneath. The gate was modified at various stages: first it was an all-timber structure; then it became a timber gate with wooden passage walls and masonry infill; then brick piers and masonry passage walls were added; finally it was incorporated to become a gate in the stone Town Wall which was itself built on 120 mm oak piles (*terminus post quem* A.D. 280–90).

Ditches: the edge of the wide ditch that accompanied the Town Wall was seen in plan by Fulford: 'the inner edge of the ditch was 4.0–4.5 m out from the Town Wall, appearing to cut the northern edge of the inner rampart ditch' (Fulford 1984, 70).

Blocking: at some point the gateway was blocked; contexts where potential dating evidence may have existed were removed in the Antiquaries' excavations.

Medieval evidence: there was some twelfth- to fourteenth-century pottery in the ploughsoil.

THE SOUTH GATE

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

- 1872 Original excavation (Joyce 1881b, 348–9); Joyce unpublished journals.
 1890 Re-excavation (Fox and St John Hope 1890, 752–4).
 1909 Exploration of ditches outside the gate (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 322).
 1957–8 Trenches H1–3 and J, south of the gate (Boon 1969, 10–12).
 1974–5 Re-excavation (Fulford 1984, 25, 27–30, 35–7, 42–51, 59–62, 66–7, 74–5).

ADDITIONAL NEAR-CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

Lectures (Joyce 1876a; Anon. 1891b); a visit (Anon. 1890–3a); an interim note (Goodburn *et al.* 1976, 368–71).

DESCRIPTION

Prior occupation: Fulford's excavation revealed an occupation layer (7) above natural subsoil with Tiberio-Claudian samian and a bowl in a LIA saucepan-pot style, the latest material being Neronian to early Flavian.

Destination: following on from Maclauchlan (1851), Joyce considered the South Gate to be the road exiting towards both Winchester and Old Sarum (Joyce 1881b, 345). It was only later, particularly after Karslake's excavation on the Outer Earthwork, that the Lesser West Gate came to be seen as the main exit to Old Sarum. See discussion in this volume (pp. 401–3).

Rampart: the gate pre-dated the rampart.

Gateway: a single carriageway 3.5 m wide.

Ditches: four sections were run north–south across the ditches: three by the Antiquaries and Boon's Trench J. All three of the Antiquaries' trenches show the earlier Rampart Ditch, but identification of the Outer Town Wall Ditch in them is more problematic. It might appear in Section AB, but not in CD and EF (FIG. 8.2). Since the latter two flanked the roadway it may be that there was always a causeway at this point. Boon's Trench J is highly problematic. It starts further out from the Town Wall, and the features which he identified as the Rampart Ditch and the Wall Ditch were significantly further away from the Wall than those in any other section. It is also frustrating that the most significant feature, namely the Inner Earthwork, was not actually dug.

Street metalling and drainage: six parallel pre-Flavian north–south gullies were found on the east side of the road (Gullies 1–6). Fulford considered these to be early drainage prior to the first metalled surface which had a rumble-drain down the middle. Evidence for the metalling of the street came from this excavation, where it sealed an assemblage comprising imitation butt-beaker, Silchester ware and a large fragment of Roman tile, otherwise not known in the town until the Neronian period. All of this supports a Neronian or early Flavian period for this road. However, a well with a Flavian fill hard up against the street made Fulford wonder if a later Flavian date was not more likely, as Cotton had thought (Fulford 1984, 37).

Dumped decorated stone: a drum of a column (0.85 m diameter, 0.43 m high) was found in the entrance, thought to be from a nearby temple. Two fragments of Doric capitals were also found, one belonging to a column 0.76 m in diameter at the top; the two capitals had different mouldings. Another stone was a half-capital of the Doric order, having stood against a building, 0.65 m diameter. These all probably related to discard during the robbing of the Forum-Basilica rather than the blocking of the gate as the deposit was not consolidated.

THE LESSER WEST GATE

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

1896 Discovered and excavated following a pipeline (St John Hope 1897a, 424–6).

DESCRIPTION

The discovery of this gate during attempts to see where an iron-collared wooden pipe leading to or from Insula III entered the town was unexpected (see p. 396).

Destination: while only a minor narrow gateway, it later came to be thought of as the main road to Old Sarum, and it is represented as such on current OS maps (see p. 401).

Gateway: this was originally an archway, 3.55 m wide and 0.99 m deep, set in the outer face of the Wall, which was 2.93 m thick here, with an inner arch 2.10 m deep and 3.62 m wide towards

the town. An iron shoe for one of the gate pivots was found. There appeared to be no causeway in front of the gate, so a wooden bridge was considered likely. At some point the gateway was narrowed to only 2.13 m wide. The partial blocking included re-used architectural fragments from another building, a phenomenon also observed in the North, South and West Gates.

Street metalling: over time, or in one phase, the roadway was raised by 1.2–1.5 m, with the street level on the interior being raised to match this.

THE WEST GATE

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

- 1890 Gateway (Fox and St John Hope 1890, 754–7).
- 1909 Trenches in front of gate (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910).

ADDITIONAL NEAR-CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

An article (St John Hope 1890a); a lecture (Anon. 1891b); a note (Fox 1899b, 81); a reconstruction drawing (Liversidge 1968, 64).

DESCRIPTION

The gate was excavated in the Antiquaries' first and last seasons. It is to be noted that the two plans of the gateway they published are slightly inconsistent in relation to the curvature of the adjacent Town Wall.

Destination: the gate clearly leads west, but the actual line of the road was not clear for some time. According to the Antonine Itineraries, *Iter XIII* and *Iter XIV* both suggest a road direct from *Calleva* to *Spinis* (presumed to be modern Woodspen) which is west-north-west; this is also the direction of the only archaeologically attested road. However, a road due west has been imagined in the past (see p. 403).

Gateway: a double carriageway, comprising two parallel passages with arches 3.66 m wide and 3.66 m long. There were guardrooms (as at the East Gate, but not the North or South). The guardrooms had painted wall-plaster. Amongst other uses, the Antiquaries imagined the inner chambers of the guardrooms could be used as gaols. Curiously, circular hypocaust tiles were found in the rubble in the gateway, though there was no hypocaust in either of the guardrooms.

