



CHAPTER 18

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After many years excavating the interior of *Calleva*, followed by just one season outside, the Antiquaries' campaign finally ended in 1909. George Fox, its leading proponent had died, and St John Hope retired as Assistant Secretary after 25 years of service. At the Society's anniversary meeting on St George's Day 1910, the then President, Charles Read, surmised 'parting with Silchester was a sweet sorrow ... It was much to be desired that the discovery and excavation of the cemetery would form an epilogue which should solve some of the problems presented by the excavated town' (Anon. 1911, 265). A century later the excavation of the cemeteries has still not taken place, beyond a few square metres by Corney, but the cumulative work of the aerial photographers, the fieldwalkers, the contractors engaged in excavations, evaluations and watching-briefs, and geophysics have combined to give a feel for what was beyond the walls. Large burial enclosures and an inhumation cemetery are now a certainty; potential areas of cremation are also highly probable. The nature of the mortuary landscape, one of the key themes identified in research agendas for the site, has been advanced, and concepts of how to detect pyre areas have been suggested which could be tested at other towns (Chapter 13). The site still remains an ideal test-bed for cemetery sampling with the full array of bioarchaeological studies and ancient DNA now available to us.

The various research framework reviews also identified 'the interpretation of the long linear earthworks radiating out from the town, particularly to the south, and the origins of the Late Iron Age *oppidum* itself' (Fulford 1996, 31). Here the array of earthworks surrounding the site has been enriched with the addition of new banks and ditches from the geophysical survey and the LiDAR. The chronological evidence for those immediately surrounding the town suggests a very different sequence to that conventionally iterated, placing the major Outer Earthworks into the late first or early second century rather than the Later Iron Age (Chapter 9). Contestation or corroboration based on fieldwork would be warmly welcomed, and selective sectioning where the earthworks were seen to intersect with other features in the geophysics, combined with a robust approach to radiocarbon sampling from various buried soils beneath the earthworks and other samples, would provide a suitable methodology to establish this. The linear earthworks, protecting access up onto Silchester Common rather than the Roman town, are even more problematic to date, and an Iron Age date is still only likely rather than confirmed (Chapter 10). Again, environmental sampling from under them to see if the pollen matches with the profiles found under Grim's Bank would be one way forward. Within the town itself the distribution of the material evidence from the time of the *oppidum* has been detailed and mapped (Chapter 11) and suggestions of the broader layout of the town made expanding from the two major excavations by Fulford, whose Insula IX report will transform knowledge in this area. In discussing both the early unenclosed *oppidum* phase and the presence of conquest-period Roman military material culture, the site has been placed firmly within its broader northern European rather than just British context (Chapters 11–12).

Within the interior, new facets have also been revealed: the development of the street-grid is seen to be gradual rather than one large event; and the extent of the late road drainage system has been mapped (Chapter 14). In terms of trade and industry, the internal zoning and the proximity of bakers and smithying workshops to the main east–west road and close to the gates are now apparent from the combination of an analysis of the Great Plan and the geophysical responses, providing a methodology that can be tested at other sites. It is also possible that the long-elusive



evidence for large-scale tanning may also have been discovered, though ideally this needs testing with ground-truthing. The scale of a tilery to the north, previously known from wasters, has also been elaborated upon (Chapter 15). Finally, the exterior has revealed what could be a circus to the north-west, though proof is lacking as yet (Chapter 16).

Overall the survey has tightened up the plan of the site, adjusted the location of some of the Antiquaries' building plans, and repositioned some of them from where Boon had 'tidied them up' on his plan of the town. Hodge's and Boon's plans have in their own ways both become icons of what a Romano-British town looks like, and yet both were static images masking the complex evolution of the townscape. The hypothesised phase plans presented here (FIGS 17.1–2) offer a very different image of a changing town, from the first tentative settlement then enclosed and regularised with the Inner Earthwork; this then expanded and broke out of these confines as Roman influence came to bear, and a new nascent grid began to give the town a more classical form and orientation. A multiplicity of earthworks was constructed until the town yet again retreated behind a new defensive line, monumentalised as the Town Wall. The picture is a lot more dynamic, incremental and adaptive than our common perception of Roman town layouts laid out in one go with the assistance of a military surveyor armed with a *groma*.

Along the way I hope I have shown the value of integrating now common geophysical surveys of entire townscapes with the rest of the archaeological data. Geophysical prospection should never be an end in itself but needs to be integrated with other datasets to advance understanding; when this is done it has significant potential to unlock new ideas.

In presenting this firmly within the story of the uncovering of evidence and the creation of knowledge, this volume shows how rapidly ideas and interpretations can change. The cut-off date for fieldwork included in this volume was 2013 and doubtless new discoveries will rapidly be made which will contest ideas floated here. This is what happens and is to be welcomed; indeed as this volume goes to press Fulford is embarking upon his own environs programme which will no doubt provide new information on many of the aspects touched-upon here. But however interpretations change, hopefully the separation of evidence and interpretation within this volume will make it a useful pointer to 250 years of excavation and survey which have been undertaken in the past and which still retain their value.

If any of this is new, then I have only been able to see it by standing on the shoulders of giants: Stair's early explorations; Joyce's, Monro's and Langshaw's devotion; Hilton Price's, Fox's, St John Hope's and Stephenson's invigoration of the Antiquaries to mount their massive campaign of work; Boon's sustained interest and synthesis; and Fulford's lifetime dedicated to work on the site which continues unabated. It is hoped that this volume will help open up the site to those unfamiliar with the huge complexity of the enormous fragmented literature surrounding it, helping them to chart their own path towards what interests them, and to frame their own research questions to explore in the future. Silchester may no longer be the place 'so little known' by Stukeley, but it is hoped this work certainly makes it more accessible.