Ditches: the approach to the West Gate could not be investigated owing to the modern driveway, but trenches cut at the sides showed the ditches to be continuous, suggesting a bridge across was likely. From the main West Gate to the Lesser West Gate there were appearances of a road having been constructed over the filled-in V-shaped ditch (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 323).

Blocking: at some point the southern carriageway was blocked. The fill included the drum of a double column from a substantial building and a large piece of Corinthian capital; see Blagg (2002, 22–5, 256–60).

Notable finds: fragments of human skull (Fox and St John Hope 1890, 757).

THE NORTH GATE

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

- 1732 *RIB* 68 discovered just west of the gate (Wright and Fairholt 1845).
- 1872 Joyce (as stated by Fox and St John Hope, but not published at the time).
- 1890 Excavation of the gate (Fox and St John Hope 1890, 750–2).
- 1909 The ditches north of the gate (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 319).
- 1991 Re-excavation (Fulford *et al.* 1997, 88–142).

ADDITIONAL NEAR-CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

A lecture (Anon. 1891b); an interim note (Frere *et al.* 1992, 302–4; Fulford 1992); a visit (Anon. 1890–3a).

SUMMARY

The inscription, *RIB* 68, was found in the Wall just west of the North Gate as a crab tree was being grubbed away at the time John Stair was active on the site. The scale of Joyce's work is unpublished; but the 1890 season saw the recovery of an outline of the main footings of the gate. Knowledge was extended in 1909 with an enlargement of the area investigated, including a section across both outer ditches. Re-excavation in 1991 ahead of English Heritage conservation work provided a comprehensive reinterpretation of the sequence, though only the Inner Ditch was partially re-excavated.

DESCRIPTION

Destination: the road to Dorchester-on-Thames.

Street metalling: the earliest street surface (115) was 'an evenly laid, hard-packed surface of small rounded gravel, *c.* 4 cm in diameter', with material from it dating to the late first century. It was flanked by a roadside gully (F42/F51) dated to the later first to early second century A.D.

Ditches: Fulford only excavated the Inner Ditch (F16 and F46), and not to the bottom. After a period of gradual silting, the ditch was deliberately backfilled in the third century and sealed by a metalled road surface (433) cut by a drain. The Inner Ditch was subsequently recut (F53) in the late third/fourth century.

Gateway: a single carriageway through an arch 3.35 m wide. The gate was later incorporated into the Town Wall. The second-century road surface was cut by a large pit, presumably for the timber phase, which was rebuilt in stone, with the footings cut into a pre-existing rampart. The periods from Fulford's excavation are:

- Period 1: pre-rampart earliest road surface and side gully.
- Period 2: rampart construction and excavation of Inner Ditch, timber and stone gatehouses, more road make-up.
- Period 3: construction of Town Wall and backfilling of Inner Ditch, more road surfaces and drains (late third century).
- Period 4: recutting of the Inner Ditch in the fourth century (F53); included within the fill was a large part of a human cranium. Late re-metalling and final abandonment.
- Period 5: 1890 and 1909 excavations.

Rampart: a *terminus post quem* from a worn Hadrianic coin is not inconsistent with the prevailing notion of a construction date of A.D. 180–200.

Wall: no additional dating evidence was procured in the excavations.

Notable finds: two skulls were found, one in 1909, to which Fulford's excavations added another. Their radiocarbon dates were 550–200 B.C. (1sd OXA 8732) and A.D. 420–540 (1sd OXA 8733). Fulford made reference to Boon's list of early artefacts from the plateau, the glass bead and the Montefortino-type helmet cheek-piece, wondering if there might have been some earlier ?fourth-century B.C. barrows on the Silchester plateau (Boon 1974, 36, 303–4; Fulford 2000a; Fulford *et al.* 1997, 129–31). A dog burial was found in a pit at the south-east corner of the excavation of the North Gate. This is slightly reminiscent of the sentinel dogs at the entrance to the enclosure and hoard deposition site at Hallaton (Score 2012), but dog burials are fairly common at Silchester.

THE AMPHITHEATRE GATE

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

- 1865 Excavation (Joyce 1876b, 416) (Journal 18 May 1865).
- 1893 Excavation (Fox and St John Hope 1894, 237).
- 1938 Excavation (Cotton 1947, 128–31, fig. 4).
- 1981 Water-pipe trench cut through (Fulford 1984, 71–2, fig. 32).

ADDITIONAL NEAR-CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

Article (St John Hope 1893b).

DESCRIPTION

The perceived importance of this minor gateway was once much greater, until the main East Gate was discovered in 1872, after which it was recognised that the gate was ultimately just to accommodate a local road leading to the Amphitheatre and a small spring thought to be a *nymphaeum* in LP 4167, to which the villagers said the traces of a road could be traced in hot summers (Joyce 1881b, 346). Cotton's excavations were undertaken in preparation for preservation of the gateway, and Fulford re-excavated as a modern water-pipe was passed through the gap.

Gateway: a single carriageway, 3.3 m wide, fractionally narrower than the North and the South Gates. The Town Wall foundation was carried right across the base of the gate, suggesting its construction was secondary to the original design. However, the dating of the Wall coincides with a refurbishment of the Amphitheatre in stone in the early third century.

Street metalling: Cotton observed that two distinct layers of road were visible and it is thought one pre-dated the Wall and one went with the gate. A layer of silt overlay the original road. However, Fulford considered the earlier road level to be natural gravel.

Ditches: no trace of a causeway was found, so a wooden bridge was suspected.

SECTIONS THROUGH THE WALL AND DITCHES

HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

- 1890 Excavation near South Gate (Fox and St John Hope 1890, 754–7).
- 1896 Section near the Lesser West Gate (St John Hope 1897a, 426–7).
- 1909 Multiple sections (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910).
- 1938–9 Cotton, seven interventions (Cotton 1947); interim report (Wright 1940, 177–9).
- 1956 Boon, Trench E (Boon 1969, 21).
- 1957–8 Boon, Trench J (Boon 1969, 10–11).
- 1967–8 Collis, two interventions (Collis 1983).
- 1978 Fulford, five interventions (Fulford 1984).
- 1992–3 Fulford, three interventions (Fulford *et al.* 1997, 142–5).

DESCRIPTION (FROM THE SOUTH GATE CLOCKWISE)

Generally the interpretation has been that there was an earlier V-shaped Inner Ditch associated with the first earthwork defences; the bank was then cut into to build the Wall, with the U-shaped Outer Ditch replacing the V-shaped one which was too close to the Wall's footings. The sections are described in turn and illustrated in FIGS 8.1–2.

(1) 1890 SoA

Reference: Fox and St John Hope 1890, 754.

A section was cut behind the west flanking Wall of the South Gate through the whole height and

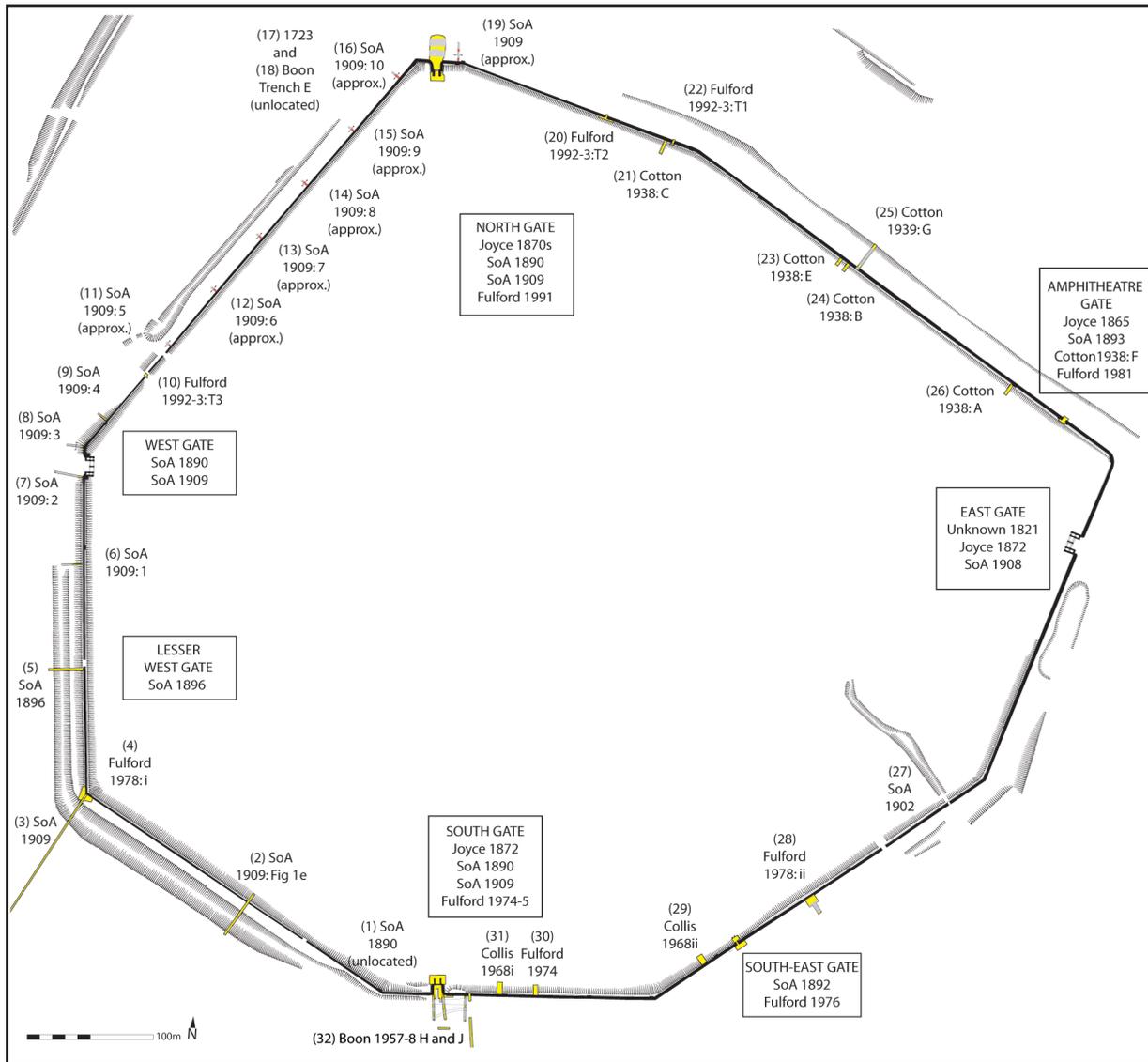


FIG. 8.1. The location of interventions on the Town Wall and Ditches.

breadth of the mound to ascertain its nature. Little was found and few conclusions drawn. No plans or sections were published.

(2) 1909 SoA

Reference: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 317 and fig. 1e.

‘A second cutting through the outer work was made at some distance eastwards’ of the south-west corner trench (Section 3). This was described in the illustration as ‘west of the South Gate’, and it can be accurately located from a pencil mark on an OS Map Sheet in the NMR.

(3) 1909 SoA and (4) 1978 Fulford at the south-west corner

References: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 317–18, fig. 1d; Fulford 1984, 27, 33–4, 58–9, 66, figs 6–9. See also interim note (Goodburn *et al.* 1979, 331).

In 1909 the Antiquaries dug a section from the south-west corner of the Town Wall all the way out to the Outer Entrenchment.

The cutting proved the existence of two ditches, the one nearer the wall being V-shaped, the

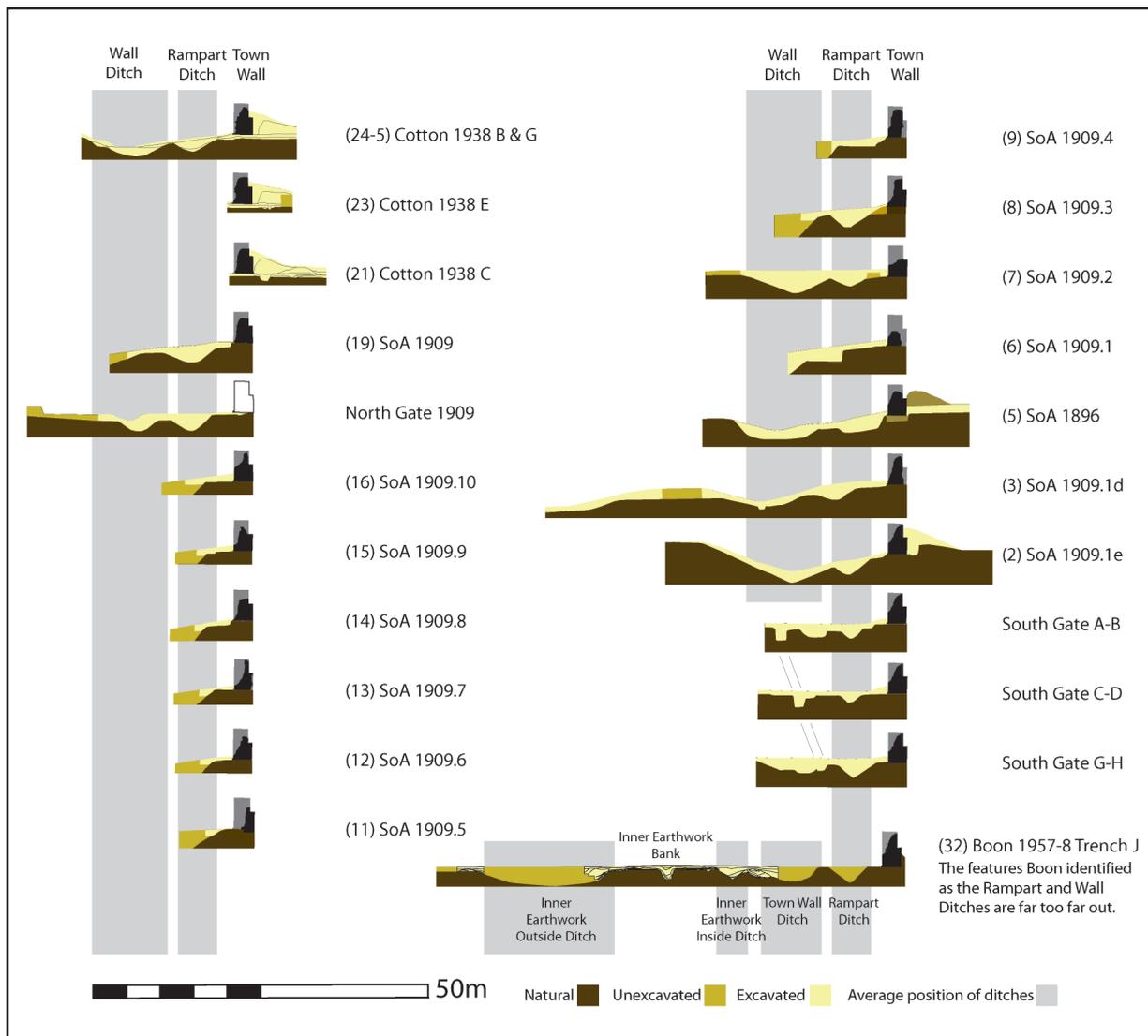


FIG. 8.2. Sections through the Town Wall and Ditches.

outer one being of a shallow saucer shape. The trench was then carried through the dead ground between the city wall and the great outer mound known as 'Rampiers', and finally through the great mound itself, a distance of nearly a thousand feet. (St John Hope and Stephenson 1911, 264–5)

Two sections of this very long trench were published and it is unclear whether the whole length was actually excavated or just profiled (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 318, fig. 1: 'Outer Bank Section 1' and 'Section at south-west angle'). If they did dig the whole extent, it is notable that they did not find anything; they referred to the area as 'dead ground'. A pencil line indicating the course of the trench is on an OS map in the NMR.

Fulford excavated the area between the Town Wall and the Inner Ditch in 1978. This gives us some insight into this area of the town prior to the Wall. A clean orange gravel spread, 0.15–0.20 m thick, dating to the Flavian era, sealed an earlier pre-Flavian black rubbish layer containing largely Claudio-Neronian with a handful of pre-conquest sherds. Animal bones were mainly cattle and represented primary butchery material with skull and limb extremities dominating. No cut features were noted in the 40 m² excavated.

An important observation is that a Hadrianic gravel horizon (19) could be seen making a sharp dip as it headed towards where the later Rampart Ditch was to be dug (see Fulford's sections

F–G). This makes no sense, unless there was already a ditch or major excavated feature here. It may be that here the ‘Inner Earthwork’ ditch was co-terminous with the later Rampart Ditch.

(5) 1896 SoA near the Lesser West Gate

References: St John Hope 1897a, 427, fig. 1; St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, fig. 1c. This section was cut when investigating the Lesser West Gate and was one of the earliest dug through the ditches. It was 4.4 m south of the south jamb of the Lesser West Gate. The trench was 0.9 m wide and at right angles to the Town Wall. The Antiquaries found two major cuts and were surprised not to find a berm between the Town Wall and the Inner Ditch, the cut of which went right up to the Town Wall’s foundation and therefore potentially undermined it. Nonetheless, in that season they interpreted the town ditch as being a double ditch similar to a section they knew in London.

The scarp descended somewhat abruptly from the plinth of the wall to a depth of [2.1 m] from the old roadway in the gate, which represents the original level. From this point, which was [2.0 m] from the face of the wall, the ditch gradually shelved downwards for [15.2 m] where its lowest depth was [3.7 m]. It then commenced to rise somewhat quickly, so that at [22.2 m] from the wall the depth was only [1.8 m], but the rest of the counter-scarp was under a field beyond our limits and could not be followed up. The total width of the ditch was about [24.4 m]. At a distance of [6.7 m] from the wall we came upon the slope of a gravel bank, which further excavation showed to be [0.8 m] high and [5.8 m] wide in all, with a flat top [2.9 m] wide, parallel with the slope of the ditch. This bank was found to pass across the front of the gate ... (St John Hope 1897a, 426–7)

(6) 1909 SoA 1

Reference: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, fig. 3.

A section excavated just to the south of the West Gate. The location is taken from a pencil mark on an OS map in the NMR. The Inner Rampart Ditch cut an earlier feature here.

[The feature] on the south side was cut on the inner slope of the V-ditch at [1.7 m] from the ground level; it had a diameter of [1.2 m] and was about [1.2 m] in depth, but only began to show when the side of the ditch was reached. It was filled with rough broken pottery, mostly of the coarse black ware with calcinated flint in the paste [probably ‘Silchester ware’]. A large iron brooch was also found here. (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 326)

(7) 1909 SoA 2 in front of the West Gate

Reference: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, fig. 3.

This section, showing there was no causeway, led the Antiquaries to believe there must have been a bridge in front of the West Gate.

(8) 1909 SoA 3

Reference: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, fig. 3, sections 3–10.

In this section a pit was revealed which was cut by and pre-dated the V-shaped Inner Ditch:

The pit on the north side, which was [2.4 m] west from the rounded angle of the wall, was also cut in the slope of the V-ditch, and was [1.1 m] in diameter, with a depth of [2.7 m]. It proved much richer in objects and pottery, and yielded two whole pots, three bronze brooches, a bronze surgical(?) instrument, a bronze handle, four broken bone pins, a piece of lead, a fragment of millefiore glass, two saggars [ceramic containers for firing pots in], one much vitrified, and a white marble object shaped like a brick. Much broken red-glazed ware was also found, including a good many riveted pieces and the following potter’s names, CARILLI. O, SECVNDUS, IVSTI. M, OF. CRESTI, also a large piece of an early figured bowl (shape 29) of Lezoux ware; a cup of late first or early second century, a dish with round moulding inside, later first century, and figured ware of early second-century date. A small fragment of marbled red-glazed ware was also found here. (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 326)

The samian stamps date to between Claudius and the end of the first century; and the find of surgical instruments reminds one of the set in one of the Stanway burials (Crummy *et al.* 2007). I wonder if a lot of this early material might not come from the disturbance of earlier deposits. This is certainly very close to the proposed Late Iron Age to Early Roman burial enclosures (see p. 379). The earlier pits were found to have been cut by the V-shaped Inner Ditch in the sections either side of the West Gate (SoA 2 and 3). From one of these (and probably SoA 3 from which so much other material also came) there was also an Iron Age coin pellet mould. This was not reported by the excavation committee but was only recognised at a later date by Boon. 'The contents of both pits cover broadly the same period. Both contained pottery of the earliest type yet recognized in a stratified deposit at *Calleva* – coarse, bead-rim bowls, butt-beaker shards, etc., in general of a pronounced native and pre-Roman facies [i.e. fabrics]. Both also contain Roman pottery, ranging from Claudian to Flavian times and well into the second century' (Boon 1954b, 69).

From cleaning the inner face of the Wall, just north of the West Gate, came a flattened golden ring, thought to be Late Roman (Fox 1895, 468).

(9) 1909 SoA 4

Reference: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 320, fig. 3.

A label on the section states this was 100 ft (30.5 m) north of the West Gate.

(10) 1992–3 Fulford Trench 3

Reference: Fulford *et al.* 1997, 142–3, fig. 26.

This was excavated prior to Wall conservation. There was a break in the Wall for no apparent reason. A small trench on the outside showed the core had been removed down to the ironstone plinth. The oblique cut through the Wall also had a post-hole cut into the edge on the inner side as if for a gate. It was concluded this was designed to give access between fields, and it pre-dated the SoA plan of the 1890s.

(11–16) 1909 SoA 5–10

Reference: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 320, fig. 3.

Six further sections were dug between the West and North Gates. Their locations have not been published, so assuming an even distribution, nominal positions have been indicated on the plan spacing them evenly along the Wall.

It is notable that the Wall in Sections SoA 4 (9) and SoA 5 (11) sealed a 1.4 m deep black deposit, interpreted as a great pond or ditch. It is too far south to be sealing the fill of the Inner Earthwork Ditch so it must be another early enclosure boundary filled in. From within SoA 5 came the partial skeleton of a horse. Also from it were a wooden writing-tablet and terra sigillata stamped CRACIS.M and LVPPA, which are not especially early.

(17) 1732 discovery of *RIB* 68

Reference: Wright and Fairholt 1845.

During the grubbing out of a crab-apple tree on the Wall just west of the North Gate an inscription came to light (*RIB* 68), since lost; it had a dedication to either Julia Domna (A.D. 193–217) or Julia Mamaea (A.D. 222–35).

(18) 1956 Boon Trench E

Reference: Boon 1969, 21.

This was located just to the west of the North Gate. It was excavated to test a statement by Aubrey in his *Monumenta Britannica*, written 1665–3, that there was the 'vestigium of an Arx, Barbican or Ridout' at the north-west corner of the town, which he rather inaccurately represented in a sketch as bending at a right-angle (Aubrey 1980–82, 428, 440). Nothing was found and the trench's location is not shown on any plans published by Boon.

(19) 1909 SoA

Reference: St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 319, fig. 2b.

A section a little to the east of the North Gate was dug at the same time as the trench across the ditch just in front of the North Gate was excavated.

(20) 1992–3 Fulford Trench 2

Reference: Fulford *et al.* 1997, 142–4.

Trench 2 was located where the upper courses of the Wall had been robbed along a 12 m stretch, and the fabric of the Wall was concealed beneath the turf. It was thought possible that features such as another postern gate might be concealed. Excavation revealed no additional features.

(21) 1938 Cotton Site C

Reference: Cotton 1947, 123–9, fig. 2.

This trench was excavated to examine the interface of the street and Town Wall. Here the street could clearly be seen in section continuing under the Town Wall and Earthwork. Pre-dating the Earthwork were also Cotton's Period I (A.D. 45–65) deposits, the earliest occupation levels recorded at that date, and her Period II (A.D. 65–120) remains of timber huts or houses and associated occupation debris.

(22) 1992–3 Fulford Trench 1

Reference: Fulford *et al.* 1997, 142, fig. 24.

'Trench 1 was located at a point where the fabric of the Wall had eroded to create a crescent-shaped hollow in the outer face of the Town Wall. Clearance of tumble from the front of the Wall revealed the plinth blocks of ironstone and evidence of differential subsidence. This had led to a break developing in the lower courses of the surviving fabric exposed in the outer face.' The positional accuracy of this trench on the much reduced published plan means that this might be located over one of the enclosure ditches revealed by the geophysics, which would explain the subsidence.

(23) 1938 Cotton Site E

Reference: Cotton 1947, 131–2, fig. 3.

This section investigated where a possible postern gateway may originally have been planned, as demonstrated by some masonry, but which was certainly never completed. Traces of Cotton's Period I (A.D. 45–65) occupation were found here, including traces of a hut with three post-holes (E1–3), as well as later Period II (A.D. 65–100) remains of timber huts or houses and associated occupation levels.

(24) 1938 Cotton Site B

Reference: Cotton 1947, 123–32, pl. XXX.

This was a section into the back of the Town Wall. Traces of Cotton's Period I occupation (A.D. 45–65) were found here.

(25) 1938 Cotton Site G

Reference: Cotton 1947, 133–4, pl. XXX.

Section cut from the base of the Wall across the ditches to the modern roadway. The existing berm concealed an earlier filled-in V-shaped Inner Ditch which had been deliberately backfilled. The later outer ditch was more saucer-shaped and had a marked external counterscarp.

(26) 1938 Cotton Site A

Reference: Cotton 1947, 123–4, fig. 1.

This cut into the back of the rampart and included half of one of the counterforts of the Town

Wall. The section revealed some of the earliest occupation material, dated to Cotton's Period I (A.D. 45–65), indeed some of the material was possibly earlier. A pit (A1) with a uniform fill contained early pottery: no terra sigillata, but butt beaker (Tiberian form), a coin of Cunobelin and an imported beaker (cf. Loeschcke type 84a at Haltern). It is curious that the pit is outside the Inner Earthwork.

(27) 1902 SoA: Stream exit point

Reference: St John Hope 1903a, 419.

Investigative work in the south-east quarter where the stream passed through a breach in the Town Wall was inconclusive but it did reveal the Wall in this sector was built on wooden piles, including a 9-inch square piece of oak which may have been part of a sluice gate.

(28) 1978 Fulford ii

Reference: Fulford 1984, 26, 65, 70, figs 27, 33.

The purpose of this trench was to investigate the location and number of defensive ditches associated with the Town Wall and earlier Rampart, though the high water table prevented digging lower than 1 m below the ground surface. The trench extended out 15 m, and was initially 8 m wide, narrowing to 3 m.

The Rampart Inner Ditch was seen from 0.0–4.8 m out from the Wall, where it was cut by the Wall Ditch which cuts down from 4.8–>14.6 m (where the excavation trench ended).

There was twelfth- to fourteenth-century material outside the Wall, and tentative evidence of a lean-to structure against the Wall.

(29) 1968 Collis ii

Reference: Collis 1983.

This section was cut into the back of the rampart. It was positioned beyond Boon's projected line of the Inner Earthwork, but within the line shown by the geophysics. While the section was not bottomed, at the lowest level Collis perceived a hollow which filled up during the first century. The location also happened to be where two wall building-gangs met, which was argued from a change in mortar, with the eastern side being the earlier.

(30) 1974 Fulford

Reference: Fulford 1984, 30–2, 37, 62–3, 67–8, 75–6, figs 25, 28.

This trench was dug to expose the rear face of the Wall 78.7 m from the eastern inturn of the South Gate (Fulford 1984, 25, 30–2). Here, while there was Claudio-Neronian material, there were also pre-conquest features, including a Pit (1) with Tiberio-Claudian sigillata, Gallo-Belgic wares and a British LY coin. Over this then developed a 'black earth', perhaps being a cultivated deposit.

(31) 1968 Collis i

Reference: Collis 1983.

A section behind the Rampart was excavated, though not down to natural. Pre-dating the bank there was a sequence of deposits. First a pit, filled with pre-conquest material and the same black soil with occasional gravel as the overlying deposit. Secondly, overlying this was a dark grey deposit; whether this represents a midden build-up or cultivation is unclear. Pottery was pre- and immediately post-conquest with a terminal date *c.* A.D. 50s, native and Gallo-Belgic wares making up 50 per cent of the assemblage. An infant burial was cut into the natural. Finally, above this was a black soil layer built up over a century, though containing some re-deposited material including Arretine sherds. This provides the *terminus post quem* for the bank. It includes samian into the Antonine period, perhaps A.D. 150–60; late second- and early third-century material was noticeable by its absence. All this was capped by a silt deposit like road silt, which was sealed by the bank.

(32) 1957–8 Boon Trenches H and J

References: Boon 1958a, 14–15; 1969, 10–11, 13–14.

Trench J is a challenge to interpret as the text description of it and the published sections are inconsistent. The trench was an interrupted cutting over 60 m long. His published plan shows a small cutting adjacent to the Town Wall for which no section was published. He states that the inner two ditches of the Rampart Ditch and Wall Ditch extended 1.2–25.6 m from the base of the Wall. However, on his section the features clearly labelled as these are much further out, with a suggested Rampart Ditch being 17.1–21.0 m away from the Wall and the Wall Ditch being 21.0–25.6 m; something is clearly amiss. Boon does, however, show the edge of a large cutting which is almost certainly the genuine Wall Ditch at the northern end of his published section.

What his section does show, therefore, is a series of two or three additional ditch-like features parallel to the town defences, but all within the major (unexcavated) ditch of the Inner Earthwork which was 41.0–60.7 m out from the Town Wall.

INTERPRETATION

Broadly, the Town Wall circuit is believed to have started as a timber-topped rampart with an external V-shaped ditch. Fulford's excavation at the South Gate demonstrated that it was constructed before the rampart; whether immediately before as part of the same construction activity, or earlier as a free-standing monumental gateway is unclear, though I would presume the former.

Later, the external face of the earthwork was cut back to insert the Town Wall, the V-shaped ditch was largely in-filled to stop the Wall slumping into it, and a broader U-shaped ditch dug further out. Various historical circumstances have been associated with the works and various features remain contentious (e.g. were both ditches open at the same time), but the chronology is relatively assured.

THE TOWN RAMPART AND V-SHAPED INNER DITCH**Description**

The initial Rampart had protecting it a V-shaped Ditch, though its precise profile varied significantly. On average the ditch was about 6.0 m wide and 2.0 m deep, lying between 2.0 and 8.0 m out from the base of the later Town Wall (FIG. 8.2). Its construction separated the town from the burial enclosures to the west-north-west, and also from the Rampier Copse enclosure which had burials inset into its earthwork; but it included the Insula XXX temple enclosure.

Dating evidence

Cotton's work dated the early bank to *c.* A.D. 160–70, though Frere regarded this as too early. Instead, he conjectured that all the ramparts being constructed around towns were part of a province-wide programme of works, and since many of the others dated to later in the second century, Silchester should as well (Frere 1967, 286); Boon concurred with this line of argument (Boon 1969, 10, n. 3). The sections dug by Collis added little to the dating evidence obtained by Cotton, except for a sherd of samian which was 'unlikely to be earlier than AD 160' (Collis 1983, 62).

Fulford's excavations revealed more material dating to A.D. 160–80, but in addition found at the south-west angle a sealed deposit including an Oxfordshire mortarium dated A.D. 180–240, and some BB1 which was thought to be closer to the end of the second century; this led Fulford to conclude that the rampart was later than A.D. 180 and probably nearer A.D. 200 (Fulford 1984, 235).

Historical narrative

The British phenomenon of early town defences has always attracted specific historical

explanations. Boon associated it with the governor Albinus who ‘stripped the island of troops for his war of AD 196–7 against Septimius Severus, rival for the throne. The frontier districts of the west and north would then have been left without the garrisons which kept the natives in check and men’s thoughts must have turned to the possibility of an outbreak of violence unseen since the days of Boudica 130 years before’ (Boon 1974, 66). In so doing he was following Frere (1967, 285) rather than other competing explanations at the time which included imagining a threat from the Welsh tribes (Wacher 1966, 67). In essence Frere’s argument was that the large-scale provision of defences of Romano-British towns was so exceptional in the Empire that it must relate to a specific circumstance and need. He saw this need in the period between Clodius Albinus’ elevation in A.D. 193 and the final show-down with Septimius Severus at the Battle of Lugdunum in A.D. 197, and this is where the consensus amongst those trying to find a single date has broadly remained. Nonetheless, Boon did note that at Cirencester the stone gates pre-dated the rampart, which seemed unlikely if all these defences had been erected in a hurry in response to a crisis.

Fulford avoided speculation, simply stating that his dating was not inconsistent with imagining construction around the time of Clodius Albinus (Fulford 1984, 235). Nonetheless, his excavation at the South-East Gate, where he had found traces of an earlier timber phase, was used by Frere (1984, 69) to counter the scepticism of others about the ‘emergency theory’. Frere wondered if earlier timber gates were not actually more common but had yet to be identified at other sites.

For discussions placing Silchester in the national context see also Hartley (1983) and for a slightly later softening of Wacher’s views on the possibility of establishing a fixed date for all the earthworks Wacher (1998).

THE TOWN WALL AND U-SHAPED OUTER DITCH

Description of the Wall

The Rampart was cut back on the outside and a free-standing Town Wall was constructed 2 m in front of it, then the gap between the two was filled with compacted clays. The Town Wall was around 2.9 m thick, with an additional external plinth projecting 0.23 m at the base. It was constructed on gravel and flint foundations, on top of which was first a pad of mortar, then ironstone slabs, then the Wall itself. There were 4–5 mortar and flint courses, then a double horizontal course of limestone throughout the entire thickness of the Wall. In some sections to the south-east where the ground was marshy, wooden piles were used as an addition to the foundations (Collis 1983). The internal face was stepped, reducing in thickness by about 0.5 m at 2.0 m from the base. However, at a series of *c.* 60 m intervals, this thickness was not reduced leading to a number of counterforts. Their size is too small for watch-towers or turrets, though this is how they were first interpreted (St John Hope and Fox 1896, 216; St John Hope 1890a). Boon, following Cotton, thought the projections could mark the location of access-stairs (Cotton 1947, 130; Boon 1974, 100).

The geology of the Wall has been examined by Sellwood (in Fulford 1984, 224–30) and more recently and comprehensively by Allen (2013a, 4–26). The flint rubble probably came from chalk outcrops in the Basingstoke area; the lime for the mortar was probably from the same chalk. The slabs for the string courses came from a variety of sedimentary deposits up to many tens of kilometres away from the north-west, north and east of the town.

Boon estimated the Wall would originally have been 6 m high with a parapet of 1.8 m. Assuming waggons carrying 500 kg, Boon calculated it would have required 45,000 loads of bonding-stone and 105,000 loads of flint (Boon 1974, 101). Allen upped the estimate with an additional 50,000 carts of sand, gravel and chalk/lime for mortar (Allen 2013a, 25); he also analysed how the detail of the slanting of the flints in the rubble core could be used to show how the Wall had been built by multiple gangs working in varying directions (see also Allen 2012b). The broader issue of the supply of stone to build the Wall has also been discussed by Pearson (2006, 100–4).

The weight of the structure meant that the V-shaped Ditch in front of the original Rampart had to be filled in; otherwise the Wall would have been prone to slumping into it. The new ditch was broader and saucer- or U-shaped, though again its profile varied significantly. On average it

was about 12 m wide, lying between 10 and 22 m out from the Wall (FIG. 8.2). Along the western side there was evidence for a gravelled pathway on top of the infilled Rampart Ditch between the Wall and the V-shaped Ditch.

Dating evidence

The Antiquaries first dated the Wall using the discovery of a denarius of A.D. 193 in the infilling behind it (SoA Section 11; unfortunately it is not clear which one Section 11 is, though the section in front of the North Gate would be likely if they are in sequence). This tied in with the discovery in 1732 of an inscription re-used or inset into the Wall. *RIB* 68 mentioned Julia Augusta, which meant either Julia Domna (A.D. 193–217) or Julia Mamaea (A.D. 222–35).

Cotton's excavations increased the amount of datable material, including coarsewares which could have been in use at the turn of the second and third centuries, and some samian. This led her to conclude a construction date of *c.* A.D. 190–210 (Cotton 1947, 130).

Collis, however, found material he was reluctant to date to before A.D. 250 (Collis 1983, 63–4), and together with Fulford pushed the construction date forward to between *c.* A.D. 260 and 280 (Fulford 1984, 42, 59, 62–3, 65).

Historical narrative

Unlike the earthen ramparts, the variable dating of town walls around Britain has meant that no specific event is associated with all of them; instead they are seen as a process starting quite early in the third century and continuing for about 70–80 years (Frere 1984). Allen observed that the Wall was not built using bricks from the local London Clay, but was more of a prestige project using stone from further afield (Allen 2013a, 106). For discussions placing Silchester's Wall in the national context see also Wachter (1952, 103–5), Corder (1955, 20–5), Blagg (1981), and Crickmore (1984, 9–23, 29, 50–6, 61, 93).

Associating the ramparts and town walls with two discrete historical events with cross-provincial causes may be in error. Esmonde Cleary took the longer-term view in his analysis looking at the much broader picture. He saw that while continental towns largely built free-standing walls, Britain developed an insular tradition of constructing walls cut into earthen ramparts, perhaps inspired from military defences in the North, though this did not happen in Germania. In the light of this he envisaged that the construction of British defences could be seen as long-term building projects for prestige, rather than sudden developments relating to historical stimuli, with the gates built first, the rampart second, then the wall inserted (Esmonde Cleary 2003, 83); Mattingly concurred (Mattingly 2006, 326–33).

A single or double ditch?

About a dozen sections were made through the town ditch at various points, and in all cases the two ditches were found. The Inner or V-shaped Ditch appears to belong to the period of the inner bank, and to have been filled up when the outer one was dug, possibly at the time of the erection of the wall. (St John Hope and Stephenson 1911, 264–5)

This general sequence of one ditch being replaced by another is the common way town defences are interpreted. However, Fulford has suggested Silchester was different and has argued that both ditches were dug at the time the rampart was first constructed. This alternative view directly contrary to the direct observations of the Antiquaries was argued on the basis of volumetric calculations by Startin (Fulford 1984, 223–4; Fulford and Startin 1984, 241). He calculated the cross-section of the Bank to be *c.* 29.2 m² (length 2453 m), while the cross-sections of the Inner and Outer Ditch were *c.* 9.1 m² (2537 m) and *c.* 18.5 m² (2593 m) respectively. Both would be required to have been excavated to generate enough spoil for the bank.

Mr. Startin's calculations make it clear that, *as one would expect*, the rampart required two ditches to be dug to provide the necessary spoil ... Thus the outer ditch, which has a wide and shallow profile, is likely to have been a later Roman recut and extension of an earlier outer ditch originally contemporary with the rampart. (Fulford 1984, 236, *my italics*)

His work was done on the basis of Cotton's sections, though the earthwork here is more substantial than behind, say, the (5) SoA 1896 trench, or (2) SoA 1909.1e. Nonetheless, within margins for error, the size of the inner Rampart ditch does appear to be too small to provide for the bank on its own. But this quantity-surveying methodology sits awkwardly with a lot of the other data. A simple equivalence of the volume between the ditches and the size of the bank cannot be made as material did not simply go from one to the other as the following data demonstrate:

- To the north, the water main trench revealed that a large quantity of gravel from one of the ditches had been cast north to create a significant counterscarp rather than south to make the rampart (Fulford *et al.* 1997, 158).
- To the west, the Antiquaries observed that the rampart was not made up of the gravel cast up from the ditch as they had expected 'wherever cuttings have been made in it, [it] has been found not to be of gravel at all, but of earth containing fragments of Roman pottery. It clearly therefore could not have come out of the ditch' (St John Hope and Stephenson 1910, 321).
- To the south-east where Collis excavated, the bank appeared to be made predominantly of clay rather than gravel (Collis 1983).

Even if the source of the material may be questionable, the quantities involved did enable Startin to create an impression of the scale of the operation needed to build the rampart: 'At Silchester the estimate of the labour involved in constructing the late second-century defences was of the order of 300–350,000 man-hours with a total volume of some 71,370 cubic metres of clay and gravel extracted from the two ditches. This figure was consistent with the volume of clay and gravel actually used in the rampart itself' (Fulford and Startin 1984, 241). So, the Rampart (excluding the palisade and gates) could have been constructed by 300 people in 100–120 days working 10-hour days.

After excavating the North Gate, Fulford continued to conclude that the two ditches were 'cut at the same time as the construction of the rampart in the late second century' (Fulford *et al.* 1997, 95). This may be the case, but it is contrary to all of the Antiquaries' sections; however, as Fulford has pointed out, the outer ditch could always have been a later re-cut, so does not preclude them having been open at the same time. Some early towns with strong military associations certainly did have double ditches. Wroxeter probably initially had an early earthwork and double ditch, then a later larger earthwork (though never a wall) and a larger single ditch (White *et al.* 2013, 179–85). Ultimately the case for a double ditch is currently unproven but not impossible.